



Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

**ADVERTIMENT.** L'accés als continguts d'aquesta tesi queda condicionat a l'acceptació de les condicions d'ús establertes per la següent llicència Creative Commons:  [http://cat.creativecommons.org/?page\\_id=184](http://cat.creativecommons.org/?page_id=184)

**ADVERTENCIA.** El acceso a los contenidos de esta tesis queda condicionado a la aceptación de las condiciones de uso establecidas por la siguiente licencia Creative Commons:  <http://es.creativecommons.org/blog/licencias/>

**WARNING.** The access to the contents of this doctoral thesis it is limited to the acceptance of the use conditions set by the following Creative Commons license:  <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/?lang=en>

**Romani Women Taking the Lead for Social Transformation**  
**The case of the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen**

**Doctoral Dissertation**

**Maria Emilia Aiello**

**Directors: Carlota Solé i Puig & Teresa Sordé i Martí**

**Department of Sociology**  
**Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology**  
**Autonomous University of Barcelona**

**April 2016,**  
**Bellaterra - Barcelona**



The present research was funded by the Ministry of Education of the Spanish Government under the Program of Scholarships for the Training of University professors (FPU - Formación de Profesorado Universitario).

## **Dedicatory**

To all those grassroots Romani women who engage with their hearts in the struggle for opening everyday more *Roads for Freedom* and emancipation.

## Acknowledgments

Esta tesis no hubiera sido posible sin haber tenido la oportunidad de generar y compartir el conocimiento en la Facultad de Sociología y Ciencias Políticas de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona donde inicié mis estudios en Ciencias Políticas recibiendo el mejor aprendizaje y la confianza para comenzar mi carrera como investigadora.

Quiero agradecer especialmente en primer lugar a mis dos directoras, la Dra. Carlota Solé-Puig y la Dra. Teresa Sordé-Martí.

A la Dra. Carlota Solé, porque esta tesis recoge sus consejos, la rigurosidad científica y la excelencia académica en una *forma de hacer* Ciencias Sociales y Sociología que ella nos transmite. Durante estos años, haber tenido la oportunidad de formarme y crecer a su lado en el marco del GEDIME, Grupo de Estudios de Inmigración y Minorías Étnicas, ha sido sin duda, algo que me ha enriquecido tanto profesionalmente como personalmente.

A la Dra. Teresa Sordé, por todas sus orientaciones durante el proceso de investigación, por sus horas. Por invitarme a descubrir la investigación sociológica en Noviembre de 2008, siendo aún estudiante de Estructura Social en la UAB... Y por ofrecerme con ello nuevas formas de leer el mundo, mostrándome así cómo a través de la investigación también podemos cambiarlo.

Quiero agradecer también a la Directora del GEDIME, la Dra. Sónia Parella, por su apoyo constante durante todo este largo trayecto de la tesis. Y a todos mis compañeros y compañeras de este excelente centro de investigación que nos forma a diario, a mi personalmente desde finales del 2012.

Mencionar también aquellos sitios que han dejado huella en mi formación como investigadora, a CREA, la *Community of Research on Excellence for All*.

Y la Asociación Gitana de Mujeres Drom Kotar Mestipen, lugar de múltiples diálogos, encuentros, debates... gracias a todas sus miembros, y en especial a Jelen, Rosamaría (junto con Yasemine) y Ana, por resolver juntas aquellas cuestiones que a veces no acaba de ver tan claras

Al igual que para mí, esta tesis tiene un especial sentido para mis padres, mi hermana, para mis abuelos, porque ellos también son unos *grassrooters*. Gracias por acompañarme *siempre*.

Y a mis amigos, que también han sentido mucho que hablar de esta tesis -y lo que con ella viajaba conmigo... muchos relatos, dudas, preguntas, historias de transformación... Siempre ahí: Ana, Lara, Sandra, Mar, Maria, Olga, Esther, Oriol, Iñaki, ... Politólogos et al.; amigos de Hipólito. A Pau, *amb molta estima*.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PART 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1. Theories on Social transformation from below</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>1.1. Dual Theories for the analysis of social change</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>1.2. A brief remark on social movements' theory</b>	<b>29</b>
Leadership in social movements	33
Associationism in social movements	37
<b>Evaluation of social movement's effectiveness</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2. Romani women at the crossroad of Modernity</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>2.1. Romani feminism: "for us, for them, with them, for the Roma people"</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>2.2. Opening the way towards a more inclusive feminism</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>2.3. Traditions as an option in a post-traditional society</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>2.4. Choosing multiple identities</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>PART 2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3. ROMA RIGHTS' MOVEMENT</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.1. A glance at the RRM origin</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.2. The Roma taking the lead for social change: the RRM from the collapse of communism to its current debates</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>3.3. Advancing towards the recognition of the Roma ethnic minority</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>3.4. A human rights' agenda</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4. ROMANI WOMEN'S MOVEMENT</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>4.1. Romani women today</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>4.2. The emergence of the Romani Women's mobilisation</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5. EU INITIATIVES FOR THE INCLUSION OF THE ROMA COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>5.1. The development of a EU legal framework for the Roma human rights' protection</b>	<b>98</b>
Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005-2015)	104
<b>5.2. A look from the grassroots: towards an emancipatory approach</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>PART 3. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>6.1. The study's objectives and hypothesis</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>6.2. Communicative Methodology</b>	<b>117</b>

6.2. The rationale: case study	121
6.3. Data collection	123
6.4. Data analysis	133
6.5. Bias and Validity	137
6.6. Ethical Standards	139
6.7. Limitations of the Study	140
<b>CHAPTER 7: JUSTIFICATION OF THE CASE: THE ROMA ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN DROM KOTAR MESTIPEN (A ROAD FOR FREEDOM)</b>	<b>142</b>
7.1. Historical background	142
7.2. Internal structure	145
7.3. Activities	146
7.4. DKM: Becoming the Grassroots Romani women ambassadors	152
<b>PART 4. RESULTS</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>CHAPTER 8. ROMANI WOMEN ASSOCIATION AS A HUB FOR SOCIAL CHANGE</b>	<b>157</b>
8.1. The power of narratives	157
8.2. Cultural intelligence: everyone has a say	162
8.3. Solidarity networks guiding Romani women's relationships	166
8.4. A "Roma Association or an Association of Romani Women? When diversity of members' background is one of the most rich assets	168
8.5. Focusing on what works to eradicate discrimination: Successful action approach	173
Official Trainers Course in the speciality of school canteens: evidence of what works	176
Leading EU-funding projects	177
Transparency is part of excellent work	180
<b>CHAPTER 9. GOING TO THE GRASSROOTS: ORGANISING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL</b>	<b>184</b>
9.1. Women participating in a Romani Women Students' Meeting	185
9.2. DKM strategy: Working with all those with whom you share aims	190
9.3. Inquiring on the impact: the activation of the associational life	192
9.4. Contributing to the creation of new Romani women associations	193
9.5. Romani women from the shadow to become community leaders	197
9.6. Empowerment that generates social change	200
<b>CHAPTER 10. REACHING THE EUROPEAN SPHERE</b>	<b>206</b>
10.1. First steps at the EU level: projects as a tool to make grassroots Romani women voices to be heard	207
Breaking down with the hierarchy among the "technical staff" and the Romani women	209
A positive return for the Roma community	211
Highly committed volunteering	212
10.2. How dreams come true: the 1 <sup>st</sup> International Romani women Congress. The Other Women	215



“As a Romani wedding” \_\_\_\_\_ 219

<b>CHAPTER 11. OPENING A NEW HORIZON OF OPPORTUNITIES: ROMANI WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>11.1. Embracing new educational challenges</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>Opportunities within spaces of informal learning</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>11.2. Finding a job</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>Organising a Romí Training</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>What happens after getting the diploma?</b>	<b>243</b>
From working in Drom Kotar to working in another Romani Association	249
<b>CHAPTER 12. ROMANI WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES</b>	<b>253</b>
<b>12.1. Negotiation within the family based on dialogue in relation to the gender roles and family responsibilities</b>	<b>253</b>
<b>12.2. Expectations on children and family members</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>12.3. Romani women leadership in their closed community: care and expectations</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>286</b>
<b>APPENDIXES</b>	<b>298</b>
<b>ANNEX 1: Narrative of Quimar</b>	<b>299</b>
<b>ANNEX 2: Table 1. Summary of Data Collection</b>	<b>301</b>
<b>ANNEX 3: Table 2. Fieldwork Study Participants</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>ANNEX 4: Informed Consent</b>	<b>305</b>

## INTRODUCTION

With an estimated population of 10 to 12 million in the European countries (European Commission, 2012)<sup>1</sup>, the Roma is the largest non-immigrant ethnic minority in Europe. Different from other ethnic communities such as the Jewish people, the Roma have defined themselves as a people that neither have nor want their own territory, but have struggled to live as a one Roma community spread across the nation-states and united under the same culture (Sordé, Flecha & Mircea, 2013). Since their arrival to the European continent between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century from the northeast of India, the Roma have faced situations that have condemned them to live at the margins of the European mainstream society. After more than five centuries being European citizens, they still being perceived as strange and it is often questioned if they should enjoy the same rights than other Europeans. Anti-Roma sentiments have persisted and increased all across Europe. A 2015 Pew Research Center poll shows that 86% of Italians, 60% of French people, more than a third of the Spanish, British and Germans expressed negative sentiments against the Roma. Prejudice is also manifested through discriminatory actions. This is a very common debate in some racist media as well as in some extreme right wing parties unfortunately existing in different European countries. This is a problem that has been worsening with the rise of international migration trends of which the Roma people have also been target.

As a consequence of this persistent situation of violation of human rights due to racism and discrimination a significant number of Roma experience nowadays important challenges concerning discrimination, poverty, low educational achievement, labour market barriers, school segregation and poor health (FRA, 2012)<sup>2</sup>. Roma school segregation and discrimination in education is translated into low levels of participation in the labour market. According to UNDP Roma household survey (FRA, 2012) shows that one out of three Roma respondents aged 35 to 54 report health problems limiting their daily activities. Concerning the paid employment rate of the EU-27, the Eurostat figures show for those aged 20 to 64 amounted, on average, to 68.6 % in 2010. Therefore, Roma unemployment remains an urgent issue to be specifically address. The picture is worse

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_en.asp)

<sup>2</sup> For more information: [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance_EN.pdf)

among women, and even of more disparities among Romani women older than 55 years of age (UNDP, 2005)<sup>3</sup>. In all, evidence shows the existence of ethnic discriminatory practices suffered by Romani people and aggravated for the case of Romani women: employers and job agencies denied them job access by using a set of exclusionary strategies through which Romani candidates were discarded before job interviews or during the process.

It is not only the opportunity cost of Romani exclusion from the labour market what is at stake but also all the consequences from not having equal labour opportunities in terms of accessing to welfare services, and thus, the effect that this has on the living conditions of the large community. But what is particularly critical is the negative impact of long unemployment or precarious job conditions on the well-being of people. Recent research evidence how one out of three Roma people are unemployed, 20% are not covered by health insurance, 90% are living below the poverty<sup>4</sup>. There is little literature specifically focused on the case of Roma people; however, according to the World Bank, the fact that the vast majority of working-age Roma lacks the sufficient preparation to be successfully integrated into the labour market represent great annual productivity losses from 526 million Euro in Bulgaria to 887 million Euro in Romania and fiscal losses from 202 million Euro in Romania to 370 million Euro in Bulgaria (The World Bank, 2010).

Disparities that suffer Romani people have led different European governments and EU public institutions to react in relation to the “Roma issue”, and make from it a topic of their political agenda, at national and European level. At the societal level, the political and social organisation of the Roma Rights’ Movement emerged with much dynamism in the 1990s, also as a response by the own Romani people aimed to find a way to the precarious living conditions that their community experienced across Europe, a situation that had worsened at the end of the eighties and during the nineties for the Roma people living in the former communist countries due to the break of the soviet regime. Self-organised as a group capable of their self-transformation Touraine (1985), the Roma organised for the struggle of their human rights at different European countries, rising

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information: <https://es.scribd.com/doc/151052693/Faces-of-poverty-faces-of-hope>

<sup>4</sup> For more information: [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/2099-FRA-2012-Roma-at-a-glance_EN.pdf).

with more strength in one countries that in others. Within the Roma Rights' Movement, Romani women also mobilized aimed at raising their own concerns and claiming for a Romani feminism, what has been slightly analysed yet (Bițu & Vincze, 2012; Brooks, 2012; Oprea, 2005; Sánchez Aroca, 2005; Sordé, 2006).

In parallel with this and framed in a new sociopolitical context, new schemes and regimes were also designed in order to face poor socio-economic conditions, prejudices and discrimination that affected the Roma in different European countries. The European Union created at an institutional level new legislation and mechanisms in this regard. The approval of the EU Fundamental Rights Agenda through the endorsement of the Maastricht Treaty (European Union, 1992) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (European Union, 1997) supplied the European institutions with mechanisms to face discrimination based on ethnic origin (Vermeersch, 2012). At a later stage, the approval of the EU Chapter of Fundamental Rights in 2000 which was enforced with the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, and the implementation of the Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC on 2011 were other major steps for the struggle of ethnic discrimination, a needed legal arm for all those NGOs and independent actors which would later claim for the rights of the Roma people, basing their petitions on these legislation. Specific legislation for the protection of the Roma people's rights would later come: in April 2005 the European Parliament released a resolution on the situation of the Roma in the EU, which marked a historical advance for the Roma communities in Europe (European Parliament, 2005). Through this resolution the Parliament called on the Council, the Commission, the Member States and the candidate countries to consider recognising the Roma as a European minority. This meant a major progress for the Roma in terms of what it would later suppose at the political level, as under the same resolution the Parliament asked the other European institutions to activate all their means and tools to combat anti-gypsism across Europe, and address directly to the Commission to ensure that the candidate countries will make real efforts to strengthen the rule of law and protect human and minority rights. Later on, in January 2008 the European Parliament approved the *European strategy on the Roma*, which endorsed the *EU Framework Strategy on the Roma Inclusion* (European Parliament, 2008).

As a political framework, the European Commission using the mentioned strategy promoted the elaboration of a strategy for Roma inclusion by the end of 2011,

considering the national stages of different member states. Drawing from this, each EU country developed its own National Roma Strategy, in which it is outlined how the goals of the EU Framework will be specifically addressed. Thus, in terms of who holds the final responsibility of enforcing the law, member states are accountable ones (Kovacs, 2012). Another result of the EU Framework Strategy on the Roma Inclusion, and in which its creation participated not only EU institutions and national governments but also other NGOs and stakeholders, is the *European Platform for the Roma Inclusion*<sup>5</sup>. In consonance with the efforts of the European Commission, the World Bank and the Open Society Institute launched in 2005 the “Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005-2015)”, an initiative which gathered different governments, intergovernmental organisms, NGOs and other Roma civil society institutions to work together in the field of education, employment, health and housing, addressing also as a cross-cutting topics gender equity, anti-discrimination and poverty.

In all, many studies have been conducted oriented to evaluate and analyse the effectivity of the institutional initiatives addressed to the Roma in Europe, either by institutions framed within the European Commission, the OSCE, United Nations or other International NGOs (consider the Open Society Foundation, ERRC, International Romani Union, among others) (ERRC, 2010; OHCHR, 2014; Open Society Foundations, 2015).

These are needed analysis not only to evaluate if the existing programmes and frameworks are achieving their initial goals, but also in order to improve them and overall, to avoid the objectification and burocratisation of the aid. The latter idea, *the objectification and burocratisation of the aid*, is a critique held by several scholars who argue that the aid oriented to the Roma as involved in many cases instead of the betterment of the Roma people’s living conditions, a creation of a “gypsy industry” ((Barany, 2011) or the NGOisation of the Romani movement (Nirenberg, 2009; Trehan, 2009). That is, NGOs or people from the third sector who have got to be rich from the money that should have been spent to lessen the plight of the Roma. Resources invested on the ‘Roma issue’ are required, and this issue urges an answer; nonetheless, its implementation need to be well-coordinated and developing relationships with the local

---

<sup>5</sup> For more information: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/roma-platform/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/roma-platform/index_en.htm)

Roma representatives and the own communities (Will Guy & Kovats, 2006), that is, the crucial issue of involving grassroots locals into the own implementation of initiatives in order to improve their social impact (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Flecha, 2006-2011).

Although several authors have recognized the role of Romani women as motor of social transformation within the Romani community (Bițu & Vincze, 2012; Brooks, 2012; Sánchez-Aroca, 2005; Sordé-Martí, 2006, 2007), research still need to better understand and explain in which specific ways grassroots' Romani women are struggling for their individual and collective empowerment. Also, more efforts need to be dedicated to analyse their social organization, how they are contributing to the large Roma Rights Movement, and also to shape a more inclusive feminism, a feminism that takes into account the voices of *all women* in an egalitarian way. That being said, this dissertation is an attempt to fully capture the outcomes of the Romani women's collective agency when successfully organised. Therefore, **the general objective of this dissertation is to conduct a sociological study of the organising that fosters and enables the grassroots Romani women to exercise and enhance their human agency as a way of both eradicating discrimination and engaging in a process of individual and collective empowerment.** Instead of mere spectators of their social reality, Romani women are indeed being agents of transformation. If not this way, how can be possible that every year there are more grassroots Romani women that join social mobilisation at their local communities to find out better opportunities to improve their own future and the one of their families? In developing my general objective I inquiry on the characteristics of the organising of the Romani women's collective agency, and I also deepen in understanding those aspects related to the Romani women which enhance their capacity for being agents of social change, at both personal and collective level.

Embracing such project leads me to frame this study within the dual theories in sociology, a perspective that allow analysing the course of social change as an interaction among systems and subjects (Habermas, 1984; 1987; Giddens, 1984; Beck, 1992b; Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994), looking at how agents by means of interactions either change or reproduce social structure. According to Giddens (1984), each actor has human agency, and it is through this agency and the day-to-day action (discursive and practical consciousness) that they structure and re-structure social systems. Structure is therefore internal to subjects, who have the potential of social change. Habermas'

(1984, 1987) Theory of Communicative Action also recovers the agency of the subject when arguing how interaction occurs between subjects capable of language and action: “lifeworld”, as this site where it is created action due to human interaction. It is through intersubjective dialogue that subjects reach consensus in communicative action, what, against what many thinks, governs those relationships among Romani women who are struggling for social transformation. Habermas’ concept of lifeworld enables me in this dissertation to capture the richness of the transformative potential of relations among Romani women, at their daily relations, at their homes, at the educational spaces in which they participate, at the market,... in all those social spaces that they share and in which they develop egalitarian interactions, in which they empower themselves and emerge as agents of social change within their communities.

Studying the Romani women’s agency is an endeavour that can be approached from different pathways, in this thesis I will do it by analysing the case of a Roma Association of Women, an example of Romani women collective action where agency is generated, enhanced and empowered in different regards. Founded in 1999 in a neighbourhood from Barcelona by few Romani women and non-Romani women of different ages, educational and socio-economic backgrounds, this association, the “Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen” is currently one of the most recognised association of Romani women in Catalonia, Spain and the European Union. With a reduced organisational structure, implementing its activities and projects at the local level in Catalonia but in on-going coordination with other organisations that work similar topics (Roma issues, Romani women social and labour inclusion, adult education) at the European level, Drom Kotar Mestipen could be considered among the type of “grassroots association” (Smith, 2000): a locally based association, autonomous, and mainly run by volunteers who are the ones who assume the large part of the job in an altruistic way. This association was one of the very first in emerging from the grassroots Romani women themselves, channelling their voices and representing them in Catalonia, and slowly contributing to organise the grassroots Romani women’s mobilisation that demands the inclusion of the voices of all Romani women, not just the few Romani women academics, to be listened and represented in public spaces of dialogue and decision-making platforms.

Thus, this dissertation is a case study of a Romani women association through which I look at a wider social reality, how the Romani women exercise their human agency in order to rise up a single voice and claim for their rights, as women, as Roma and as not academic. These three axes –gender, ethnicity and educational level (class)– define the stand from which they do their struggle (De Botton, Puigvert, & Sánchez Aroca, 2005; Parella, 2003). From this broad study of the Romani women’s human agency I concrete my analysis on four specific objectives, which are the following.

**First, to carry out an in-depth analysis of a Roma association of women as a case where the Romani women’s human agency is effectively fostered and enabled, understanding and defining which are the underlying features that make possible that this association becomes a hub of social change for Romani women involved in its activities.** In order to understand and define which are these features, I delve on an analysis of the own association, and more specifically, on some aspects regarding the dynamics of the association. I try to understand why this association has made a difference in empowering Romani women relying on the analysis of specific elements related to its leadership, inherent ruling principles, internal organisation in terms of membership composition, and criteria related to its activities.

Once carried out an in-depth analysis of the association I move to a further stage of the research: I examine and explore the impacts of the association, what I conceptualise as the outcomes of the Romani women’s collective agency successfully organised. From this stage my other three specific objectives are defined. The second specific objective is **to examine the impact of the Romani women’s collective agency organised in a Roma association of women in broadening their opportunities.** Thus, I wonder through this specific objective, in what ways the Romani women’s collective agency organised in a Roma association of women broadens the opportunities of Romani women involved in its activities? So, how the actual opportunities of the women are enhanced? What are the perceived changes in the women’s lives and routines once they get involved? In what ways the broadening of their opportunities enable them to engage in a process of individual empowerment?

The third specific objective focuses on looking at the impact on the family level, it aims at **exploring the impact of the Romani women’s collective agency organised in a**



**Roma association of women in broadening the opportunities of their own families.**

By means of addressing this specific objective I will be able to respond to the following questions: In what ways the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women broadens the opportunities of Romani women's families? In turn, in what ways does a Roma association of women support the Romani women involved to become *agents of change* within their families?

Different authors on which this dissertation is built upon have showed through their analysis how Romani women are leading a change within their own families and within their communities. However, it has been barely addressed the specific effect of grassroots Romani women's organising on their families.

Finally, the fourth specific objective tackled in the dissertation is **to explore the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women on shaping and fostering the own grassroots Romani women's mobilisation at the community level and beyond.** Through this last objective I am interested in exploring not only the strategies used by the association to reach out new grassroots Romani women and organise them, but also the actions that the association embrace, and the future projections. Drawing from this, some of the questions that will guide this specific objective are the following: In what ways the Romani women's collective agency, when organised, contributes to shape and foster the grassroots Romani women's mobilisation at the local level and beyond? Through which specific strategies and actions it operates at the different levels? How the Romani women's mobilization and the Romani feminism is contributing to shape a more inclusive feminism?

All that said, this dissertation is also framed within the perspective that Erik O. Wright (2010) called "emancipatory social sciences", that science that seeks to generate scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project of confronting the different forms of human oppression. In line with this, knowledge created in this research will provide evidence of how Romani women are taking the lead in the social transformation of their own social conditions and the owns of their people; it will illuminate on the theoretical contributions that they as an organised group are doing to the Roma Rights' Movements as well as to mainstream feminism, and overall, it will advance on those dynamics that enable the creation of alternatives for emancipatory social change.

### ***Factors that motivated the selection of the topic***

Different factors were taken into account for the selection of the topic of this dissertation, and perhaps more important, for shaping it in one specific way –and not in another. At its initial stage, the general idea was defined in an on-going dialogue with my two advisors until leading to agreed that the topic would be of interest among different publics and in turn contributing with novel theoretical knowledge to a sociological (link to the field in which this investigation is imbricated, and also to the academia), social (for its expected social impact) and personal motivation (for my own involvement in the organising of the Romani women). Therefore, I do consider that these motivations should be mentioned for the selection of the topic, because bounded one to each other, they have brought me to develop this research and participate today from other investigations focused on the Roma people which are being developed at the Immigration and Ethnic Minorities Research Group (GEDIME), at the Department of Sociology of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

**Personal motivation.** I got involved in Romani issues in November 2008 collaborating in a research that one of my advisors, Dr. Teresa Sordé-Martí, was leading at UAB, the FP6 INCLUD-ED project (2006-2011)<sup>6</sup>. Then was the first time that I was introduced to a world that till then was totally unknown for me, the one of the Roma people. The methodological approach used by Dr. Sordé led me to slowly unveil the social reality of many Romani men and Romani women by means of the different conversations we were having in the scientific spaces created by the project, as many of them participated in the own research project, in the advisory council.

Later on, in late 2010 I received an email from the Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen calling for volunteers, they were organising what they called “the First International Romani Women Congress: The Other Women”: I thought that I could not lost that opportunity, I wanted to be there and volunteer in whatever I could. So I answer the email and offered myself to give a hand in the Romani women congress. Since then I have continued volunteering in Drom Kotar Mestipen; during

---

<sup>6</sup> 2006-2011: “**INCLUD-ED. Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion from education in Europe**”, VI Framework Programme of the European Union. Main Researcher: Ramón Flecha García. Reference: FP6-028603-2. Teresa Sordé: Coordinator of the Integrative Project.

some periods I collaborate with more intensity than during others, but always with the same passion as all women who collaborate there. Starting my relationship with the Association at that moment of the Congress was something that, for me as well as for other volunteers and collaborators that had a similar experience, could never forget, memories and experiences that already form part of our lifeworlds.

Involved as research collaborator in Dr. Sordé projects during the last year of my degree in Political Sciences and during my master in Sociology, I decided to focus my master thesis in studying the interplay among social agents and scientific evidences in the design and implementation of a community programme. I did this by studying the case of a working cooperative initiated by Romani and non-Romani people from one of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods from Spain, what allowed me to observe and analyse the strategies and actions used by those agents in order to create an effective solution for overcoming –*by themselves*– their precarious situation, thus not only creating job for themselves but also opening more job positions for other people from their barrio. The master thesis was a first approach to the study of the agency of Romani women, what made a first inspiration to move me to a next stage in my academic career and continue studying this topic during my PhD dissertation.

**Sociological relevance.** Several scientific investigations have been conducted focus on researching the situation of the Roma people, with different aims and also related to the topic of this dissertation –contributing to shed light on the social transformations that the own Roma people is leading from their own lifeworlds to face racism and discrimination, and to their own emancipation. Many of this investigations have been of substantial interest for my own research, nonetheless, it needs to be acknowledged that there is still scarce scientific literature on Romani feminism, a claim that Romani feminist themselves are doing since back the beginning of the 2000 (Brooks, 2012; Bițu & Vincze, 2012). This may not be attributed to the lack of social interest on the different type of contributions that Romani women are doing to the own Roma Rights movements and to the improvement of their communities, neither to the sociological interest that it may involve the study of the specific processes and dynamics that these women are carrying out in their daily lives in order to led these transformations. As already expressed and as it will be explained throughout this dissertation, this investigation tackles a topic that is indeed of deep sociological interest grounded on

different reasons. First, as the organising of the Romani women's agency at the individual and collective level remain little addressed by the scientific community. Indeed, when reviewing the scientific literature for my literature review chapter on this topic this is a first fact that is made evident. Second, as many lessons and theoretical contributions can be obtained from the understanding of the mobilization of the grassroots Romani women to be used in other social realities, with non-Romani women and in society in general. The social group studied, as already mentioned, presents a deep potential for transformation, which is so often overlooked by researchers, this sometimes due to using methodological approaches that are derived from ethnocentric or relativistic perspectives that impede gathering the contributions that Romani women –or Romani people in general can do to science (Gómez & Vargas, 2003). Uncovering some of these contributions through this research will showcase that Romani women can inform novel theoretical knowledge, and contribute in turn to unveil effective solutions to their own situation of social vulnerability. This is way of contributing to create knowledge in sociology, making it useful; involving the public and for the public, what sociologist Michael Burawoy call “doing public sociology” (Burawoy, 2005), is present along the entire investigation. Finally, study this topic it is of sociological relevance as it evidence the ways of going beyond the structural power established in society. Sociological scholars have historically defended the systemically established privileged positions within the organization of the social system. Power itself is a concept understood here in an asymmetrical way. Roma people in society are structurally seen as being part of an inferior class with a lower cultural level. Thus this thesis also show how to go beyond the structural conception of categorizing people in society, empowering individuals “from below” who are also playing the role of active agents on contributing to make changes on the pre-established structure and go beyond; for instance, the idea of Romani students when firmly states “Romí and University students”, challenges Bourdieu (1984).

In all, this thesis is framed within a large line of research within the Immigration and Ethnic Minorities Research Group (GEDIME), at the Department of Sociology of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, initiated by Dr. Teresa Sordé and since its very beginning encouraged by Dr. Carlota Solé, who hold an extended research background on the study of international migrations and the processes of integration of migrants and ethnic minorities. The line of research focus on the study of the situation of the Romani

people and those actions that contribute to the improvement of their social inclusion (“migration, ethnic minorities –Romani people–, and social inclusion) is currently being studied at GEDIME by several researchers and in different competitive projects which are conducted in collaboration with other academic institutions, national and international. Thus, this dissertation aims also to contribute to this research line and it will serve indeed to open up future research questions which have been unexplored till the moment.

**Social interest.** The subject of this research is of extended social impact among different publics, Roma and non-Roma audiences, civic associations and institutional and public organisms. First, this dissertation will make visible the very contributions that grassroots Romani women are indeed doing at different levels, at the one hand, to mainstream feminism when they vindicate that they claims are included, when they ask to be listened in those spaces of public debate and decision making (other large feminist platforms in which the Other Romani women participate, as well as public spaces created for instance, by the city council, which used to be co-opted by academic women); and on the other hand, to the Roma Rights’ Movements, the other Romani women have developed specific strategies and actions for their social mobilisation that could be indeed useful for the large RRM.

Another aspect that makes this dissertation of social interest is that it provides evidences that contribute to break down with many existing stereotypes and prejudices about both Romani women and Romani associationism, which so often is portrayed as clientelistic and coordinated from a top-down logic. This investigation shows how Romani women’s agency when effectively organised in collective action, it has a big potential for social transformation.

It is for this, in turn, that the social interest relies also in explaining to institutional and public agencies the story of the case analysed in this dissertation and the stories of the grassroots Romani women: why they succeed in reaching other Romani women out every year at the time of organizing, for instance, the intergenerational Romani Women Students’ Meeting? How they organised at the local level? How leadership work? All these aspects are key questions that European institutions and other social and educational organisations that work with the Roma not only want to know, but also need

to know. If in this research I have deeply studied and understood the success of the Romani women's agency under certain conditions, it is of social interest for all those agents and agencies that are working for improving the living conditions and for fulfilling the human rights of the Roma.

## **Structure**

This dissertation has been conducted under the communicative methodological research (Gomez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011), already recognised for enabling scientific investigation to have scientific, political and social impact given its transformative nature specially when used with at-risk communities (Sorde & Mertens, 2014). This investigation is an instrumental case study (Stake, 2010) of the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen, chosen grounded on its specific characteristics as site where Romani women's human agency is generated, enhanced and empowered in different regards. Qualitative methods have been used as data collection strategy: interviews, communicative daily life stories, participant communicative observations and revision of documentary information. For the analysis of data, all data gathered was coded according previous established categories, defined in relation to the theoretical framework and the literature review, which helped me to structure the categories.

This thesis is divided in six parts and 13 chapters.

**Part 1. Theoretical Framework**, is organised in two chapters. **Chapter 1 “Theories on Social transformation from below”**, it starts reviewing the dual theories in sociology, the theoretical lenses that allowed me to analyse how Romani women through their interactions are engaging in a process of personal, family, community and social transformation. In a second section, some specific theory on social movements is presented, what enable to gain a better understanding of the Romani women's mobilisation, understanding the key role played by ethnicity as a factor of unity and solidarity. I introduce in this section another important debate: civic associations in relation to social movements, that is, how some associations which are effective in their advocacy become key actors also for the rise, or not, of a movement. Shedding some light on key issue related to what literature says regarding ‘effective social movements’, is of major importance in order to later understand why I have chosen the case study of

the Romani Women Association. At the end of this section I review Amartya Sen's capabilities approach (Sen, 1989), which has utmost relevance for this dissertation as I use from his approach the idea of 'opportunities'. **Chapter 2: "Romani women at the crossroad of Modernity"**, is focused on the theoretical contributions made by Romani women scholars and non-Romani women scholars about Romani feminism. Despite the novelty of this research field, key debates are outlined and its main features presented, what allow to understand why this feminism can be considered a contribution at the current state of the art.

**Part 2. Literature Review**, is structured in three chapters. In **Chapter 3. Roma Rights' Movement**, going back to its origin, I review some of the main debates within the movement: the issue of the recognition of the Roma as an ethnic minority, and the struggle for the achievement of the human rights' agenda (the recognition of the Porajmos, education, migration and Roma political representation). **Chapter 4. Romani Women's Movement**: it is divided in two sections, the first one is an overview of the current social situation of the Romani women in relation to different areas (discrimination, education, employment, health, housing, youth and participation). The second section reviews the emergence of the Romani women's mobilisation. It reviews the different institutions and platforms that through events and alliances have put the issue of the Romani women at the European political agenda. Specific data is provided regarding the case of Spain. **Chapter 5. EU initiatives for the inclusion of the Roma communities**, in it I review how the European Union has addressed the 'Roma Issue' at an institutional level, creating new legislations and mechanisms to tackle not only anti-Roma discrimination but also the Roma social exclusion. In a subsequent section I explain some of the critical arguments emerged regarding the European Roma policies, describing on what arguments they are grounded and also the proposals ('lessons to be learnt') made in order to make the most of the aid and resources invested in interventions and research projects aimed at overcoming the Roma social exclusion.

**Part 3 concerns the Methodology** of the dissertation. Structured in two chapters. In **Chapter 6. Methodology**, the communicative methodology used is deeply explained: its theoretical basis and the reasons that have motivated the selection of this specific methodology to develop the dissertation. Introduced the communicative methodology as a main approach of the research, it is explained the case study, and the different data

collection techniques used. Finally, I explain how I have conducted the data analysis. Specific remarks are provided regarding the bias and validity of the research, mainly a consideration due to my own involvement in the association as volunteer. As a final consideration of this chapter I mention some limitations of the research. In **Chapter 7. Justification of the case**, I explain in detail the reasons that have led me to select the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen as a case study for my dissertation. In order to justify the selection, it is explained the historical background of the association, its internal structure, its activities, and its social and public presence.

**Part 4. Results.** This is the central part of the dissertation, as it is the part where results are presented. **Chapters 8, 9 and 10** corresponds to those aspects related to the selected association and its organising, how Romani women's collective agency due to a specific way of organising under the frame of the case studied have informed their mobilisation at the local level and beyond. **Chapters 11 and 12**, corresponds to the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in the Romani Association of Women on their self and collective empowerment that lead to broadening up their opportunities and thus improving their lives and the ones of their communities.

Finally, **Part 5. Chapter 13. Conclusions:** in it all the findings of the research are discussed at the light of the theories used in the theoretical framework and contributions from literature on the Romani women's movement. All the conclusions are explained in detail, highlighting the theoretical contributions that are derived from this dissertation to the fields of contemporary sociological theory, social movements' theory and leadership, organising and Romani feminism. Additionally, future lines of research that are opened up from this research are also explained.



## **PART 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

## **CHAPTER 1. Theories on Social transformation from below**

### **1.1. Dual Theories for the analysis of social change**

To analyse the transformative nature of the RRM and also of the Romani Women's Movement to enhance their human agency requires building my analysis on a solid theoretical framework that allows, first, to well-capture and acknowledge the capacity that individuals have to transform their own social conditions and social structures through exercising their human agency, and second, to conceive social movements as possible agents of social change. Approaching the actions of the RRM and the very struggles of the Roma communities from these theoretical coordinates will enable me to provide an accurate sociological analysis of the transformations and defeats that the RRM have led, recognizing the specific role performed by Romani women, initially as members of the larger RRM and later as leaders of the Romani Women's Movement.

Social theories in which a systemic approach of analysis predominates (with a clear predominance of *system* over subjects, and systems predominate in the analysis of the social scientists) such as Parsons' functionalism, Merton's middle-range functionalism or Luhmann's system theory, or those social theories in which the subjects prevail (subjects are considered above systems and generate the sense of their actions), such as Mead's symbolic interactionism, the phenomenology of Schütz (1974) the ethnomethodology of Garfinkel (1967) or Goffman (1959) dramaturgical approach, all provide a partial theoretical view that allow to capture how social change takes place at the micro level pushed by human agency, and in turn, how societal (systemic) forces either promote or hinder it at the macro level of analysis.

Systemic-based or subject-oriented analytical approaches of social theory may not be the most suitable theoretical equipment to the study of human agency, the effect of people's interaction, or its impact on the system structures and thus, how to explain that a Roma Association of Women can develop a set of actions that trigger certain changes in the social structure. Analysing this reality both at the micro and the macro-level requires departing from those theoretical lenses that conceive society from a dual perspective, taking into account how social change occurs due to the interaction among

and in-between systems and subjects. Indeed, theoretical lenses that far from breaking with the subject-oriented approach and with the systemic views, goes beyond them, thus comprehending society as a dual entity. Subjects and structures can both contribute to social transformation or lead to social reproduction, what is clear is that a holistic sociological analysis takes both elements into account. Authors in line with this dual theoretical conception are Habermas (1987), Giddens, (1984) or Beck (1992, 1994).

A central author in this approach is Habermas and his theory of the ‘communicative action’ (1987), in which he understands a particular vision of society, simultaneously conceived as systems and as lifeworld:

“(…) The concept of the lifeworld that emerges from the conceptual perspective of communicative action has only limited analytical and empirical range. I would therefore like to propose (1) that we conceive of societies *simultaneously* as systems and lifeworlds. This concept proves itself in (2) a theory of social evolution that separates the rationalization of the lifeworld from the growing complexity of societal systems so as to make the connection Durkheim envisaged between forms of social integration and stages of system differentiation tangible, that is, susceptible to empirical analysis.” (Habermas, 1987, p.118)

Habermas concept of human agency is developed by re-elaborating Schütz’s concept of “lifeworld”, through which he provides his particular understanding of the relation among the agent and the multiple social systems. In this sense, Habermas’ notion of ‘lifeworld’ refers to the background knowledge and common experience that allow individuals to communicate to each other, reach mutual understandings and coordinate their actions, linking agents and systems in an interactive process. Later on (Chapter VI, Vol II), Habermas explains the functions of communicative action for each of the aspects of the lifeworld: *lifeworld* is formed by three structural components that develop particular functions: *culture*, which develops the cultural reproduction, can be understood as all the knowledge inherited from the past; *society*, which is in charge of social integration, is understood as the set of norms that rules the social life; and *person*, which is in charge of the socialisation, is understood as the capacity that individuals have for communicating among each other and reaching agreements:

“Under the functional aspect of *mutual understanding*, communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge; under the aspect of *coordinating action*, it serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity; finally, under the aspect of *socialization*, communicative action serves the formation of personal identities. The symbolic structures of the lifeworld are reproduced by way of the continuation of valid knowledge, stabilisation of group solidarity, and socialisation of responsible actors” (Habermas, 1987, p.137)

In line with Chomsky (1988), Habermas understands that individuals have a universal capacity for language, that allow us to engage in the process of intersubjective understanding with other individuals and thus to coordinate social action. In all, his dual conception of society and his theory of communicative action is what he proposes as the tool to face the problems derived from instrumental actions, manifested in society under the shape of antisocial behavior, social conflict, anomie and alienation. Therefore, the challenge here is how individuals with a shared lifeworld experiences at the micro level can face the dynamics of the macro level, that is, the dynamics of the system. For the case of concern of this thesis, how the organising of a Romani Women’s Association can foster their human agency and therewith face the structural dynamics of a society marked by power relations and inequalities based on economic, gender or ethnic relations. As Habermas explains in the following quotation, this is the key problem of social theory: how to connect the notion of the *system* with the notion of the *lifeworld*:

“The fundamental problem of social theory is how to connect in a satisfactory way the two conceptual strategies indicated by the notions of 'system' and 'lifeworld'. (...) Until then, we shall have to be content with a provisional concept of society as a system that has to fulfill conditions for the maintenance of sociocultural lifeworlds. The formula—societies are *systemically stabilised* complexes of action of *socially integrated* groups—certainly requires more detailed explanation; for the present, it may stand for the heuristic proposal that we view society as an entity that, in the course of social evolution, gets differentiated both as a system and as a lifeworld. Systemic evolution is measured by the increase in a society's steering capacity, whereas the state of

development of a symbolically structured lifeworld is indicated by the separation of culture, society, and personality” (p. 151 - 151)

Drawing from the abovementioned, Habermas recognises that in the lifeworld there are some type of agreements, which, inherited from previous generations, we as individuals can either accept or reject. Roma people and -as will be observed later, particularly, Roma women, question some aspects of their lives while transforming difficulties into possibilities. Another example to conceptualise this idea is how leadership is understood among the Roma people: for the Roma people elders or traditional leaders are a source of deep-rooted authority in the community. But as argued by some authors, although recognizing the potential of this cultural trait of the Roma, this could involve in turn a challenge at the time of how to articulate it in the present time, where among the Romani movement there have emerged new bureaucratic structures of power –for instance, in NGOs- which may require considering other forms of leadership. A *Habermasian* read of this dilemma could be the need to open the forum for a discussion on the issue, involving all actors’ viewpoints, and thus finding those solutions which based on validity claims could better represent the community interests.

The structuration theory elaborated by Anthony Giddens is of much importance to be incorporated in this theoretical framework because of the recovery that this author does of the duality of the structure and the central role deployed by the agents as potential protagonists of social change. According to Giddens, social theory should be able to illuminate concrete processes of social life. For that reason he develops a social theory that is not concentrated upon the epistemological issues, but focuses on the ontological concerns of social theory, that is, on what involves the human action and therefore, the social reproduction and social transformation. In his book “The Constitution of Society” (1984) Giddens aims to understand human agency and social institutions. Thus, it is for the emphasis on human agency why his conceptual approach it is of much worth to be used in studying the transformations achieved by the RRM and by the Romani Women’s Movement, and within this, by the Romani women.

In the structuration theory, Giddens understands the ‘structure’ in a different way as the structuralist and post-structuralist school of thought did, which conceive structure as ‘external’ to human action and therefore as something that can constrain the free

initiative of the subject. In Giddens' theory *structure* refers to the rules and resources, or sets of transformative relations, organised as properties of the social systems:

“(…) structuring properties allowing the ‘binding’ of time-space in social systems, the properties which make it possible for discernible similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them ‘systemic’ form. To say that structure is a ‘virtual order’ of transformative relations means that social systems, as reproduced social practices, do not have ‘structures’ but rather exhibit ‘structural properties’ and that structure exists, as time-space presence, only in its instantiations in such practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents” (Giddens, 1984, p. 16).

As exposed in the quotation, social systems are those relations between actors or collectivities, organised as regular social practices (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Again, the presence of actors as the ones who carry out the social action through their day-to-day action enables them to change the abovementioned ‘virtual order’, this is a transformative dimension for the analysis of society. In his theory, Giddens adds the idea of the *duality of the structure*, which involves that the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organise. Agents and structures represent a duality which is in a continuous process of interaction that leads to the structuration of social systems: “structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity” (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). The understanding of structure as internal to individuals and ‘with no independence of the knowledge that agents have’ gives agents a huge potential for social change, no matter if agents have a lot of information or very little. This is due to individuals’ human agency, the capability that people have for making change.

In Giddens’ structuration theory, in some form, social system is the element that establishes the relations among actors. But as well posed by Garfinkel, actors are not *cultural dopes*, they do have a high capacity of oral expression. Related to this, Giddens makes a differentiation among what he calls ‘discursive consciousness’ and ‘practical consciousness’, which again, is of interests for approaching the analysis of the Romani Women’s Movement contributions. According to him, ‘discursive consciousness’ is

‘what actors are able to say, or to give verbal expression to, about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action’; ‘practical consciousness’ is ‘what actors know (believe) about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action, but cannot express discursively’ (Giddens, 1984). As Sordé emphasises (2006), this is important for the case of many Roma people as long as it involves somehow a differentiation among “academic intelligence” and “practical intelligence”, and therefore, the relevance of taking into account all the knowledge that individuals possess, regardless of whether they have been acquired in the academia or in other contexts of the day-to-day life. Many Roma people do not have academic credentials due to the systematic discrimination they have suffered in education, which have led them to drop out of school; however, they do have practical intelligence and skills acquired in informal spaces. This “cultural intelligence” (Ramón Flecha, 2000) that many Roma people have is what allows them to make rich contributions that can not only trigger social transformations, but also inform social theory. Putting this in Giddens’ words, Roma people would also be “a social theorist on the level of discursive consciousness” (Giddens, 1984, p. 18).

Each actor has agency, so he or she can use this agency to change the elements that make the social systems work, and therefore, influence their structuration. Thus, some of the very central issues of this theses are linked to how Roma women deploy their capacity of agency and specifically, in which contexts, under which mechanisms, and which is the role played by the social movements as triggers or stages, or either both. Or even the other way around: which are those particular conditions in which Roma women cease to be an agent, thus losing their capability of making a difference? And how can it be that some specific Romani Women’s associations and their organising enables Romani women in their endeavour? Besides Habermas’ and Giddens’ contributions already exposed, Beck’s ideas on the *reflexive modernisation* and *individualisation* provide relevant insights into these issues, as well as into the study of other aspects approached directly or indirectly in this thesis. For instance, the study of how Romani women are participating in the struggle for Romani women’s rights, claiming for the inclusion of the voices of the ‘other women’ and [although not being aware] being part of a larger social process that is also occurring in other realms of society, what Beck (1992) has defined as the “demonopolisation of science”; or even how some actions identified among the Roma community in general or within the RRM

can illuminate effective solutions to address some challenges faced by mainstream society (for instance, the Roma trans-territorial identity can provide positive contributions to the unsolved challenge of the construction of a European identity and society).

With the idea of *reflexive modernisation*, Beck (1994) refers to the process of moving between an industrial society organised around the pursuit of wealth and goods to the one organised at a global scale, in which risks and hazards can occur across a range of institutional settings, either in science, class, politics, the workplace or the family environment. Thus, it is the step from the industrial society to what Beck defined as the “risk society”: a phase of development of modern society in which social, political, economic and individual risks tend to escape the sphere of control and protection of institutions of the industrial society. So, if the *first modernity* was characterised by the existence of full employment or economic security, the *second modernity* (different from post-modernism) is characterised by the predominance of risk. In all, reflexive modernisation throws the basic social principles of the nuclear family, the economic security woven out of industrial regulation, the full employment into a flux (Beck, Bonss, & Lau, 2003, p.1).

Within the process of reflexive modernisation two social phenomena are taking place: globalisation and individualisation. As Beck puts it, “‘individualisation’, means, first, the disembedding and, second, the re-embedding of the ways of life in the industrial society by new ones, in which the individuals have to procure, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves” (p. 13). Individualisation it is not a process of isolation but the option of having an individualised and chosen biography, a “do-it-yourself biography” (Hitzler, 1992, in Beck 1992, p. 15), where new ways of life are developed (e.g.: previous existing family models are no longer imperatives, social rights are now individual rights, etc.). Due to the process of individualisation individuals are no longer subject of any specific determination, but therefore forced to decide. Sometimes they might get trapped in dilemmas, but at the same time, they become agents of their own biographies, and more opportunities of dialogue are opened up.

As highlighted, Beck puts the subject at the very centre of social theory. Related to this, Lash’s reflections on the reflexive modernisation and how this very idea emphasises the



role of human agency over structure is noteworthy; he states that the reflexive modernisation thesis is built on the core assumption that humans are progressively freeing their agency from structure. Lash wraps up the argument putting the attention on how in reflexive modernity both individuals' chances and inequalities depend not on the access to the *mode of production* as it used to be in the industrial society, but on the individuals' place in the '*mode of information*' (Poster, 1990, in Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994, p.121):

“What indeed underpins reflexivity is then neither the social (economic, political and ideological) structures of Marxism, nor the (normatively regulated and institutional) social structures of Parsonian functionalism, but instead an articulated web of global and local networks of information and communication structures. One might best understand this new context in contrast to industrial capitalism, in which 'life chances' and class inequalities depend on an agent's place in and access to the mode of production. In reflexive modernity, life chances depend, instead of on place, on the 'mode of information'.” (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994, p. 120-121).

Lash is pointing at a central phenomenon in the reflexive modernisation: the access to information, something that has been accurately studied by other social theorists such as Manuel Castells in his trilogy *The Information Age* (Castells, 2009), in which he develops his Theory of the Network Society. Adopting a holistic and multiculturalist approach, Castells explains the deep changes occurred in everyday life at a global scale due to the revolution of the communication technologies experienced with the entrance of the new millennium (a new historical epoch), and derived from this, the consequences of being included or –what is worse– excluded from the Network and from access to IT: inequality, poverty, misery and social exclusion is the other side of the information age for those who are left outside the Network (UNDP, 1999).

As mentioned previously, in today's second modernity and Beck's risk society a key process of transformation takes place: *the demonopolisation of science*. It is in this risk society in which the belief of the expert knowledge as an absolute and non-questionable truth is broken, opening up the path to a key change about how truth is socially conceived: “Truth was a supernatural effort, an elevation to the near-divine. It was a

close relative of dogma. If once one possessed it, had pronounced it, it was difficult to change and yet it changed continually. Science is becoming human” (Beck, 1992, p. 167). If during the industrial society what governed was the ‘specialisation’, that is, a separation and a monopolisation of the scientific knowledge, and also of the political action from just one concrete social sector, at the time of the risk society a process of expansion of science takes place, a phase in which science is subordinated to its own self-reflection challenging its public character. Science becomes every time more needed, but it is not enough to define what is true, because in order to reach this agreement lay people should be brought into the discussion. Science is no longer irrefutable and the monopoly of a reduced elite of individuals who hold some kind of power, it is opened to the dialogue with other users who become ‘co-producers’ of the social process of definition of knowledge. In turn, these lay people are no longer the ‘objects’ of science but become also the subjects of the study.

Derived from the erosion of the scientific knowledge as something “unquestionable”, we are spectators of the end of the traditional forms of doing science, in the labs and by experts’ groups. Today’s elaboration of knowledge needs to be validated by mainstream social agents. This has a direct connection with how research on the Roma people has been traditionally done (this is further developed in chapter 5, Methodology): the demands of “researched agents” for research funded with public resources to have social impact improving their lives, and especially of those vulnerable groups that accept to participate in it, is crucial in this new conception of scientific knowledge (Gómez, Racionero, & Sordé, 2010). There are many examples that evidence how the Roma through their associations are starting to participate in the elaboration of expert knowledge as well as policies targeted at them. One of the research methodologies that has well-proved to successfully advance in the inclusion of the voices of Roma people as active agents of research (recognizing them as creators of knowledge together with the researchers), since the very design of the research process to the dissemination and implementation of its results, is the *communicative methodology of research* (Munte, Serradell & Sorde, 2011).<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> In a previous paper done in collaboration of other colleagues, I analyzed the key elements of this methodology that make the inclusion of the Roma people throughout the research process possible, and the major benefits that this involves in terms of maximizing the political impact of the research. See: Aiello, E.; Mondéjar, E. & Pulido, M. A. (2013) Communicative Methodology of Research and the recognition of the Roma people, *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(2), 254–265.

All these theoretical concepts set out in this section contribute to do a better analysis and understanding of the contributions that Romani women, the Roma people and the social and political movements in which they participate as real transformative actors (the Romani Women's Movement and the RRM) at the very grassroots level to the RRM are doing in our current society. In turn, conceiving them as agents of change in on-going interaction within the social system will not only enhance a better description of their own social reality but it may also provide for new scientific knowledge that can contribute to overcome the barriers that still hinder their social inclusion.

## **1.2. A brief remark on social movements' theory**

In this section it will be introduced some specific theory on social movements which will allow to gain a better understanding of the Romani people mobilisation, understanding the key role played by ethnicity as a factor of unity and solidarity in both, the RRM and the Romani Women's Movement. Also, theoretical contributions of authors such as Touraine, Melucci or Castells helps to understand why rights' movements initiated by Romani people and Romani women fits in what is known as "new social movements". But in order to deep in the Romani Women's Movement articulation, especially in Europe, I introduce in this section another important debate, which is the one related to civic associations in relation to social movements, that is, how some associations which are effective in their advocacy become key actors also for the rise, or not, of a movement. Shedding some light on key issue related to what literature says regarding 'effective social movements', is of major importance in order to later understand why I have chosen the case study of the DKM.

Alain Touraine, a well-known international sociologist in the social movement theory who defined his perspective as "sociology of action", marked a breakdown with the previous traditions in the study of social movements. For Touraine the social movement is not created by the opposition, rather by a process of subjectivation. For the French scholar, feminism is the most important social movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and current motor of social change. In this sense, the women's role in society is defined through

---

subjectivation (Touraine, 2006). He analyses the current women lifeworlds considering current situations and debates socially presented according to different women identities. For Touraine, women's lives take place within a coherent universe of representations and practices which are very different from men's practices because women are oriented towards the creation of the self and towards the reconstruction of society.

Touraine defined social movements as “agents of conflicts for the social control of the main cultural patterns”, inquiring in what is that moves individuals to cooperate together in collective action. Studying the social movements that appeared after 1968 he concluded that some of the reasons that bind actors in postmodern society are no longer sociopolitical factors but sociocultural reasons (Touraine, 1985). So this is what distinguishes traditional social movements from what Touraine called “New Social Movements”: “social movements that fight for a society defined by its diversity, adding ethnic or moral pluralism to political pluralism and free enterprise” (Touraine, 1985, p. 777). The component of the cultural identity within this notion of new social movements emerges as a strong factor, and it is indeed a feature we can find in the RRM and also in the Romani women's mobilisation. In this sense, many of the NGOs or the grassroots associations that compose the RRM are rooted in family bounds, the axis around which the Roma social life is structured. The Roma culture, their values and traditions have been maintained mainly thanks to the oral transmission through family members' generation after generation. The identity-base and the deep commitment for the struggle for social justice of the Roma community constitute two crucial factors that keep the movement alive and united, no matter in which geographic territory.

A Marxist approach of the historical materialism would not enable us to understand the Romani Women's mobilisations, but Touraine's theoretical contributions are useful as they help to “rediscover” social actors, thus overcoming the view that vulnerable people are all “dominated” and emphasizing the capacity of these collectives for self-organizing as a group:

“(…) Only an analysis based on the idea of social movement can challenge directly and efficiently such a view and help rediscover that these alienated and excluded categories are nevertheless actors and are often more able than

the “silent majority” to analyse the situation, define projects, and organise conflicts which can transform themselves into an active social movement” (p. 782).

This is a central idea for conceiving the RRM and the Romani Women’s Movement as social movements with the capacity for self-transformation: in creating their own civic associations the Roma and specifically for the concern of this thesis, Romani women, become ‘agitators’ of an ethnic mobilisation around the Roma issue, thus contributing to the transformation of the existing image of the Roma as ‘vulnerable and oppressed’, being pioneers of an active Roma civil society mobilised for their social and political struggle. Thus, the RRM and the Romani Women’s Movement can be understood as social movements formed by very diverse Roma communities but which stand together motivated by a common ethnic identity. This conception of the RRM and the Romani Women’s Movement are also in line with Melucci’s approach of social movements, who emphasises how social movements are social constructions of collective identity (1996, p. 49), whose first message is the mere fact of their existence and act: “this tells society at large that there is a problem that involves everyone and around which new forms of power are being exercised” (Melucci, 1996 p.125-126). According to Melucci, a social movement can be considered an individual and collective reappropriation of the meaning of the action that is at stake in the forms of collective involvement, and this is what makes the very experience of change in the present a condition for creating a different future. Such action has three main components: group solidarity, a definition of the conflict, and a ‘breach of compatibility of the system within which the action takes place’. In the present dissertation Roma-led movements and particularly Romani women’s mobilization will be analysed for these three components to see whether they can be found in these movements and to what extent. Under Melucci’s views, social conflict moves from more traditional forms of conflict, that is, traditional economic/industrial system, to cultural grounds: those conflicts that affect personal identity, the time and the space in everyday life, the motivation and the cultural patterns of individual action (Melucci, 1992, p. 796). So actors of these social movements do not struggle just for material goals, but also for symbolic and cultural stakes: “they try to change people’s lives, they believe that you can change your life while fighting for more general changes in society” (Melucci, 1992, p. 797.). “And even more, their normal situation is a network of small groups submerged in everyday life which require

a personal involvement in experiencing and practicing cultural innovation” (p. 800). What Melucci explains about the cultural component of new social movements deeply resembles the orientation of both the RRM and the Romani Women’s Movement: as agents creators of group solidarity, which is present in the transterritorial identity of the Roma people, and in its deeply cultural character, as generator of identity for the Roma community. According to Koopmans, Statham and McGarry (in Trehan & Sigona, 2009) an ethnic identity can be crucial to take advantage of political and institutional opportunities in the greater political struggle. In line with a Habermasian approach, social movements offer a new way to deal with politics, as “they supplement the principle of representation with the principle of belonging” (Melucci & Avritzer, 2000, p.509). Therefore, rather than looking for political representation *per se*, the Romani Rights movement serves as a mirror in terms of Melucci’s approach, as it introduces new values and moral concerns to the public sphere: the public recognition of the Roma ethnic minority in the public sphere, the right to be treated equally, or the struggle for a Romani feminism that stands for the defence of the voices of the ‘other women’ (non-academic women).

Castells’ (2009) ideas on social movements as ‘cultural communes’ also fits with some of the characteristics of the Romani mobilisations. According to him, contemporary social movements appear as a defence of existing identities and localities against three elements under the process of globalisation, that is, the dissolution of traditional ways of life, against networking and flexibility that increase individualisation and destabilisation, and against patriarchal structures. Thus, these reactions provide the main contemporary source of identity and meaning as well as a strong liberating power for social mobilisation, arising social movement as “cultural communes”. And these communes share three traits: they are defensive of identities and are deeply rooted in solidarity, they are organised around common cultural identifiers, and they resist dominating forces of meaning making (Castells, 2009).

Drawing from these contributions of social theory on the ‘new social movements’ helps to better understand how Romani-led mobilisations constitute a response to the situation of social injustice that the Roma face as well as a reaffirmation of the Roma cultural identity. Step by step the RRM and the Romani Women’s Movement are gaining social and political achievements. The RRM entered in the public sphere coinciding with “the

awakening of subpolitisation”, a time in which new opportunities and conditions were created for social movements and grassroots oriented groups to participate in politics sharing a space traditionally occupied by ‘authorised’ political agents (Beck, 1994). All in all, politics no longer take place just within conventional political institutions, but they are happening in the very neighbourhoods. But as Beck states, “monopolies which arose with industrial society and were built into its institutions are breaking up. *Monopolies are breaking up* -the monopolies of science on rationality, of men on professions, of marriage on sexuality, and of politics on policy– *but worlds are not collapsing*” (Beck, 1994, p. 232). As the monopoly of science and expertise is broken up, also the monopoly of traditional politicians is broken up and thus, it is the time for social movements to create alternative democratic space as institutional mechanisms do not fulfil their rights and so often do not represent them (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Brecher, Rak, Westhead, & Jones, 2000). In the midst of this new scenario emerge the RRM and the Romani Women’s Movement led by committed Roma people, who are articulating their demands and hence conquering and sharing the public and political space.

Due to the purpose of this dissertation among the different specific elements that social movement theory analyses, in the following sections, special emphasis is placed on the theoretical contributions of leadership and associationism to serve the research of the Romani women’s mobilisations and their capacity to enhance human agency and empowerment of the very women as well as the communities they belong to.

### *Leadership in social movements*

The study of leadership in social movements and collective action has become since the late decades of the 20 century a topic of interest by itself within the literature of social movements and organizations, as it has become relevant to understand its influence in the outcomes of the social movement as how they contribute to social change (Aminzade et al., 2001; Morris, 2000; Morris & Staggenborg, 2007; Skocpol, Ganz, & Muson, 2000, Ganz, 2010, Andrews, Ganz, Baggetta, Han, & Lim, 2010, Melucci, 1996). Mainly, these scholars support the idea that traditional 20<sup>th</sup> century social theory on social movements has ignored the role of leadership for the success of social movements. This somehow evidences the need to correctly address the relevance as well as the limitations of both structure and agency. Thus a deep interest in studying the

key role that social agency plays –in the shape of leadership- in social movement and collective actions emerged.

Some authors have analysed the role of leadership and especially the contributions of the leaders to the movement and its success or failure. They highlight a variety of elements such as the story-telling or narrative, the leader's background, personal life story as well as strategic capacity and the power to engage people in collective action (Couto, 1989; Davis, 2002; Han, Andrews, Ganz, Baggetta, & Lim, 2011; Morris and Stagerborn, 2004).

Marshall Ganz is one of the most recognised scholars within the leadership and social movements' studies whose contributions have been of major relevance regarding leadership, organisation and strategy in social movements, civic associations and politics. One of the major contributions of Ganz in this regard is the notion of considering people's feelings in the process of engaging people in collective action. Thus, a leader should set those feelings free that facilitate a person to engage in collective action. Therefore, those who are not yet participating need to see the purpose in their action and contribution to a social movement. By engaging the *heart*, the *head* and the *hands*, with the first representing the values, the second the strategy to proceed in the struggle, and the latter representing the actions that need to be or are taken by the people Ganz (2010) defines this process of leadership in interaction with the people to engage and denominates it as public narratives in which leaders explain or adapt a public story departing from the idea of using the heart and the head.

Benford and Snow (2000) have discussed this meaning construction and developed the concept of 'framing', defined as an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction (ibid). These authors argue that *framing* is active as it is something that is being done, and processual in the sense that is of a dynamic, evolving process, in other words, it involves the generation of interpretative frames that not only differ from existing ones but may also challenge them. Even more specific, collective action frames are those action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation (Gramson, 1992a, in Benford & Snow, 2000).



Alongside Morris and Stagerborn (2004) emphasise the ability of leaders to construct meaning through storytelling which engages others to join the movements (Morris and Stagerborn, 2004, p. 19). According to the authors, the leader is the inspiration to others and works as a strategic decision-makers who organises others in the social movement. The authors further highlight that leaders play a crucial role in creating and offering spaces and thus frames in which participants feel empowered to engage and organisational strategies can emerge as a result of collective identity and action. Other authors have analysed the narratives for their contribution of a historical precedent that stands for individual and collective resistance (Couto, 1989).

Ganz further defines leadership as a process that emerges from the interactions between the leader and the people and according to using the heart and head to trigger the third element, which are the hands. Hence, he contemplates leadership as a collective effort, the result of a process of using ones own life story and their capacity for an effective strategy. A leader can be distinguished by his or her life story and motivation in addition to the access to relevant knowledge and the use he or she makes of it (Ganz, 2009). Both Ganz (2000) and Morris and Stagerborn (2004) highlight the previous life experience of the leader as crucial in this endeavour. Morris and Stagerborn (2004) point to the fact that the personal background based on the lived experiences, education and knowledge acquired during the participation in diverse social institutions, lead to different strategic choices and, hence, to failure or success. The authors particularly point to the participation in civic associations such as religious institutions or any other public space that serves as an inspiration to the people.

Melucci refers to the framing processes as part of the symbolic production of a social movement. Frames are to be defined as the “discursive representation of collective action organised according to the position of the actor in the field, and they must be located within theory of ideology” (Melucci, 1996, p. 348). Melucci directly links frames provided for the collective action with ideology, arguing that ideology is a set of symbolic frames which collective actors use to represent their own actions to themselves and to others within a system of social relationships.

Beyond the theories on social movement and leadership, literature in the field is very much concerned about identifying the effectiveness of specific social movements in

achieving their goals, putting their issues of concern in the public agenda or framing the public agenda? Thus some studies have explored effective leadership and social movements pointing at several aspects of leadership and characteristics of the very leaders which may influence the outcomes of the collective actions.

Drawing from the contributions of Bourdieu, Putnam, and the literature on social movement leadership, Nepstad and Bob (2006) have developed the concept of 'leadership capital', a broad term in which they include three different components that effective movement leaders have: cultural, social and symbolical capital. Firstly, regarding cultural capital, according to the authors, leaders need from three kind of this type of capital: what they call a "localised cultural capital" –the one needed to understand their community's own context and experiences, a "universalistic cultural capital", knowledge of the values, sympathies and cultural principles and political trends of the general publics, and "transcultural skills", which is required in order to be able to operate at different levels and engaging different audiences. Secondly, in relation to the social capital, Nepstad and Bob rely on Putnam's (2000) contributions about the importance of social networks as sources of social capital, and support that this capital is embodied in strong ties to activist communities and weak ties to broader mobilising networks. Thirdly, regarding the symbolic capital, the authors explain that this capital is the one related to prestige, honour and social recognition. They emphasise that symbolic capital can be derived from different sources, as for instance the fact of belonging to a religious institutions as was the case of many ministers who were key leaders of the American Civil Rights Movements as the own Martin Luther King.

As evidenced by Nepstad and Bob (2006) in their analysis of the cases of the Zapatista Army National Liberation in México, the U.S. and Overseas Plowshares Movement and the El Salvador Liberation Movement, leadership capital can allow movements to compensate for a lack of traditional material resources, or a lack of political opportunities as in the case of the Ogoni ethnic minority people case in Nigeria's Niger River Delta, and thus is what explain the change in the social and political structure. By her side, Nepstad, (2004) also analysed the key role played by leaders within the Plowshares Movement and how they contributed to its sustainment throughout time since the eighties. She suggests that they were crucial for implementing community practices that contributed to reinforce the long-term activist commitment. By composing

Catholic Left Communities, leaders constituted what Peter Berger calls “plausibility structures”, a way to strengthen normative and affective commitment among participants through creating and reinforcing emotional bonds and relational ties, and thus forging a sense of activist identity derived from action.

Several authors have pointed out the ability of movement leaders to frame goals and issues (Einwohner, 2007; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986; Morris, 2000). Leaders are the ones who make the interpretations and compel others to engage in the movement, making them attractive to the public, and inspiring individuals to get involved. Although supporting this state, through her empirical analysis of the differences in the outcomes of two Jewish ghettos in the Nazi-occupied Europe, Einwohner (2007) goes further when suggesting that social movement leaders in order to succeed not only do an effort of framing the discourse but also “framing themselves as legitimate leaders”. This is what the author calls gaining the role of “authority work”, those efforts made by leaders to establish their authority in the eyes of potential followers (p. 1307). According to Einwohner, authority work varies across movement settings and it is especially important in situations in which there is uncertainty, and where traditional sources of authority and leadership may be in flux or absent. Under this situations, the presence of leaders’ authority work as a source of leadership may become a key element for the emergence of successful collective action. For instance, the existence of authority work is what explains the differences in the outcomes between the Warsaw Ghetto in which Jews arose in armed rebellion against the Nazis, and the Vilna Ghetto, in which although planning for a similar resistance, a sustained uprising never were adopted by the rest of the ghetto community. The author defends the capacity of leaders for mobilising resources and promoting forces in order to inspire collective action while at the same time, drawing from Weber’s classic work on the social bases of leadership and authority, that leaders are able to demonstrate some quality which can convince others to follow them.

#### *Associationism in social movements*

As already highlighted previously, associations can have a key role in promoting leaders but it has a myriad of effects on communities and especially social movements which will be depicted in the following. here is the conception of civic associations in relation

to the environment, that is, deeply acknowledging the role they play in fuelling civil society and therefore for the promotion and sustainment of democracy. This was already pointed out at mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by Alexis de Tocqueville in his “Democracy in America”, who observed that in the American society *Political associations may therefore be considered as large free schools, where all the members of the community go to learn the general theory of association*([1840]).

Building on Tocqueville’s reflections, mainly American scholars have identified the benefits of engaging in civic associations for widening civic opportunities –and in turn, the impact of this on the good functioning of democracy (Baggetta, 2009; Putnam, 2000; Almond & Verba, 1963; Skocpol, 2003; Fung, 2003). Reviewing this literature Baggetta (2009) emphasises three dimensions: interpersonal interaction; governance experience, and institutional relationships. Regarding interpersonal interaction, associations enhance opportunities for people to interact with other individuals from outside their primary social networks (family and close friends). In turn, face-to-face social interaction is a core element in determining the civic-effects potential of an organisation. Second, in relation to the governance experience, civic associations provide ordinary citizens the opportunity to practise two separate dimension of governance: management and representation. Also in this line and collected by Baggetta, in their studies for the American associationism (Verba, Schlozman, & Brandy, 1995) underline that associations fuels for opportunities for members to practise managerial skills on a smaller scale. Associations often offer members the chance to influence decisions through informal conversations with leaders, attending open forums or other decision-making meetings, as well as influence decisions by becoming leaders themselves. This is particularly important in the case of ethnic minorities and in the case of Roma associations, as individuals who have traditionally been led at the margins of job positions representing management and representation responsibilities. Finally, regarding institutional relationships, as Skocpol (2003) and (Skocpol et al., 2000) have also evidenced, participating in some groups increase the possibility to interact with other institutions and organisations, what in turn impacts beyond the own group.

Specifically regarding the relation between associations and the participation of at-risk social groups in them, as is the case studied in this dissertation, by incorporating into

their constituencies marginalised groups and individuals, civic associations lead them to be participants of the political system, embodying the individuals' voices and representing them in the larger political system. Thus, by participating in civic associations citizens promote spaces for dialogue in which through deliberation they can learn, express and acquire civic skills while responding to social issues. It is not a contested issue that civic associations are a key element to democracy as they create venues for individuals to get involved either in formal or informal mechanisms of policymaking (Andrews et al., 2010). Inherently linked to this argument is the debate in which the present dissertation deepens, that is, the existence of civic associations, which are better able to provide their members with a voice than other associations. In other words, the matter of the impact that these activities of civic institutions might have.

In previous sections the role of associations in promoting interpersonal interaction has been highlighted; governance experience, and institutional relationships. Since the early studies of Robert Putnam in his "Making democracy work. Civic traditions in modern Italy", the strong link between the performance of political institution and the character of civic life have been revealed. According to him "the civic community" is characterised by civic engagement, political equality, solidary trust and tolerance, and a strong associational life. Putnam and his colleagues evidenced that democracies work better if a long tradition of civic engagement exists. His investigation opened up a wide agenda regarding which were the convivial conditions for democracy to emerge. A key conclusion in relation to this was the importance of "social capital": the collective value of all 'social networks' (who people know) and the inclination that arise from these networks to do things for each other ("norms of reciprocity").<sup>8</sup> Social capital enhances trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks. Thus, these networks of civic engagement such as the neighbourhood associations, cooperatives, or other type of societies, represent the intense interactions among the organisations and are an essential form of social capital: "The denser such networks in a community, the more likely that citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993, p.173). These networks increase the potential cost to a defector in any individual transaction, foster robust norms of reciprocity, facilitate communication and improve the flow of information about the trustworthiness of individuals, embody past

---

<sup>8</sup> For more information: <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro/about-social-capital>

success at collaboration that can serve as the basis for a culturally-defined template for future collaboration (Putnam, 1993). So, building on this initial study in Italy Putnam stimulated a debate on the relation of social capital and civic engagement and their importance for democracy but also for individual well-being.

While Putnam has lead the study of social capital and civic engagement, other scholars have analysed in which ways specific types of associations impact on these dimensions. I want to mention here the work of the American sociologist David Smith, who has studied the role of what he calls “grassroots associations”, and the internal and external impact that organisations can attain. Smith defines the grassroots associations (GA) as “locally based and basically autonomous, volunteer-run, non-profit groups that have an official membership of volunteers” (Smith, 1972, 1981, 1994b, in Smith, 1997, p. 269).

In his review, this author mentions that GA have different types of impact, flowing from the structure and processes common to these type of organisations. Precisely, he points at five categories to identify the impact of a GA (Smith, 1997). First, *social support/helping/service*. According to him, GA can generate social and interactional spaces, usually on a face-to-face basis. They all tend to generate interpersonal support and informal helping among members. Meanwhile, on the aggregate level, GA may provide some social integration within a territory. Second, *stimulation/self-expression*: GA tend to provide their members with various kinds of stimulation, information and experiences. They encourage their members to share their own valued member experienced and GA-provided information with non-members, therefore becoming educators or informers of the general public. Third, *happiness/health*: social support generated by GAs capitalises in more happiness and satisfaction with life, as well as to foster better health and less illness among members. Four: *sociopolitical activation/influence*: GAs politicise their members and generate sociopolitical influence activity directed at non-members and external organisations. Members learn democracy directly from participation in GAs, as they sometimes become involved in public affairs, or other relevant issues. This sociopolitical activation also spills over into other GA activities of members. All these cumulative elements lead to greater sociopolitical activism in a participatory democracy in a given territory (Smith, 1997, p. 278.). The fifth impact can be labelled as the *economic and other outcomes* that the GA promotes. In some case, GA foster the improvement of the economic situations of their members,

especially through the “economic system support” (local unions, local professional associations, farmers’ GAs).

What Smith states is that when extrapolated to the full range of GAs in a nation’s population, all these five kinds of GA effects are generally of major importance to that society. Thus, associations have internal and external impacts. On the one hand, regarding the *internal impact*, this author mentions that GA provide social and emotional support that contributes to the satisfaction of social needs, greater happiness or life satisfaction, and improved health and longevity. They also provide informal education and useful information, as well as they encourage more citizen political participation in democracy. On the other hand, regarding the external impact of GAs, they involve either significant service to external others and/or significant external sociopolitical influence, mainly at the local level. GAs set the base for the constitution of national social movements: “Were it not for such a GA grassroots base, national associations and social movements would be taken far less seriously in their attempts to influence state and national politics” (Smith, 1997, p. 296). The activities of GA support participatory democracy and a civil society more broadly, as well as they legitimate and validate supralocal associations and movements with a grassroots connection or base: “local or grassroots associational participation makes people more likely to get involved in other kinds of individual democratic political participation. Associational participation is a major engine of democratic participation” (p. 297).

Organisations (Radu, 2012) as part of the social institutions can play a leading role in creating social opportunities that can capitalise in advancing the individuals’ capabilities (Sen, 1999). Amartya Sen developed his framework of the “capability approach”, in which social opportunities” are defined as:

“Arrangements that society makes for education, health care and so on, which influence the individual's substantive freedom to live better. These facilities are important not only for the conduct of private lives (such as living a healthy life and avoiding preventable morbidity and premature mortality), but also for more effective participation in economic and political activities” (Sen, 1999, p. 39).

The focus of the capability approach is thus not what a person actually ends up doing, but also on what the person is in fact able to do, and whether or not the person chooses to make use of that opportunity (p. 235). The idea of capability can accommodate the distinction between someone who chooses a decision freely from someone who has no alternative to do something; it is oriented towards freedom and opportunities: the actual ability of people to choose to live different kinds of lives within their reach, rather than confining attention only to what may be described as the culmination –or aftermath- of choice (p. 237). Sen distinguishes between ‘functionings’ and ‘capabilities’. Functionings are the various things a person may value doing or being. They may vary from elementary ones (being nourished) to very other complex activities or personal states (participating in community life). On the other side, capabilities refer to the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations: “the freedom to achieve various lifestyles” (pg. 75).

Capability to choose between different affiliations in cultural life can have both personal and political importance. For instance, the option of many Romani women to keep their traditions could be considered such freedom to choose how to live, including the opportunity to pursue parts of their traditions. The importance of capability relies on opportunity and choice. Capability is linked with substantive freedom, it gives a central role to a person’s actual ability to do the different things that the person values doing. The capability approach focuses on human lives, and not just on the resources people have, in the form of owning or having use of objects (p. 253). This approach shifts the attention from the means of living to the actual opportunities a person has. Yet, Sen emphasises that capability is only one aspect of freedom, related to substantive opportunities, but it cannot pay adequate attention to fairness and equity involved in procedures that have relevance to the idea of justice. Sen states “if the idea of capability is good for assessing the opportunity aspect of freedom, it cannot possibly deal adequately with the process aspect of freedom” (p. 295).

Amartya Sen puts the example of illiteracy and how it can hinder the participation in specific types of economic activities, or either it can hinder political participation due to the impossibility to read newspapers. Hence, social opportunities together with political freedoms, economic facilities, transparency guarantees and protective security are all



instrumental freedoms that contribute to the general capability of a person to live more freely, while they complement one another (p. 38).

As the author recognises, institutions contribute to our freedoms their role can be sensibly evaluated in the light of their contributions to our freedoms, so “to see development as freedom provides a perspective in which institutional assessment can systematically occur”. (p. 142). Amartya Sen refers to the market, or the democratic system, or the media. But he also mentions the case of SEWA, the Self-Employed Women’s Associations, which has been a leading women’s organization opening employment opportunities for women in India, and thus advancing substantial social change in the lives of many of them. Sen acknowledges the very important role that women’s organizations play in transforming opportunities for women. Nussbaum (2003) acknowledges the value of the capabilities approach, as it is especially helpful for the analysis of gender inequalities, but she differs from Sen’s idea as she emphasises the need to define a list of specific capabilities.

A recent study of the Open Society Foundation has analysed the relationship between human well-being and the enhancement of collective capabilities, focusing at the major role that grassroots organisations can develop. Although it is difficult to measure the impact of GA in advancing towards the achievement of substantive freedoms, Radu (2012) supports the role these community-based organisations in advancing local well-being and thus enhancing collective capabilities, which are valuable for the increase of individual quality of life. GA can particularly do this through the promotion of strategies of social cohesion and education, which although slowly, are starting to be included as ‘subjective measurements’ of well-being. The claim of the author is key, as he suggest the evaluation of social policies not in relation to functionings, but in relation to the extent to which they advance social opportunities. For this issue, the role of the organisations that operate at the community level in an intermediary arena is of further importance, as they shape social alternatives for individuals, reinforcing personal and collective capabilities. In relation to social cohesion, the author argues that this is a central feature in subjective measurements of well-being, which can be examined in relation to social exclusion, civic participation and involvement in community (p. 28). In relation to education, GAs can promote strategies of classical education as well as

informal education. This in turn, has an impact on inclusion, civic participation and achievement.

#### *Evaluation of social movement's effectiveness*

Several authors from the field of social movements and organisation studies have researched on the factors that explain the effectiveness in civic associations (Andrews et al., 2010, Pennings, 1976; Kanter & Brinkerhoff, 1981; Han et al., 2011); Knoke and Prensky, 1984). These studies have moved from more simple approaches, those which consider “effectiveness” as organisations which attain their goals, to more complex multidimensional frameworks (Pennings, 1976, Kanter and Brinkerhoff, 1981). Other authors assume –for instance– that effectiveness can have different meanings depending on the organisations, the environment in which they operate or the aims they have (Cameron, 1986; Herman and Renz 2004 in Andrews et al., 2010; Jun & Shiau, 2012).

Knoke and Prensky (1984) in studying voluntary associations are more in line with unidimensional approaches to organisation effectiveness as in their conceptualisation effectiveness is conceived in terms of output or goal attainment. According to them, associations can pursue three general classes of goals: satisfying member's demands for services; achieving recognition and legitimacy from the public and community elites; and influencing public policies in the domains of interest to the collectivity. What these authors recognise is the difficulty to measure these goals as they may depend on perceptual indicators, such as ‘reputation for success’ (Knoke & Prensky, 1984). In this sense, more recent research (Andrews et al., 2010; Jun & Shiau, 2012, Sowa, Selden, & Sandfort, 2004) has moved beyond this unidimensional approach advancing towards a multidimensional approach, thus deepening in the discussion of the concepts of success, influence, and impact.

Taking into account Andrews et al. (2010) considerations for their analysis of civic associations effectiveness, Jun and Shiau (2012) propose a multiple constituency approach to examine and understand the organisational effectiveness of community-based advisory voluntary civic associations, understanding these type of associations as those associations with indirect and intangible outputs and outcomes: ‘civic associations that are active on broad community issues and play a semiformal advisory role to local

government (...) associations in charge of advocacy functions of non-profits, which involves activities that influence policy decision-making and implementation processes and enhance civic engagement while doing so; these activities can also challenge resource allocation priorities (Jun & Shiau, 2012). However, the issue of concern here is how and by whom effectiveness is defined and evaluated as these association involve multiple stakeholders, what supposes some elements of subjective evaluation (Herman 1992; Martin, 1980, in Jun & Shiau 2012, p. 634). Effectiveness ratings of the constituency groups (different stakeholders) can be dissimilar based on their respective goals and interests. What Jun and Shiau attempt to do is go beyond what they consider that is a limited approach to organisational effectiveness, based on two reasons. On the one hand, the unidimensional approach tends to focus on the goal attainment aspect of organisational effectiveness; much used in studies that have paid attention on service-oriented non-profits. On the other hand, the multidimensional framework that identifies the different dimensions of organisational non-profit effectiveness, such as the approach developed by Andrews et al., (2010). The authors underscore that these approaches are limited: the first approach assumes that consensus regarding organisational goals and evaluation criteria being used exists; and the second does not explicitly consider that key internal and external stakeholders can have different objectives and viewpoints (Ibid., p. 637). With their multiple constituency approach pretend to overcome these limitations.

Back into the debates of what makes a civic association to be more effective, some scholars have analysed the relationship of leadership quality to the political presence of civic associations, evidencing that more skilled and committed leaders have higher levels of political presence (Han et al., 2011). Political presence is defined by (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008) as “the extent to which civic organisations have visibility in their communities and have an impact on other civic and political actors”. Thus, those civic organisations that achieve a greater political presence are more visible within the political arena, and consequently more able to participate in the public debate and get a seat in the policymaking table (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad, 2008; Han et al, 2011). Following Han et al. (2011) understanding of *effectiveness*: “political presence assesses the degree to which the organisation has the standing it needs to be an effective advocate for its constituents” (p. 48). From this, attaining political presence can be a measure of effectiveness in civic associations. However, authors emphasise

that this does not only involve public advocacy as accessing solely to the legislative agenda, as many lobbies are aimed at, but also accessing to a greater spectrum of public agents: the media, the courts or the public agenda:

“Political presence may be conferred by the news media, allies, opponents, elected officials, or government agencies. Civic associations that secure favourable political presence from decision-makers and achieve standing may not prevail in every battle, but their standing gives them much better chances than their peers who lack political presence.” (p. 48)

Here lies another important element for associations’ effectiveness: the issue of leadership. Literature on social movements and organisations have deeply studied how for an association to achieve political presence it is necessary to count with skilled and committed leaders, that is, to have a good *leadership quality* (Ganz, 2010). Thus, “leaders must be able to mobilise common efforts (...) to enable others to achieve purpose, not just pursue individual preferences” (Han et al, 2011: 46). Based on this literature, leadership quality is central as leaders that have more motivational, strategic and relational skills, and are more committed to the organisation, are better equipped to foster the creation of spaces where democratic capacity-building can be enhanced. This is of great value for civic associations given that, as recognised by Skocpol (2003), Putnam (2000), Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), and Skocpol, Ganz and Munson (2000), they play a core role in developing civic skills of citizens and creating social capital.

This conception gathers two strands of research. On the one hand, those studies about civic associations as advocacy groups standing for the objectives of their constituencies within the broader public arena. And on the other hand, those which conceive and value the work civic associations do for becoming *schools of democracy* in the sense of Tocqueville, that is, for enhancing citizens to exercise power in the political arena. The argument is so that a good leadership quality fosters the building of democratic capacity among the association’s member, which make them acquire more civic skills and social capital. In turn, both elements enable a greater political presence of the association to which these members belong to and strengthen democracy.

## **CHAPTER 2. Romani women at the crossroad of Modernity**

### **2.1. Romani feminism: "for us, for them, with them, for the Roma people"**

As Nicoleta Bitu states “Confronting European feminism with what I have learned from the African American women’s movement (...), I was shocked by the lack of sensitivity toward diversity and inequality among women and even more so by the presence of racism among some European feminists (Bițu & Vincze, 2012, p.46). Bitu’s statement clearly reflects that Gender Studies still downplay the value of Romani women’s claim in contemporary mainstream debates. While Black feminism (Hooks, 1989) and Latino feminism (Andaluzia & Moraga, 1981) start gaining a place a few decades ago within mainstream feminists’ discussion and also within academia, Romani feminism although advancing in this path has not reached these targets yet. Through the eyes of some feminists, Romani feminism is a double entity that cannot be conjugated in balance: Romani identity involves patriarchy, and the feminist struggle involves fighting against it. But as Brooks demands we should let ‘the Subaltern speak’, as Romani women can be both, Roma and feminist (Brooks, 2012; De Botton, Puigvert, & Sánchez Aroca, 2005).

Drawing from this and against the existing image in the social imaginaries promoted by mainstream media and discontented by those ‘exclusionary research’ that portray Romani women as subordinated to Roma men and displaced to the private sphere, Romani women are leading many processes of change within their families and communities, displaying a discourse around a Romani feminist identity. Straddling between traditions and modernity, Romani women’s feminist ideas and strategies are changing not only gender and family relations, but also the way in which the Romani women’s identity is understood, thus making their own decision to face current challenges and generating new opportunities for themselves and the own Roma people. These transformative dynamics are found at their individual lives and also in their networks of associations, which have quickly irrupted in the last decades throughout the world. Along this line, emerging scientific research is revealing how, far from indigenous view of the Romani women, they are being a motor for social change (Sordé, 2006).

Those researches that have focused their attention on illuminating the ways in which Romani women are leading multiple transformation, break with traditional perspectives from which Romani studies have been carried out. Two of these traditional perspectives that indeed condition how Romani women transformations are depicted are ethnocentrism and relativism (Gómez & Vargas, 2003). Ethnocentrism is based on the idea that there are cultures that are more advanced than others. Under this perspective, studies have conceived Romani people as naturally disengaged from mainstream society, with a natural tendency to commit crime, not interested in working or in education, among other prejudices (Bernasovsky & Bernasovka, 1999; Cavalli-Sforza, F. & Cavalli-Sforza, L., 1994; Hancock, 1975).

In relation to the study of Romani feminism, Bitu and Vincze (2012) reflect around the situation of the Romani women, who face an *intersectional inequality* due to [at least] their ethnicity, class and gender. This requires overcoming ethnocentric approaches and analysing the contributions of Romani feminism from other coordinates as ethnocentrism fails to capture the complexity of the Romani women issue. Currently in situation of the Romani women multiple axes of inequalities intersecting together are at stake. Romani women are subject of multiple exclusions and discrimination, a phenomenon also observed in other social groups like the case of domestic workers of immigrant descent (Parella, 2003); all these are variables that need to be included.

Regarding the relativist perspective, it is still occasionally used in some studies that focus on Romani identity and Romani women. In these studies results tend to reinforce an exotic and essentialist image of the Romani women, always regarding the perspective of the non-Romani world, considering that any step that is achieved is just a mirage that has not a real basis (Mac Laughlin, 1999; Okely, 1996; San Román, 1998). Oprea, (2005) has explained this analysing how Romani women are represented in some Roma traditions. In her analysis of arranged marriage of a 12-year-old Romani girls in Romania, she denounces that research on this issue did not emphasise the problem in terms of the arranged marriage of a minor, but covered by the media as ‘exotic’, severely problematic in the sense that Roma culture was presented as breaking Romanian laws in a ‘primitive’ vs ‘progressive’ binary construction where the ideals of feminism are presented in trouble with Romani women (Oprea, 2005, p. 134).

But being able to incorporate the contributions done by the very agents requires to move

beyond these previous perspectives to a third viewpoint, a dialogic perspective which has emerged from an increasing dialogic turn experienced in both societies and social sciences. This connects with what has been already explained in section 2, the need from a theoretical approach that allows to fully understand what is happening in this new social order in which we are currently located, emerged as a consequence of the crisis of the modern project, the end of the industrial society and the questioning of traditional authorities. Some intellectuals understood that this transformation is the end of major metanarratives (Lyotard, 1999), the dissolution of the rational subject (Derrida, 1967) or the exhaustion of emancipatory power (Foucault, 1995). However, other intellectuals more aligned for the purpose of the present dissertation and recognizing the crisis of traditional modernity, observed different causes of these changing times, recalling the attention to an increase in human reflexivity (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994), dialogue (Gómez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011); and the increase of opportunities to make decisions related to one's own life and to society (Habermas, 1984, 1987).

Modernisation processes have increased uncertainties while opening up and providing more and better life choices. Changes experienced in the risk society (Beck, 1994) involve moving away from those prescribed social norms. In turn, these changes affect all the spheres of social life, including intimate and social interactions among individuals. Giddens (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Castells et al. (2006) have well analysed the new shapes that former traditional family and intimate-relationships acquire in the current time, and how in the process of negotiations of gender roles, living options or other aspects concerning family, dialogue plays a much more relevant role than it was in the past. In turn, traditions, gender roles, or access to education are also being discussed within the Roma community and in the Romani families, discussions in which Romani women are at the very centre. Habermas (1987) would read the shift of passing from societies in which dialogue was not central, to societies in which dialogue is used as an intersubjective element to reach agreements as regaining the dialogic project of the democratic revolutions, when people decided to manage their own lives. In today's society the traditional modernity –or the first modernity– is being shaken and people's will to colonise the lifeworld through communicative practices arise again. From this dialogic perspective, social agents are the main protagonists, the agents on a global scale, research investigations are elaborated taking into account their voices and no longer maintaining them at the margins.

## 2.2. Opening the way towards a more inclusive feminism

Romani women have been discriminated against and excluded for being women, Romani, and the majority of times not having academic credentials. Feminist and scholar Lúdia Puigvert (2001) has called these women the “other women”, as they have traditionally suffered situations of discrimination based on gender, but beyond this, based on their lack of academic training, that obligates them to face unequal relations due to the confluence of multiples inequalities. This is very much in line with what has been mentioned early, the claim of Bitu and Vincze (2012) on the need to approach the situation of Romani women from an ‘intersectional’ perspective (Crenshaw, 1991), that include the discrimination that they suffer due to their ethnicity, gender, and class. Back to Puigvert, she explains that “the other women” are women that have claimed accessing to democratic spaces of decision-making from which they have been traditionally excluded, in turn, they claim to be able to participate in an equal position, in the feminist debates, explaining also what their demands are, which are not always in line with those of mainstream feminism:

“(…) It is considered that women who attend a demonstration actually struggle for women’s rights. But those women who achieve that her husband helps her with housework do not. A woman who studies the psychological and social consequences of abuse and the need to end with them is valued and listened to. However, a woman who denounces someone who abuses her is only considered victim of the submission that she accepts. (...) This arbitrary classification is not only exclusionary but is also present within the activities and assessments that we as women do of ourselves. Thus, the “other women” elaborate a negative perception of themselves causing the feeling that they will not be able of embracing any substantial change in their lives. (...) However, the dialogic orientation present in adult education centres and in women who attend them break with this exclusionary border (...)” (Puigvert, 2001, p. 62-63) [Own translation]

What Puigvert claims is the recognition of the *other women* within the academic debates, taking their contributions seriously into account. The mainstreaming of the voices of the other women into feminism, through creating spaces for dialogue and debate have given place to



*dialogic feminism*. This feminism based on the participation of all women who acknowledge themselves in equality can bring their arguments and change their self-perception, thus embracing the substantial change to which Puigvert is referring to in the quotation. Dialogic feminism as Sordé states (2006) constitutes a common ground to analyse the action of the Romani women and their social and political mobilisation as agents of change for their own lives and their community.

Romani women are making their own contributions to feminism, a feminism based on the dialogic one. Sánchez-Aroca (2005) has pointed out to some elements present in what she has called the “Romani feminism”. Some of these elements have been in turn mentioned by other Romani women scholars as strong cultural values of Romani women, which they claim and want to maintain as Romani and feminists. Sánchez-Aroca mentions the importance of the family in the life of the Romani women. Far from being a burden, Romani women do not want to resign to attending their families but they include them as a key element for success in their transformations: family goes hand in hand with them in the struggle for the Romani women’s emancipation. Another element is the search for dialogue and agreement present within the lives of the Romani people. Agreement an underpinning value of coexistence is not only a key principle in Romani culture but also a trait of Romani feminism: the progress of Romani women is achieved by searching agreements through dialogue and by constructing alliances with other agents, Romani men, non-Roma women. In this sense, Vincze emphasises how Romani feminism empowered her to create networks, in which there were not only Romani women, but also non-Roma women and men “working to solve immediate, practical problems but also to broadly conceptualise societal issues (...) Romani feminism is a process of permanently (re)creating solidarities around universal human rights” (Bițu & Vincze, 2012, p. 45-46).

Another element identified by Sánchez-Aroca is that authority of women is not measured depending on their academic success or their age, but it is considered depending on the coherence maintained in the daily life with Roma norms. Therefore, each ritual and tradition of the Romani culture became every time more a decision of the own women. Linked to this aspect another element is the option and the value of motherhood as a personal choice. Among Romani women motherhood is a highly appreciated value, and something that has not hindered them to develop their own personal projects, Romani women themselves claim to have the right to decide on this important issue. Gelbert (2012) explains how if her

grandmother could see some of the claims of some [confounded] “feminists” who interpret exclusively-female acts as oppressive, she could find it just ridiculous: “Part of a long line of women all over the world who confound “the feminists” (including myself), my grandmother finds it ridiculous that a woman should relinquish her God-given right to perform certain exclusively female acts, such as cooking breakfast, that continually prove a man’s helplessness” (2012, p. 28). The same can be considered for the act of reproduction. Focusing feminist debates in these issues could be totally missing the point for the majority of Romani women, as they do not experience motherhood as an imposition but as something chosen by them. Besides the importance of motherhood and also related to the meaning that the extended family and its unity for Romani people has, respect and centrality of elders is another cultural option of the Roma identity, also present in Romani feminism: elder Romani women because of their experience have much to contribute to the community. And eventually, another element which has been indirectly mentioned is the fact that Romani feminist claims are made not only in a feminist sense, but they are made in order to enhance progress of all Roma people.

### **2.3. Traditions as an option in a post-traditional society**

Romani traditions, values and the role of women within society are experiencing the same dialogic process than mainstream society. Giddens analysis delves into what involves according to him “living in a ‘post-traditional society’”. He observed that in the second modernity traditions are not given up, but as a consequence of living in a reflexive society, they become a choice thus changing their status. Either people discursively defend their traditions amidst a multi-layered reflexivity or those traditions are transformed into fundamentalism by negating any kind of rationale for being respected other than the one of being a legacy from the past per se. Immersed in this post-traditional society individuals are the ones who (because of the social bonds are not inherited) in order to build social bonds have people have to open out to the other as a required condition of social solidarity. A similar act needs to be done at the larger scale, what the author calls a “hand of friendship within a global cosmopolitan order” (Giddens, 1994, p. 107). Therefore, we are not kept within Weber’s iron cage, but for Giddens individuals do have the chance of developing authentic forms of human life that are far from being “the formulaic truths of tradition”, but where there can be a strong defence of tradition. Similar processes are also explained by Habermas (1999)

who argues that even those cultures considered as an enclave in the most closed traditions like the Pennsylvania Amish become reflexive, maintaining their function of binding individuals to each other but also opening up ways for them to be critical and exposed to different options. Romani Women also ascribe this reflexivity with tradition by incorporating negotiation strategies and dialogue, not only questioning them but also opening up and building new ways of doing things according their cultural identity (Sordé, Serradell, Puigvert, & Munté, 2013).

The way Romani feminism manages tradition is of particular interest. Traditions and new patterns coexist, entering into a process of building networks of solidarity more than seeking differentiation (Sordé et al 2013; Oprea 2005; Bitu and Vincze, 2012). De Botton, Puigvert and Sánchez Aroca (2005) have explored how Romani women are negotiating their own spaces as women without giving up their cultural identity as Roma. Sordé (2006, 2007), has identified three different ways that Romani women experience tradition: choosing to respect tradition; reconciling it with emerging opportunities; and using tradition as a shield. In Sordé's qualitative based study, Romani women discussed how traditional values like maternity, the preservation of virginity, and respect for elders are always read as an imposition, when for some of them they constitute cultural options that they freely decide to embrace; indeed, not all of them do. As (Gelbart, 2012) states, many Romani women decide to be "true Romni", choosing for instance, their role as mothers, and academics should not understand this as an imposed and oppressive role.

All these scholars point out that Romani women are unveiling many processes of change at their personal level, with their families and in current societies. At the intersection of tradition and modernity, Romani women ideas and strategies are also contributing to change gender and family relations, creating new understanding of their identity as women, and generating new opportunities to better face current uncertainties. Some of these transformative dynamics will be analysed in this dissertation, others have already been found in the network of associations that have emerged throughout the last decades at the local level and at the European level.

## **2.4. Choosing multiple identities**

Under the influence of individualisation, Romani women capable of using their human agency not only decide by themselves but also engage in different processes for social change (Solé, Serradell, & Sordé, 2013). Parallel to the process of disembodiment from traditional ways of living, Beck's notion of individualisation also involves creating new forms of life in which individuals can make up their own biographies. Thus, when traditional certainties are no longer the ruling norm, Romani women need to imagine and re-create their new discourses, too. Sordé (2012-2014) has recently studied how migration triggers some of these processes thus changing the gender roles among Romani families often putting women as the protagonists. For instance, in many processes of circular migration Romani women are the ones who leave the home country that moves them to imagine themselves in a different role and add a new identity as a migrant Romani woman. Moreover, these new roles adopted by Romani migrant women are negotiated with the adults of the family, as the decision to migrate is collective and never individual. In a similar line than Beck, Giddens sustains that individuals construct their self-identity through a reflexive project that defines who we are, where we come from, and where we go. Beyond our behaviour or reaction to others, we all construct our identities as part of an ongoing narrative, in our story of our self. Each subject plays an important role in shaping and deciding upon her or his own life. Every time more, as Romani women participate in more spaces of debate and decision-making, in their families, their communities and society, they find that having to build up their own identity relying on multiple possibilities, as non-Roma women do, they can be mothers, wives, chefs, but also university students, NGO directors or members of a political party. As reflectivity does not mean 'reflection', individualisation does not mean reducing the individual. Opposed to this, the process of individualisation requires that individuals adopt a much more active role as they constantly have to make decisions. This is of major relevance for women and even more for Romani women as it opens up a great deal of potential for them to become leaders of their community change.

Aubert and Flecha (2003) carried out a three year longitudinal study on the perceptions of Romani women about their daughters' education and their own. This study revealed

that most of the participating mothers had high expectations about their children's future, as this represented for them possibilities beyond their reach (when they were children). Romani mothers translate their high expectations into a critical posture toward the school system when they see that it is not fulfilling their hopes. Romani mothers conceive education as an opportunity for upward mobility, and create new discourses that could shape new avenues for themselves and their children. Valls and colleagues (Valls, 2003-2004) researched in which ways Romani women have accessed the regular labour market and conjugated their work with their traditional roles within their families and communities. This study showed some examples of how discrimination and deeply rooted stereotypes are important barriers that Romani women have to face in order to get employment. The discourses developed to face discriminatory practices are full of rethinking their identities as women, as Roma and as non-educated.

All these studies showed that the individualisation has deeply affected the lives of Romani women. If traditionally Romani families were reluctant to let their daughters and wives go to school, access the labour market, or to travel in representation of their NGOs, the path of individualisation and the possibility of dialogic negotiation opens up an avenue to change these options.

## **PART 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

## CHAPTER 3. ROMA RIGHTS' MOVEMENT

### 3.1. A glance at the RRM origin

Tracing the origins of the Roma Rights Movement (hereinafter, RRM) is a difficult endeavour, as finding an agreed upon year or a place that could set the beginning of its initial actions remains nowadays a contested issue among Romani scholars. Our aim here is not to go back in detail to the historical roots of the RRM but rather to provide a glance at its origins that will allow us to understand facts that took place later.

One of the ways to delve into the origins of the RRM is by locating the first Romani organizations that emerged for the struggle of the “Roma issue” under a clear international approach, something well-documented by the Romani scholars (Hancock, 2002; Matras, 1998; Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997). As Ian Hancock explains (2002), the Romani people have organized themselves to struggle for the betterment of their living conditions and the end of oppression exerted among them by feudal states first, and the nation-states later, at least since mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, in 1722 a thousand armed Romanies organized for their freedom from the German states, or even before this, “Bercovici wrote of a huge meeting in Switzerland of Romanies from all over Europe at the end of the fifteenth century” (Hancock, 2002, p. 113). This reveals that, against the portrayed image of the Roma as a passive and subdued people, disinterested from its own socio-political issues, they have been able to organize themselves at the social and political domain. As a note on this, even the first scholars that researched on the origin of Romani language and through this on Romani people, Johann Rüdinger, a German linguistic, appreciated that it was “the historic denial of civil rights what have turned the Gypsies into what they are now (...) this is a still political inconsistency, which our enlightened should be ashamed to tolerate. For, the mistreatment of the Gypsies has no other cause but deeply rooted xenophobia” (Rüdinger, p. 44-45, in Matras, 1999, p. 43). But the image of the Roma as a barbaric people, even the efforts of scholars to fight against the *Orientalist* perspective on the Roma, seems to be still alive within some contexts even nowadays.

At the beginning of the 20 century there were different political events at several countries within and outside Europe that showcase that Roma people were starting to vindicate their civil and social rights to their corresponding governments. In this sense, in 1906 in Bulgaria Romani leaders raised up a petition to the National Parliament in which they demanded equal rights for the Roma. Two years later, in 1908 in the US, the National Gypsy Association of America was founded, aimed at improving housing and education of the Roma people from the country. In 1928, the Red Dress Gypsies' Association was set up, following similar concerns. For East European countries such as Poland, Russia, Yugoslavia and Romania, the end of the First World War would involve the expansion of the Romani political activity. In Romania, in 1926 was founded the Association of Roma, which between 1930 and 1934 published the *Romani family* journal. In Romania there is evidence also of Romani associations created by non-Roma people, this is the case of the General Union of Romanies of Romania. It is worth mentioning here that in 1933 in Bucharest, the General Association of Gypsies of Romania organized an International Conference: "United Gypsies of Europe", in which the issue of the education and integration of the Roma was discussed. For the side of Russia, Romani activism was very vivid due to the task done by the Pan-Russian Romani Union. However, this ended up with the arrival of Stalin to the power as he prohibited it (Hancock, 2002). Romani women were also present in Romani activism in the interwar period and the case of Greece is an example: in 1939 two women created the Panhellenic Cultural Association of Greek Romanies, with the aim that the Roma m coming from Asia Minor in the 1920s could obtain the Greek citizenship and passports (Liégeois, 2007 in Marushiakova & Popov, 2015).

The Projamos (Holocaust) perpetuated by the Nazi regime during the World War II had a direct influence on silencing the political activity of the Roma people, as many of them were reluctant to identify themselves as Roma. As Hancock argues, things regarding Romani activism started to change again by 1985 when for instance the National Romani Organization and the World Romani Community in France was founded –although the latter also received support from Canada and Poland. It should be mentioned that the World Romani Community was illegalized by Charles de Gaulle in 1965 for considering it a threat in case the Roma people would claim for war crimes' repatriations. However, the same year a new organization emerged: the International Gypsy Committee, with a strong aim in its agenda: the war crimes reparation, which



would be a topic directly addressed in the Second Roma Congress in Geneva, 1978. In few years this organization had already made many partner organizations in many different European countries such as Finland, Spain or Greece, and also Australia, Canada and the United States (Hancock, 2002).

The Roma pogroms occurred during World War II marked the Roma history and the political activity of the Romani political movement since that point on. This would become a strong bond among the European Roma communities, and a salient issue for their political organization, as it would involve a common ground among the community to ask for accountability to the national governments. In turn, it evidenced how some European governments (as the France of De Gaulle) would be reluctant to recognize the atrocities of the Nazi regime or some decades later, even to recognize other similar racist facts executed in other European countries by the state (e.g. forced sterilizations of Romani women in Eastern Europe).

In 1971 the First World Roma Congress took place in London, organized by the International Gypsy Committee, which had been founded in Paris in 1965. According to Acton and Klimova (2001), this first congress was oriented to call the international attention for the British Gypsy struggle. Besides this, the symbolic importance of this congress is huge, as it was there when the Roma flag (green and blue with 16-spoked chakra)<sup>9</sup> and the Roma anthem (“D’jelem D’jelem”) was adopted as a national emblem of the Romani people. At the Conference, the organization was re-named “Comité International Rom”, and its aims were adopted as the following:

“The goal of this congress is to unite Romanies throughout the world, and to move them into action; to bring about emancipation as we see it, and according to our own ideals; to advance at our own speed” (Hancock, 2002, p. 121).

In addition, the First World Congress established the International Romani Union (IRU), which is still nowadays a key institution for the Roma community at the international level. The IRU was set up with a deep aim of lobbying and negotiating with and across the Roma community at a European and International level (Mirga and

---

<sup>9</sup> It has been already adopted in a Conference in 1933 (Hancock 2002)

Gheorghe, 1997, p. 12). After the first Congress, four more Roma Congresses have been celebrated organized by different Romani organizations. The last Roma world congress has been the 5<sup>th</sup>, organized in Prague in 2000.

Other well-known scholar in the Romani Studies, Yaron Matras, specialized on the analysis and linguistics of Romani and who has worked as communications officer for a Romani NGO, traces the origin of the RRM in Germany, beginning in the yearly post war years. According to Matras, the development of the Romani Civil Rights Movement in post war Germany could be divided into four phases (Matras, 1998). The first phase, *the support of individual reintegration and early organizational attempts*, occurred in the years following the war and after the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. The second phase, *the de facto constitution of associations and ideological consolidation of the movement*, characterized by the rise of the organizational structures. This was possible because it coincided with the time that individuals had gathered expertise and knowledge and thus, started representing the interests of the community. These individuals would be later the ones who will act at the national sphere, forming a ground of activists. At the second phase emerged the collective awareness among the Sinti and the Roma as an ethnic minority, struggling to improve their situation. The third phase arrived by the early 1980s, and its main features were the prevalence of what Matras called ‘constitutional and ideological debates’ among the associations (Matras, 1998, p. 50). A focus in the debates was the situation of the Romani immigrants and the refugees.

Finally, the forth phase would be the one occurred after the political transition in Eastern Europe, *embedding of civil rights activities in an international context*, characterized by the flourish of Romani associations at the international level and the collaboration among them. It should be emphasized at this phase the increasing awareness-raising at an international level on the Roma issue. This was possible not only because several Romani associations emerged, but also because the Romani cause became an ‘issue’ at the European field: multilateral organizations such as the Council of Europe or the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE), and other international human rights organizations made from the Roma a target for their policies and actions (Ibid. 1998). Another important fact for the emergence of phase 4 according to Matras was internal to the movement: the emergence of a pan-

European Romani nationalism in the context of refugee support campaigns in Germany, which were born hand-in-hand with the work that independent-local grassroots work with refugees, and not through the institutionalized channels.

The political transition to democracy in the countries of Eastern Europe came hand-in-hand with the rise of episodes of violence and racism against the Roma. In solidarity to the Roma communities affected, the Romani political organizations quickly organized in international forums in order to respond to repressive measures (especially those involving the police) implemented in the Czech Republic, Romania or Bulgaria. Repression towards the Roma not only called the attention of the Roma organizations on a common issue of concern –the Roma rights– but attracted the attention of international human rights associations as for instance Amnesty International or the Helsinki Watch (Matras, 1998). However, as Matras argues, the main issue in phase 4 revolved around the ideological debate on the minority and national status of the Roma in Europe, which in turn contributed to shape resolutions and inspire the discussion at the international level.

Thomas Acton, another scholar in the Romani studies, suggests that during the thirties and the fifties some Roma organizations were created but it was not until the sixties when the new political movement multiplied at an international level (Acton, 1974). Acton considers that for the RRM a crucial year was the 1967, as it was when the Roma politics' style starts having an impact on the large public opinion, thanks to the accumulated experience of the previous years:

“1967, an *annus mirabilis* (...) when the new style of Gypsy politics which they had developed during the previous years began to make its impact on public opinion. People who came into the movement at that time were caught up in a great surge of enthusiasm, a feeling of new awakenings and mighty forces stirring, a belief that the persecutions of the centuries could now in a brief space be ended by our efforts” (1974, 60).

Romani leaders at that time proposed policies that were, militant, anti-assimilationist, and anti-paternalist, and they tried to legitimate them with governments, the UN and the Council of Europe. What Acton emphasizes is that the emerging organizations reacted

against the discrimination suffered by the Roma, but especially the one in the field of education and the forced evictions. In Acton's words: "Gypsy political activity in civil rights, education and culture has grown exponentially since the 1960s, stiffened by an ever-growing educated ill-prepared to tolerate prejudice their elders took for granted" (Acton, 1998, p. 12).

In all, scholars seem to agree on that the origins of the RRM cannot be detached from the own political and social situation history of each country or region, as in Spain the end of the Franco regime allowed the Roma to politically organize (Sordé, 2006), in Germany the first civil rights activists started to become organized in the aftermath of the war (Matras, 1998) and in Central and Eastern European countries, the collapse of communist regimes which brought with it more episodes of racism towards the Roma that led in turn to the awakening and mobilization within the Roma community (Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997).

### **3.2. The Roma taking the lead for social change: the RRM from the collapse of communism to its current debates**

The fall of communism worsened the plight of the Roma population from the Central and European countries: anti-gypsy racism increased, and the Roma emerged as great losers from the breakdown of the communist regime and the end of its severe controls on economy and society (Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997; Barany, 2002; Hayes & Acton, 2007). However, a new stage for the Romani Rights Movement flourished. The end of communism involved the opening of new opportunities for the "Roma issue" in the social, cultural and political field, and in turn, it posed a major challenge for the RRM, that is, the need to place and represent the very demands of all the actors of the RRM under a common ground: "The Romani political elites realized that democracy demands participation, presence and activism of not only the Romani elites but also from individuals and communities. Perhaps this is the greatest challenge facing the Roma in the next century" (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1997).

But what were the main debates that raised up within the broad spectrum of Romani parties and organizations of the RRM? Some of these debates still on the RRM agenda

with few variations since that point on until the present day. The premise under which the claims of the RRM could be gathered, broadly speaking, would be well described as the one of 'different but equal'. On the one hand, among the Romani organizations, Romani activists and the Romani political elites there was a strong debate around how to gain political representation and the recognition of the Romani ethnicity (the debate on the "Roma nation", the "Roma transterritorial identity"). On the other hand, it was the deep concern of how to advance towards the accomplishment of the Roma human rights at the national and international level. Women's voices were also starting to raise and with a strong social and political consciousness of what their needs were, they were creating Romani-women-led associations and thus articulating their own struggle.

The RRM emerged with force after the end of Communism, a time which there was a huge expansion of Romani NGOs –although much influenced by the political mobilization of each national country. As mentioned in the previous section, two inter-linked debates were core in the discussions: the issue of the recognition of the Roma as an ethnic minority, and the struggle for the achievement of the human rights' agenda.

### **3.3. Advancing towards the recognition of the Roma ethnic minority**

The recognition of the "Roma nation" (Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997) or what other authors have defined as the condition of the Roma as a *transterritorial* people has been constantly mentioned in relation to the RRM and the Roma identity, not used in the European Westphalian tradition but in terms of how the Romani people describes itself as a 'politically self-aware ethnic minority' (McGarry, 2008, p. 40), united to formulate their political and social claims ( McGarry, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Sigona & Vermeersch, 2012; Spirova & Budd, 2008; Trehan & Sigona, 2009b; Vermeersch, 2014). This deserves further attention in order to understand the deep importance of the ethnic identity base of the RRM, and how the movement has used this element as a force to be united -even though recognizing the existence of differences among the many Romani communities- for struggling together in the achievement of human rights.

Although Romani activists claimed that the "Roma nation" did exist, Mirga and Gheorghe (1997) emphasize that the power of this idea is of a major symbolic, moral or

political character rather than legal. The Romani elites never dared to ask for their own territory or state, but the idea of legitimizing their claim based on the elements included under the concept of the 'nation' was indeed a strong political tool. According to the mentioned authors, the basic concept is more connected to the idea of an "ethnic nationalism" based upon membership in a nation-culture or a blood-descent group rather than of a civil and liberal concept of citizenship.

The idea of the "Romani nation" emerged in the seventies and, even utopian, it had a strong emotional appeal for the political Romani movement that "justifies, at least for the Romani political leadership, the introduction of the Romani issue within traditional frameworks" (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1997). Such emotional content carried within the idea of the Romani nation should not be despised for understanding the strength it has as a political tool for the RRM, as already pointed out by James Jasper (2011) on his research on emotions in protest and social movements, emotions are basic in every aspect of political action. Even more, including these components as part of the analytical frameworks involves also a step towards recognizing the role of agents in social movements and their motivations, thus balancing the traditional dominance of the theories more focused on the structure (Jasper, 2011).

Roma strong sense of unity and the maintenance of their common identity even being spread across different nation-states comes from their shared history and values (Sordé, Flecha, & Mircea, 2013). Present in very different countries from Europe, Latin America or Australia, the Roma groups have adopted the language and have developed dialects of the Romano, the original language of the Roma people. However, within the diversity that characterizes the Roma, each of these groups have kept the unit as a cultural people through the strong link that provides the Roma identity. This identity unites its members around the world regardless of the country of residence. For instance, as claimed by them in the World Conference Against Racism celebrated in Durban in 2001, the Roma want to be denominated worldwide as a unique people with one name, the "Romà". Even more, the creation of modern nation-states neither supposed the assimilation of the Roma, although their culture were the target of strong attacks and marginalization (Barany, 2002). Additionally, the experience of the *Projamos*, reinforced the sense of "nationhood" understood in the symbolic sense expressed by Mirga and Gheorghe (1997). Still, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has not been freed from

the increase of anti-Roma sentiment at the public level and even worse, the approval of several anti-Romani policies at institutional level in some EU countries (Vermeersch, 2012; Castañeda, 2015; Gould, 2014).

In response to this, the Romani communities reacted in different European cities vindicating the enforcement of all Roma's human rights. Roma civil society answer to these acts within the broad European national scenarios evidenced the solidarity among them, and further, the feeling of belonging to one broad community. Thus, unlike other identities the Roma one has a strong base on respect for cultural diversity and a high ability for adaptation to new contexts. The Roma have always claimed for their right to live according their culture, their equal treatment and their access to the same opportunities than non-Roma citizens. Nonetheless, the European conjuncture of nation-states where Roma live has been sometimes a hindrance for their own culture as priority has been given to mainstream cultures avoiding the development of the minorities. For instance, the case of the Romani language and how it was persecuted in the early nineteen's years in some European countries such as Spain and Germany exemplifies this lack of respect towards the Romani culture (Sordé, 2006).

The FP5 Workaló research project (2001-2004)<sup>10</sup> made key contributions in this regard, as it was the first investigation focused on the analysis of the Roma people situation which pointed out *the existence of a non territorial dimension in the conception of the Roma identity*. This was also a relevant contribution for the Social Sciences, as it enhanced to identify the limitations in certain methodological approaches such as what Beck (2004) has called the “methodological nationalism”, which has determined the scientific observation from the nation-states perspective. Particularly, in the analysis of the identity this approach has led to the attribution of a concrete territory to each identity. But the communicative methodology used in Workaló allowed deepening in the comprehension of the Roma identity traits showing that it is very far from the nationalistic conception of identity that has traditionally existed in Europe. WORKALÓ allowed to shed new light into the character of the Roma identity, defining it as follows: *Roma identity is transterritorial because it does not have and it does not claim for a territory*. On the contrary, Roma people after centuries residing in different national

---

<sup>10</sup> CREA, WORKALÓ Project. *The Creation of New Occupational Patterns for Cultural Minorities. The Gypsy Case*. FP5: European Commission RTD, 2001-2004.

territories want to live within a diversity of cultures, languages and countries as they currently do, but they want to do it preserving their own identity, as they know that this is not detrimental to being at the same time, Roma. This transterritorial approach constitutes actually an alternative for the understanding of the identities as it surpasses both the nation-state traditional perspective and also the transnational one framed within the nation-state constraints. In this sense, when specific features of the Roma culture such as equality, respect of differences, cooperation and solidarity are linked to the transterritorial scope of their identity a major alternative about the way of experiencing the cultural identities in a globalized world emerges (Flecha, 2001-2004).

The RRM incorporates this transterritorial character of the Roma identity using it as a strong cultural trait of the Roma in order to include more Romani people, no matter their country of origin. This element of the RRM makes it unique, reflecting the identity-base of the movement, as well as the way in which it still preserves many cultural traits of the Roma culture, as it is loyalty to an extended family, the authority of elders and their leadership capacity in the community, or the existence of strong networks of solidarity (Sordé, 2006; Sordé et al., 2013; Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997; Hancock, 2002).

The official recognition of the Roma people as a European minority<sup>11</sup> by the European Parliament in 2005 was a huge step forward for the Roma communities in Europe. This fits the claim of a sector within the RRM that asserts that Romani people deserve special treatment within a European framework (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1997). Although the *de facto* or *de jure* recognition of an ethnic or religious minority could mean a formal issue, it can involve the opening of many opportunities at the legal domain due to the rights it can foster to approve. For instance, thanks to the recognition of the Roma as a European ethnic minority some of their cultural traits or rituals have been also recognized, putting the Roma life styles at the same position of that of mainstream society. As Sordé explains, a well-known case that reached the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) taking into account the principle of ethnic discrimination was the case of “La Nena”, a Spanish Romani woman who in Spain was denied the right to receive a widow’s pension because of being married in accordance to Romani rites and

---

<sup>11</sup> European Parliament (2005) *Resolution of 28 April 2005 on the situation of Roma people in the European Union*, (P6\_TA(2005)0151) (Brussels).



not according to national marriage civil law (Sordé, 2006). As this case evidences, institutional recognition is just the initial step towards broader juridical and legal processes that can indeed suppose a win in terms of advancing towards the fulfilment of rights of many vulnerable populations.

In such a way of seeking cultural recognition, many efforts have been dedicated to maintain and standardize the Roma language, Romano, as mentioned, “is a powerful factor of our identity” states Hancock (2002, p. 139). Against what is commonly misunderstood, Romani language has been written by Roma people as far back as the 1500s (so it is not true that is not a written language) (Ibid.). Romano is spoken by a large majority of Roma people with exceptions like Spain, Portugal or England, in which Romano has been abandoned during the past two centuries as an everyday community language (Matras, 2013, p. 4). As already mentioned, this could be attributed to persecution and the prohibition to be spoken at the public sphere (e.g.: in order to achieve *standardization* Catholic Kings prohibited the Roma people from using their language). But the recognition and standardization of the official status of the Romani language is a key claim within the RRM, which was debated in the Roma World Congresses as a proposition of the International Roma Union in a symbolic gesture that would resemble the advance towards a Roma nation (Ibid.). But the standardization of Romano has turned into not an easy task. Finally, in the IRU’s IV World Romani Congress celebrated in April 1900 there was adopted a standard alphabet, drafted by the French language activist Marcel Courthiade. However, as Matras explains, at that same time, there were already many other similar actions to write and publish Romano. All in all, an important gain for the Romano recognition has been its inclusion within the European Charter for Regional and Minority Language from the European Council, which considers it a language without territory. Besides this, other national states have achieved that their governments recognize the cultural value of Romano and promote its teaching at some public spaces. For instance, thanks to the active mobilization of Catalan Romani activists, the teaching of Romani is currently included as an initiative of the *Integrated Plan for the Roma People*, a comprehensive strategy to improve the situation of the Romani people in areas such as education, health, labour, and social and political participation (Sordé, 2006).

Borrowing from (Melucci, 1989) ideas on social movements and his considerations about ethno-national movements, some links can be established with the RRM and its historical claim of the recognition of the Roma ethnic minority previously analysed. In developing his analytical approach about contemporary social movements Melucci argues that many ethno-national movements develop their action on cultural groups aimed to ensure the protection and renewed vitality of the group culture. Some parallels with these ideas can be established with the RRM (and as will be noted later, other aspects of Melucci theoretical considerations are more than valuable). He emphasizes that for social movement alluding to cultural traditions is valuable in creating new symbolic systems, a component observed in the case of the RRM. While this is true for the RRM, understanding its “national” struggle in a ‘soft’ way and more symbolic, as Mirga and Gheorghe stated. Melucci later observes that at the political level, the ethno-national movements involves two problems to complex societies: they raise questions about the need for new rights for all members of the community, the right to be different; and second, they claim the right to autonomy, to control a specific living space (geography). For political action –Melucci says– “this means fighting for new channels of representation, access for excluded interests to the political system, and the reform of the decision-making processes and the rules of the political game” (Melucci, 1989, p. 91). In all, if the RRM claim to be different, it does not claim to have its own territorial autonomy, what somehow represents them at the international level as a united group; what they do demand, in any case, is to have a single voice at the European and at the international political space.

### **3.4. A human rights’ agenda**

The importance for the Roma communities and the RRM of claiming for the ethnic recognition and thus acknowledging a historical injustice has gone -since the early emergence of the movement- hand in hand with its efforts in the struggle for the achievement of the Roma human rights. Until the present days, the struggle against the different forms of discrimination that the Roma experience in their daily life, is the cornerstone of the demands of the RRM. Roma discrimination underpins the way how they are perceived by mainstream society, portrayed by the media, mistreated by segregationist school systems, criminalized by a set of policies and discourses that make

them the scapegoats of a [reduced but powerful] political elite for whom the Roma serve as justifier of all the EU's misfortunes, and a long list of "other" negative impacts on them.

But instead of passing through these situations silent and as mere victims, the Roma people and their networks, the RRM, have organized in the past to vindicate their human rights, as are still doing nowadays. Through different means and manifested in very diverse ways, the RRM and their people rise up their voices to challenge injustice and when possible, agree on a common position.

The recognition of the Porajmos during the Nazi era, the access to a culturally and socially responsible education, the protection of asylum seekers and migrants (and later in time, the controversy around the Roma freedom of movement in the EU), or the debate about the Roma political representation are some of the fronts of the RRM that are still today very present in the Roma agenda. In all of them, diverse positions can be found. It is not our aim here to explain them all, but just to briefly present the ways in which the RRM is acting in each of these scenarios, as said, all of them tinged with discrimination.

### *The recognition of the Porajmos*

The recognition and reparation of the victims of the genocide during the Nazi Germany has been a central demand of the RRM. As it has been accurately documented by (Lewy, 2000)), during Nazi Germany Gypsy were seen as a "plague", and consistent with this, rigid measures needed to be implemented in order to struggle against them. Accordingly, in 1933 Germany passed a law which allowed the forced sterilization of *Zigeuner*. Later on, in 1940 the ethnic cleansing from "undesirable elements" started (Lewy, 2000, p. 81). Since that moment on, Roma were victims of forced sterilization, internment, forced labour and finally extermination carried out by the Nazi and its allies in the occupied territories (Kóczé, in Sigona and Trehan, 2009).

The recognition of the Roma genocide has been included in the RRM agenda since the Third World Romani Congress in Göttingen, 1981, when survivors of the Romani

holocaust testified and a resolution was passed in order to tackle the issue of the repatriation. However, German governments did not accept to acknowledge Romani losses under the Third Reich (Hancock, 2002). Few years before, in 1979, the public campaign in favour of West German Roma carried out by the *Society for the Threatened People*, -a German human rights organization- together with other Roma organizations, made possible to place the issue of the Nazi persecution of the Roma on the public agenda (Margalit, 2002).

Some positive achievements have been obtained regarding the recognition of the Porajmos: currently, there is no room to questioning that what the Nazi did with the Roma was identical to the Jewish. In 1997 the president of Germany, Roman Herzog, opened the *Documentation and Culture Center of the German Sinti and Roma* in Heidelberg, overtly recognizing that the genocide inflicted upon Sinti and Roma was conducted driven by a racial motivation and with the will for systematic and final extermination. In the US, the story of the Porajmos has been included in the Holocaust Memorial Museum located in Washington. At international level, January 27 has been declared as the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, commemorating the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.

All in all, many Roma associations are still firmly working in order for the Roma holocaust to be known at the international level, as this in one of the ways of treating all these victims with dignity and justice and also to raise awareness about racism still affecting many Roma worldwide.

*“The best education for our children as for all”*

Education has always been a major issue within the struggle of the RRM because -as in other social movements such as the African American Civil Rights Movement- , for the Roma, education is indeed conceived as the tool to achieve their people’s emancipation and the way out of poverty. As recent data reveals<sup>12</sup>, education is still representing a

---

<sup>12</sup> Fundamental Right Agency - The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States Survey 2011: Roma report low literacy rates. About 20 % of Roma respondents aged 16- and above said that they cannot read and write compared to less than 1 % of the non-Roma living close by. A large majority of Roma

major source of unfreedom for Romani children and Romani people in 21<sup>st</sup>, what has a direct [negative] impact on their capacity to exercise their agency, in the way Sen (1999) has argued. In current Europe, Romani children get systematically denied their right to education, having lower enrolment and completion rates, and, when they do have access, many of them are victims of multiple segregations that range from being separated from mainstream education, streamed in different classrooms or diverted to special schools (Council of Europe, 2012; ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre), 1999; ERRC, 2009; Friedman, Gallová, Kubánová, & Slosiarik, 2009). As expected, the plight is worse for Roma women who face a double or even triple discrimination: for having low levels of education, being women and being Roma (UNDP, 2005). All these constitute heavy reasons for what the issue of minority education resides at the centre of the RRM debates: it was this way in the wake of 1989 (Cahn, 2002), and twenty-five years later, it remains an even more urgent issue.

At the eyes of Roma worldwide recognized leaders, “education is the key to advance towards modernization, it requires commitment and resources, and that it is what lacks in the many Roma communities” (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1997). Reversing school failure among the Roma involves not only tackling this severe and persistent problem, but also continue working hard as many Romani NGO are doing in order to end up with racist discourses that blame the own Roma for their academic failure, deploying an image of them as “lazy”, not interested in education, and “ignorant”. What happens is that Romani people do not recognize with current educational systems, which the most of the times turn the back to ethnic diversity and plurality. The still existing stereotypes among mainstream society explains why many Roma complain that education is a serious and collective problem, that stigmatizes the entire community and many times legitimizes an unfair and racist educational system (Vargas & Gómez, 2003; Klaus and Marsh, 2009).

But a great number of Romani NGOs through deploying diverse campaigns and actions, and operating at the grassroots level and also at the international level are challenging segregation and school failure and working to ensure dignity, inclusion and equal

---

respondents had not completed upper secondary education. On average, 89 % of the Roma surveyed aged 18 to 24 had not acquired any upper secondary qualification compared to 38 % of non-Roma living close by (FRA-UNDP, 2012)

education for Roma children and Roma in general. Examples of this are the programmes funded by international organizations for promoting the Roma school success such as some European initiatives (e.g. Roma education fund; Education Support Program funded by the Open Society Foundations; among others), or other local actions implemented by national NGOs, as the *Trobadas d'Estudiants Gitanas* (Romani Women Students' Meetings) organized by the Roma Women Association Drom Kotar Mestipen, which will be later explained.

The RRM is highly committed not only with children's education, but also with Roma adults' education and with Roma education. Within the RRM, women are playing a key role, but also in their own Romani Women's Movement, their voices always have been raised up to demand that Roma children get the best education as non-Roma children do. Education in society in general but especially for Roma is playing a key role in overcoming prejudice and inequality. The RRM and its actors are constantly being catalysts for change; nonetheless and as stated by them, governments need to move from good intentions to actions and cooperate with them, in order to make possible the end of segregationist educational models and provide the Roma with the type of successful education they dream of.

### *The issue of migration*

Roma migratory fluxes have been assumed in the social imaginaries as aligned with their "nomadic" way of living. Similar to this, another assumption has been that Roma use migration as the *easy* way out to escape from hostility and racism (Nirenberg, 2009b).

The end of communist regimes meant the collapse of a carefully designed integration system and the resurgence of strong prejudice against the Roma (Pusca, 2011). This is no longer a debate. In turn, it is well known that at this time, in a context where new economic and political problems emerged, for citizens from former soviet countries, the opening of the borders made of migration a now *feasible* solution. Therefore, recent scientific evidence revealed that migration in the case of Roma is a strategy, as well as it is for non-Roma people, to improve their living conditions and therefore, should be

understood within the framework of the international migration fluxes from the East to the West (Sordé, 2012-2015). However, Roma migrants face more challenges than non-Roma migrants, and this is due to the discriminatory barriers they have to face for their ethnic background, and for being migrants.

Besides this, and from an institutional approach, the migration wave started in the late eighties involved a new set of political and economic demands that could no longer be tackled from the national level, but it required a European agenda.

The EU enlargement and the inclusion of former communist countries with significant Roma communities such as Romania, Hungary or Bulgaria have been a test for the European enlargement policy: for proving the extent to what the EU is able to forge a democratic transition in these countries while ensuring the protection of minority rights (Pusca, 2011). The protection of minority rights is at the core of the EU project due to the continent's past history. However, anti-immigration and anti-minority discourses specially targeting the Roma have increased exponentially during the last decade, and more xenophobic attacks towards the Romani people have been registered than previous years (FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) & UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), 2012). Petrova (2000) states that the EU current policy of increased obstacles to immigration created is "race neutral". A policy that according to her, "operates on the foundation of deeper lying and unchallenged racist presumptions, and is applied in a racist way" (Petrova, 2012). This is overtly observed – she continues- "in the case of seekers of political asylum who come from countries with civil and political unrest, in which whole ethnic groups are denied their basic rights" (Ibid.). Alongside this, other critical scholars observe that current attitudes towards Roma in the EU countries –France and Italy are both good examples– should be understood as part of a wider trend that has conceived immigration shift from an integration policy to a discourse clearly focused on securitization and protection of citizens (Acton, 2012). For instance, for the case of France, a trend that saw its apogee during the Sarkozy administration, when he implemented an agenda to satisfy his electors who believed that there were "too many immigrants" (Ibid., p. 17). So Roma are blamed at both home countries and host countries: at home they are blamed for being accused as the ones who bring bad reputation to the country; this in turn leading to racism among Roma and non-Roma population within the national territory. At the

host countries Roma are blamed for being perceived as the criminals, carriers of problems (Ibid.).

The later scenario in which Roma are perceived as criminals fits the social construction process under which the Roma migrant community living in Italy have gone through in the last decade, with as consequence their social perception as nomads, harassers, baby thieves among others (Woodcock, 2012; Sigona and Vermeersch, 2012). This can be only understood as the consequence of the interaction of diverse factors such as the link among an anti-immigration discourse, a populist control on the media, and the occurrence of tragic facts that need to be explained to society. In the end, a distorted image is displayed, in which the Roma end up being systematically criminalized. The case of Giovanna Regianni, an Italian woman murdered in Rome in 2007 of which a Romanian Roma was accused but who later was found innocent is an example of how stereotypes and a terrific act can be conveniently used: the government used this case as a shield to protect itself from critiques for expelling thousands of Roma from East Europe.<sup>13</sup> Like this case, many other similar cases could be mentioned. At the end, the state machinery can be used to defend violent actions toward the Roma, hiding evictions, expulsions and imprisonment (Pusca, 2011, p. 9).

In the sight of racist policies such as the case of the Roma deportations carried out by the Sarkozy government, the RRM have appeared as a united block in different European cities expressing the condemnation of these anti-Roma actions. For instance, a big demonstration was celebrated in Madrid on 2010 in solidarity with the Roma.

Similar solidarity reactions are found in the history of the RRM back in the seventies. As Matras explains, when labours immigration was halted in the early 1970s, application for political asylum became the only legal immigration opportunity. The only ones that were rejected were those handed-in by Roma people. In front of this situation, pro-Roma protest movement in Germany in the last 1980s organized with some success (Matras, 2013).

---

<sup>13</sup> For more information: [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/08/world/europe/08italy.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/08/world/europe/08italy.html?_r=0)



In all, the RRM has evidenced again its networks of solidarity at different EU states when rights of free movement of the Roma people as European citizens has been infringed.

### *Roma political representation*

At the fall of communism, international human rights NGOs as the *Human Rights Watch* reported the situation of vulnerability under which the Roma were living, mainly in the Central and Eastern countries of Europe. Protecting the Roma was not in the political agenda of these countries neither in the EU agenda (Vermeersch, 2002). But the denunciation task of the international NGOs and the political mobilization of the “Romani intelligentsia” taking benefit of the momentum, build an advocacy network around the Romani question that made governments and society more aware not only of the historical debt towards the Roma people, but also the normative context of minority treatment (Mirga and Gheorghe, 1997). This is the historic background of what represents still today a demand of the RRM and a controversy in relation to the Roma and the political domain: the issue of Roma underrepresentation in those organs of decision-making and administration in national countries and the EU that indeed design policies that have an impact on their daily lives.

As Vermeersch (2002) argues, the real influence of Romani interests on government decisions continue to be limited although some steps have been taken. According to him and other authors, the increase in the gap between Romani and non-Romani politicians hides a much controversial and deep social problem, that is, the heavy weight of racism on popular opinions (Vermeersch, 2002; Hanglely Jr, 2002; Matras, 2013). Thus, the debate here among the scholars and the Roma organizations revolves around the issue about if special protection mechanisms and institutions need to be built in order to supply protection and guarantees for social inclusion for the Roma, or if the already existing legal frameworks at both national and international level are enough (Vermeersch, 2002; Matras, 2013).

Despite the fact that there seems to be a certain consensus around the idea that -given the persisting discrimination among the Roma-, special instruments to ensure the

protection and inclusion of the Roma as a social group are needed (Matras, 2013), scholars are aware that this is not enough for ensuring the complete social inclusion and participation of the Roma (Vermeersch, 2002). Hangley uses Vermeersch' argument to explain his own view on this issue: "Vermeersch suggests that Romani activists will not be able to influence policy when problems of prejudice and racism are more successfully addressed by the state" (Vermeersch, 2002, p. 117). According to Vermeersch, states are not doing enough, because racism allows it to ignore all these prejudicial policy. But Hangley states that in order to address racism, there is a need to enforce responsible policies that tackle racism. Governments need to attack the material inequalities that affect the Roma, so Romani citizens will be in a fair position to use the channels to involve in politics and "deflate the racist argument that they are incapable of participation" (Vermeersch, 2002, p. 117). These are traditional claims that the RRM have been vindicating at the national governments and at the EU instances (e.g. consider the claims of the RRM regarding the promotion of affirmative action measures in the access to Roma students to higher education or to public job positions –hospitals, city councils, etc.).

During the past years Roma activists have been campaigning with the aim of adding supports to the issue of the Roma political representation at national and international level. In this regard, since the early nineties, many Romani candidates in different countries in Central and Eastern Europe have entered parliamentary elections for mainstream political parties (Vermeersch, 2002). For instance, in Czechoslovakia in 1990 11 MPs of Roma origin were elected to the federal and republic-level parliament of the country as candidates for the two dissident movement (Ibid.). Although later, mainstream parties cut-down the representation of Roma into parliament.

At the international level, NGOs have played a key role "watching" what states do and monitoring and contesting human rights abuses. With the aim of articulating a unified voice that could communicate within European and international institutions, some Roma international institutions have been created. The *European Roma and Travellers Forum* (ERTF), a consultative organism from the Council of Europe, constitutes an example. It emerged from the own Roma who start considering the suitability of the

existence of a body that would help them express their concern at the European level.<sup>14</sup> This idea was formally constituted in 2004, with the promotion and support of the Finnish president Tarja Halonen, who found the idea that for some relevant debates concerning the Roma such as migration and the refugee question, a more in-depth discussion was needed at the European level and thus, a one Romani dialogue partner. Some consider that the creation process of the ERTF was the first attempt to welcome all the Romani NGOs (Nirenberg, 2009). After the success of the initial meeting, the ERTF was constituted as an NGO in France funded by the CoE –and this organization by Finland. Currently, the ERTF is the largest and most representative independent Roma institution in Europe, which includes more than 1500 member organization, among them, the International Romani Union, the Roma National Congress, the International Roma Women Network, or also some Roma political parties. However, the ERTF has also received critiques. The debate delved around the issue that in the negotiation process during its creation there was an imbalance of power between Roma and the European institutions and national governments that constituted a single block. Roma people complained that they were participating in a process where they were not being allowed to choose their own teams while governments and the CoE chose their own representatives (Nirenberg, 2009). Additionally, another strong critique was that the ERTF adopted some of the bad habits of the traditional Roma organizations such as the ‘emeritus status’ of their original board members. But what the ERTF do in a successful way is unifying a set of groups previously in competition and exemplifying new factions.

---

<sup>14</sup> For more information: <http://www.ertf.org/index.php/about-us>

## **CHAPTER 4. ROMANI WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

### **4.1. Romani women today**

The Roma, an ethnic minority of Indian origin who have spread out all around the globe, are one of the first people to live beyond the states' boundaries in Asia, Europe and America. Despite their geographical dispersion, Roma claim the existence of a common cultural identity and a shared history. Racism has always marked this history: they have been slaves and victims of hate crimes, were murdered by the Nazis, and have inevitably been trapped in poverty. Estimates say that 12 million Roma are distributed throughout all the continents. After the EU recent enlargement, the Roma have become the largest ethnic minority in the Union accounting for approximately 10 million.

Even though the Roma have been living in Europe for more than five hundred years, scholarship has not been well developed in the field of Romani Studies, and within it, little attention has been paid to the specifics of Romani women. The limited scientific literature is oftentimes forced to be complemented with other sources. Indeed, most of the existing data on the Roma situation in Europe have been conducted by advocacy NGOs (e.g. European Roma Rights Center, Save the Children) or different international bodies (e.g. European Commission, OSCE, UNDP). Another aspect that reflects this scarce interest is the lack of ethnic data regarding Romani population. Nearly no official or large scale effort has been made to collect quantitative data on this group. Despite the extended belief that legal constraints make it impossible, this is in fact not the case; the most common cause is a lack of political will. Therefore, there is clearly a need to promote the advancement of research in this area for obvious scientific, social and political reasons. The fact that the EU hosts the largest Romani population in the world situates the continent in a privileged position to enhance and lead the world Roma policies.

In 2004, the European Parliament expressed concern regarding the huge discrimination suffered by the Romani women, stating the enormous gap between the academic level of Romani and non-Romani women (European Parliament, 2006). In this sense, social barriers that women of Roma origin have to face are in most cases related to education.

The Council of Europe or the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) are struggling for raising awareness on the human rights violation when it comes to Roma and specially Romani women, considering issues related with their sexual reproduction as one of the most attacked issue.

The situation of the Romani women today can be described considering concrete areas which keep them off of fully developing their daily lives as any other women in Europe. Education, health, housing, sexual violence, labour market, forced sterilization, trafficking, are all areas that constitute some of the dimensions that need to be approached in order to improve the living conditions of the Romani women and advance to the real fulfilment of their human rights. In what follows I will make an overview of the situation of the Romani women today in terms of discrimination, education, employment, health, housing, youth and participation.

First, discrimination for reason of ethnicity is considered the main reason of social exclusion and marginalization of communities such as the Roma. Being considered the strongest barrier for an equality access to public services, education and labour market discrimination lead to social inequality and poverty. Indeed, according to the World Bank, the poverty rate among Roma is considerably higher than the non-Roma people (Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens, 2003).

Being part of a historically systemic discrimination (Gómez & Vargas, 2003), evidence just prove that in the 21st century in Europe, the discrimination against Roma increased (FRA, 2009; 2012). About 30% of Roma are unemployed, 20% are not covered by health insurance, and 90% are living below the poverty line (FRA, 2012). According to data provided by the survey elaborated by the Fundamental Rights Agency in 2009 (to Roma aged 16 and above), 25% of the respondents recognized having felt a discriminatory treatment because of their ethnic origin in the 12 months. This percentage was still significant in the 2011 survey (FRA, 2012) when the responses were a little different by country going from 25% in Romania to around 60% in the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy and Poland.

Regarding the awareness of anti-discrimination laws in employment, in countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy and France, the Roma people who participated in

the survey (FRA, 2012) recognized their awareness regarding legislations which protect them when applying for a job. Bulgaria and Greece were the countries with less awareness in this sense. Comparing Roma men and women in the EU Member States, the survey shows that Romani women are less aware of anti-discrimination laws, especially in Italy and Poland.

Second, in relation to education, poor achievement in education is considered to be one of the most outstanding problems of Romani women (Sordé, 2006). There are several causes which make Romani girls leave school. Avoiding this school drop-out has become a crucial aspect of the agenda of the Roma rights' movement, especially of the Romani women's activism. Romani women are taking care of their children to continue their studies and obtain a basic qualification that can promote access to higher levels of education.

The survey carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2012) shows shocking data on Roma people in Europe: 71.2% of them did not complete primary education and only 13.7% aims to achieve to complete secondary education and to choose or not, postsecondary education. Data on Romani women's level of education is also impacting: 19% of Romani women respondents (aged 16 or older) had never been to school; 58% of women (same age) had left school before age 16 (when compulsory schooling ends on several European countries). In the case of Romani men (between 16 and 24 years), the survey fixed at 0% the men who have never been to school and 38% those who left prematurely.

Discrimination in education is also related to the social construction of the labour system. In this sense, given that job skills have to be learnt under an academic diploma, Roma people feel educationally discriminated for not having acquired some very valued social skills within an academic program. Although some of the Roma people's abilities -for instance, those which they carry out within their family and cultural context, in their everyday lives- are sometimes required to other workers, the employment structure does not recognise them. These educational barriers have strong implications not only for Romani women but also for the Roma community as a whole.

Third, in relation to *employment*, another space where Roma are not socially represented is the labour market. Educational discrimination has a direct impact on employment. Respect and recognition of the Roma culture in this field is still a challenge to be addressed. According to the above mentioned FRA survey, in most European member states, the number of Roma describing themselves as unemployed, is at least double than the number of non-Roma. For instance, the Romani women unemployment rates are on average one third higher than those for men. For the non-Roma population, the gap between female and male unemployment rates is much lower.

Comparing with the non-Roma community, Romani women have higher taxes of unemployment. A survey carried out in Spain (Sánchez-Aroca, 2005) showed that 49% of the Roma women are unemployed, 29% have dependent employment and 40% are fully dedicated to housework. There are some jobs traditionally associated with the Roma. For example, itinerant sale is being the occupation for 39% of the Roma, followed by construction and the agricultural sector. However, recycling does also play an important role, considering 5.4% of the workers (Sánchez-Aroca, 2005).

Spanish data from the Fundación Secretariado General Gitano (FSGG, 2009) state that 31.5% of Roma in Spain believe that being Roma is the real reason to not finding a job. A consequence of this inequality makes clear other data which claims that 58% of the Romani women considers employment as the first necessity to be fulfilled for their community.

Factors such as unsure salary, precarious jobs, lack of Social Security coverage, among other elements, bring these people to a huge labour insecurity. Furthermore, sometimes Roma people have jobs that non-Roma wanted to take and this can be problematic at some point; especially in times of economic crisis, when competition for jobs increases, mostly for low-skilled jobs. This reality places Roma in a disadvantaged position, a competition which they can lose, mainly due to their lack of academic formal recognition, but also because of the social and structural discrimination they have to face in the labour market (FRA, 2012).

Romani women, who suffer a threefold discrimination because of their ethnicity, access to education and gender, face even greater difficulties. Their participation rate in the

labour market is much smaller. However, their employment rate in the informal sector is higher comparing with non-Roma women as well as with Romani men. Also important to mention is the fact that women are the ones who are increasingly launching initiatives and efforts to change both their personal situation and that of their community.

Fourth, regarding to health, a report elaborated by the United Nations in five different countries concluded that, depending on the country, the mortality index on Roma childhood is from two to six times higher than the one of other people. This may be due to their lack of health care assistance, bad life habits, lack of information in some occasion and more sanitary risks (UNDP, 2002).

Discriminatory practices are reported throughout Europe, targeting Roma in general and particularly Romani women: refusing to being attended or directly mistreated by medical personnel (FRA, 2009). When looking at gender differences across all EU Member States, more Roma and non-Roma women than men said that their daily activities are limited because of health problems (FRA, 2012). It is therefore reasonable to assume that being limited in daily activities might affect the possibilities to find a job or be in paid work. Limitations in daily activities due to health problems increase with age.

Most Roma people do not enjoy medical insurances. There are noticeable differences when comparing Roma and non-Roma responses in Greece, Romania and Bulgaria in particular, where only around 45% of the Roma said they have medical insurance in contrast to around 85% for the non-Roma.

Regarding the awareness of having medical insurance coverage and not the actual healthcare provided when a need arises, most Roma people are not aware of this importance. This fact leaves this group even more on the margins of medical assistance which can be relevant for them, such as preventative healthcare and pre-screening examinations.

In relation to housing, inequalities are also notorious in Europe. Across all EU Member States, more persons share the same room in Roma households than in non-Roma households (FRA, 2012). In non-Roma households, the average is one person per room



in most European countries. However, for both Roma and non-Roma households the average was 1.5 persons per room. In contrast, the average number of persons per room in Roma households ranges from 1.5 in Spain to more than 2.5 in Romania, Slovakia, Greece, Poland and Italy (FRA, 2012).

Another key indicator of housing quality is the availability of any of the following: indoor kitchen, indoor toilet, indoor shower or bath and electricity. The results of the FRA survey show important differences between the EU Member States in the proportion of Roma and non-Roma living in households where at least one of these amenities is lacking. Spain is an exception in this regard with the overwhelming majority of both Roma and non-Roma households having these basic amenities.

On the other hand, in Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia the majority of the Roma live in households that do not have covered basic amenities, in contrast to the non-Roma households surveyed. It should be noted that in Bulgaria and even more in Romania many of the non-Roma households also lack at least one of these basic amenities. However, differences between the Roma and non-Roma households are most pronounced in Italy and Greece.

For the field of *youth*, Roma youth suffer today a situation of inequality compared to non-Roma young, reflected in the unemployment rates and the level of education of both groups (Sánchez-Aroca, 2005).

On average, only one out of two Roma children surveyed attends pre-school or kindergarten (FRA, 2012), which is a big difference in comparison with the non-Roma community. During compulsory school age (with the exception of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania) 9 out of 10 Roma children aged 7 to 15 are reported to be in school. Participation in education drops considerably after compulsory school. Following the European survey, only 15% of young Roma adults have completed upper-secondary general or vocational education.

Given the important role they play in the domestic economy and the fact that many of them are building a family between age 18 and 21, considering the responsibilities that it entails; the situation is even worse and it involves not only the young people, but the

whole community. Some of the diplomas they receive are not valid into a highly competitive labour market, which requires the secondary education as the minimum diploma. In addition, ghetto schools located in discriminated neighbourhoods used to offer low academic options and a non-motivational school environment with lack of interest on covering cultural Roma necessities, fulfilling their interest and making people to feel identified with the school, which address their own needs.

However, there are more Roma girls than Roma boys who make it to enrol in college. Even if the Roma women dropout rate is higher, especially in making the change to high school, the girls who continue studying, they do so up to achieving the admission to higher levels of education, such as university.

One of the key tools to address these situations is to create Roma referent models that motivate other Roma and raise labour and educational expectations for young Roma. And indeed, the Roma and pro-Roma associations are working to achieve it.

Finally, in relation to the field of participation in public spaces of debate and decision-making, if the Roma participation is underrepresented, Romani women is even more at the margins in mainstream society.

Stereotypes, lack of identification with political institutions and organizations where there has traditionally been Roma participation, the perception is that they are not being heard. Difficult social and working conditions (which are displacing the social and political participation as a priority activity) or lack of education (which entails a lack of self-esteem, especially in relation to academic people usually present in these areas), are some of the barriers that have been identified in relation to the active participation of the Roma population. It also highlights a strong distrust in politics which have generally either ignored or used Roma for electoral purposes.

To get an accurate picture of the Roma rights movement, we need to give special attention to the role of women, as they are being very active in associations of both women and men as well as in exclusively women-led (as it is the case of the association to be studied in this thesis); particularly in recent years, in which women are creating women's associations with a significant activity.

All said are some brief contextual data that help understand the situation of the Romani women in European countries today.

#### **4.2. The emergence of the Romani Women's mobilisation**

Chapter 3 has introduced a glance to the origins of the RRM and has explained how mainly after the fall of communism, Romani people took the lead and articulated a social and political movement. It has been showed too how the RRM has not remained passive in situations where the human rights of the Roma have been violated, and the main debates in the movements' agenda regarding the field of their cultural rights, education, migration and political representation have also been introduced. The articulation of the RRM and the later creation by institutional organisms of a Roma aid regime and schemes oriented to reverse the situation of inequalities under which Romani people still live in Europe, evidence that Roma do have a voice in Europe, and that their struggle is to overcome social exclusion while living in Europe in equality, being recognized as a people with their own cultural identity, an European ethnic minority.

Romani women around the world are currently participating in a very diverse way in different spaces of debate and decision-making such as local associations, political parties, NGOs, adult education centres, among many others, thus creating their own spaces that allow to discuss about those issues that are of their concern (Sordé et al., 2013; Brooks, 2012; Gelbart, 2012). The “other Romani women” are challenging racialized, gendered and sexualized views of them and leading a feminist struggle, a struggle that is often carried out in the everyday life, in silence, within their homes and communities.

As Sen recognizes, women's power –economic independence and social emancipation– can have far-reaching impacts on the forces and organizing principles that govern divisions within the family and in society as whole, and can influence what are implicitly accepted as women's entitlements (Sen, 2009).

At the European level, the Council of Europe<sup>15</sup> has played a key role in the struggle against racism and discrimination regarding Roma, and indeed in the articulation of an institutional Romani women's movement, although that promoted from the top-down not always including the voices of the very grassroots Romani women, those women with no academic credentials.

Nonetheless, the contributions done by the Council of Europe in regards to the rights of the Romani women are worth to be recognized. One of the initiatives promoted by it was the *European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion*<sup>16</sup>. Specific impacts have emerged from the Alliance in the sense of improving Roma conditions. One of these results is the Romact project<sup>17</sup>, which in collaboration with the European Union intends to implement policies and public resources to include all population, including Roma.

In the same line, the Council of Europe have contributed to the awareness of Roma needs and the visibility of the Roma community raising the voice on their realities while claiming for actions to improve their living conditions. The four Roma women's rights international conferences organized by the Council of Europe are an example of this commitment. At the same time, the first international conference of this Council, held in Stockholm in 2007, was remarkable for the institutionalization of the Roma women's movement in Europe, although an initiative promoted from the top-down.

The *1st International Roma Women's Rights Conference* was held in Stockholm, Sweden, in December 2007. It was a two days conference (including a previous conference the day before called "*our voices heard*") where policy-makers –including the Swedish Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Council of Europe and the European network of Romani women- got together discussing Romani women challenges and their rights with the aim of sharing good practices. Different topics were addressed: Combating Trafficking, Respecting Reproductive Rights, Public Health Care for Roma. Some of the concerns expressed were related to exclusion and discrimination, anti-Roma attitudes across

---

<sup>15</sup> For more information: <http://www.coe.int/en/>

<sup>16</sup> For more information: <http://www.roma-alliance.org/en/>

<sup>17</sup> For more information: <http://coe-romact.org/>

Europe and pertinent policies implemented by institutions, local government, and especially some Council of European Member States which do not always address effectively the Roma women discrimination. Indeed, the *Declaration of Romani Women Networks*<sup>18</sup> was one of the results of this conference; where among other issues, the debate was focused on the mechanisms needed for ensuring the implementation of the already existed Human Rights conventions and European Union directives, also for the Roma. For example, the elimination of the racial discrimination or the human rights violation produced against Romani women while the forced sterilization is still a reality for Roma women in some European countries.

For bringing all these topics to the discussion, this conference was breaking ground on the awareness of Romani women needs and those of their communities. One of the matters the participants wanted to include on the Declaration made as a result of this meeting, was related to the adoption, by the European Commission, of the *European Strategy for Roma Integration* which has actually been approved as a consequence of this conference. Furthermore, they also asked several institutional agencies -such as the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) or the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)- to tackle the anti-Gypsyism in Europe and to allocate the resources for managing to accomplish the terms of the European Parliament Resolution on Roma regarding human rights violations against Roma (European Commission, 2005).

Two years later, in January 2010, Athens was home for the 2<sup>nd</sup> *International Conference of Roma Women*, organized by the Council of Europe. In this occasion, the conference was entitled “*I am a European Romani Woman*”. Aiming at improving Roma women’s conditions in Europe while breaking stereotypes regarding the Roma women, the issues tackled were focused on the one hand on early marriages and forced sterilization, pointing out on the slogan “let the girls grow”. In a subliminal way, the message this conference wanted to broadcast was that of creating a positive perception of Roma women in the media. Media plays an important role on spreading a certain image on a concrete community. Considering the Roma women, they feel urgent and necessary to change the damaging image media is doing on Roma practices and cultural traditions.

---

<sup>18</sup> For more information:  
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680082fbe>

Besides discussing on how to change these harmful practices, they also emphasised on Roma women's economic empowerment, entrepreneurship and their access to labour market. In October 2010, the Council of Europe, the Minister's Deputies established "The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma" claiming all stated to adopt concrete measure on Roma community. Several points tackled are related to: *Non-discrimination and citizenship; Social inclusion; International Cooperation*; among many other issues described.

Following this institutional work, in October 2011, the Council of Europe in collaboration with the *Instituto de Cultura Gitana* organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> *International Conference of Roma Women*, in Granada, Spain. This time the agenda got even more broadened and representatives from different Roma institutions were part of the meeting. Besides Roma women from different continents, as Africa, America, Asia and Europe took part of the meeting; this conference was room for discussion on Roma women issues such as education for girls, sexual diversity, identity, cultural values, among other topics. One important topic to highlight in this occasion is the participation of Roma women in the discussion and implementation of the policies developed by the administration representatives for improving Roma conditions and their image on the media. At this meeting, attended the Director of the Roma Culture Institute Foundation; the president of the International Romani Women's Network (IRWN); the Social Representative of the Secretary General for Roma; representatives of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, as well as representatives of the Andalusia Government and the University Menéndez Pelayo. In spite of being a very institutional conference, the meeting also counted on the participation of Dolores Fernández, the president of "Romi", the First Romani Women Association in Spain.

The second round table of this 3<sup>rd</sup> international conference of Roma women was focused on human rights of Roma women, shedding more light on issues such as sterilization, trafficking, early marriages, forms of violence against Roma women and also strategies of improvement. They also manifest their disappointment with several actions carried out as forms of anti-gypsyism. All these discussions and actions to be taken were collected on the Declaration of the Third International Roma Women's Conference and also what they called the First World Congress of Roma women. After the celebration of this Conference, Europe was becoming ground for an even stronger

Roma women mobilisation. Being a mostly institutional mobilisation, the number of researches and reports which have been elaborated regarding Romani women rights and regulations was notorious. One of this, for example, is the UNICEF report on *Women Motherhood Early Childhood Development*<sup>19</sup> or the Position Paper<sup>20</sup> published by the European Women's Lobby, called: *Tackling multiple discrimination of Romani and Traveller Women- a crucial factor for the successful implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies*.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference in Granada, the city of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Conferences were announced. In September 2013, the Finish Government decided to host the 4<sup>th</sup> *International Roma Women's Conference*, entitled: "Acting now for an equal future". More than 150 Roma European Women attended the meeting in Helsinki. The former Finish president opened the conference jointly with other speakers from the government. Representing the Council of Europe, Jeroen Schokkenbroek, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma issues, also attended this meeting as he already did in Athens two years before.

The debates were on how to improve Roma women's situation and the one of their community. In the same line that the former conferences, the participants in Helsinki discussed on the implementation of polices and strategies already claimed in previous meetings. Another point of the agenda, which has been set by the women participants, was focused on the networking between Roma women and other groups working for gender equality.

The final report<sup>21</sup> elaborated after the meeting gathered the main points and provided concrete recommendations to national and local authorities for each of the three priority areas established and also main points addressed for other related areas. The priority areas established were: *education*, in which the governments are asked to support Roma

---

<sup>19</sup> For more information:  
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016800c129c>

<sup>20</sup> For more information:  
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016800c0adb>

<sup>21</sup> For more information:  
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016800c0a83>

girls' education and preventing the drop-out rates. *Active citizenship* is the second concrete area to work on. Roma women asked to be active members and participate at the social, economic and political level. Concrete legislation should include their voices to this regard. Finally, *gender equality and community mobilization* are other important areas to work on. Further discussions were carried out on areas in which Roma women find obstacles in their daily lives. Areas such as: *employment, health care, housing and accommodation, gender violence and trafficking, media and freedom of speech, the need for disaggregated data*. What this final report presents is the list for any specific area of concrete and specific recommendations on what local and national authorities should do in order to improve Roma women's fulfilment of human rights.

In line with the title of this 4<sup>th</sup> conference ("acting now for an equal world"), the European Roma and Travellers Forum jointly with the IRWN also elaborated a Position Paper<sup>22</sup> to make a public statement of their interest in the success of this conference, and also to encourage women to collaborate together for the improvement of their living conditions and their status in society. Several European recommendations and Parliamentary Assembly Resolutions were considered outcomes of these International Conferences led by the Council of Europe.

Shortly after this 4<sup>th</sup> international conference at Helsinki, an expert meeting on the "*Roadmap for implementing the strategy on Romani women's issues (2013-2020)*" took place in Strasbourg on February 2014. This event included 15 Roma women experts in the Romani women issues from Romania, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Ukraine, Finland, Turkey, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, Moldova and Macedonia. The meeting intended to make progress on the decisions and actions presented at the Finnish Conference by the Romani Women who attended the meeting. The timeframe established for the implementation of these policies is 2013-2020, and it is expected the collaboration of other Roma activists, international organisations, governments and other stakeholders. This meeting of experts stabilised a *Working Group of Romani Women for the implementation of the Strategy*, which will be in charge of executing the elaborated an *Action Plan 2014-2016*, for the implementation of the *Strategy on the*

---

<sup>22</sup> For more information:  
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016800c0ac7>



*advancement of Romani women and girls (2014-2020)*. This Action Plan includes Strategic objectives and activities to be carried out in a timeframe with a specific responsible person. Additionally, it was also elaborated the *Strategy for Romani women 2014-2020* also with specific goals and strategic objectives to be addressed. And the *Strategy for the Advancement of Romani women and Girls, 2014-2020*, promoted also by the Phenjalipe Network of Roma Women.

In March 2014, a brainstorming meeting for the 5<sup>th</sup> international Roma women conference was organized in Istanbul. The Turkish Government together with the Council of Europe collaborated to organize this meeting and discuss a joint coordination for the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference in 2015. They also discuss about the Roma women situation in Turkey as well as their needs, space for action and for joint collaborations with other Roma women organizations. Representatives of the Turkish government attended the meeting and education for Roma children was again one of the most important topics to be addressed.

In October 2015, the 5<sup>th</sup> *International Review Conference of Roma Women* took place in Skopje, organized by the Council of Europe together with the Government of Macedonia. The conference had webstreaming available and was attended by more than 100 participants. The attendance of Roma women is an element to be highlighted due to its increase with each of the international conferences from the 1<sup>st</sup> one in 2007 to the 5<sup>th</sup> in 2015, when Roma women from 20 member States of the Council of Europe attended the meeting. However, the profile of the Roma women attendance is constituted by political figures, experts and government representatives. After the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting in Finland and as a consequence of the strategies implemented there, this 5<sup>th</sup> conference was a space to broad the discussion on specific areas and concrete recommendations already discussed, but with the specificity of how to implement them, deepening on the preparatory process. New resolutions also resulted from these debates, as for example, the decision of including gender in the national Roma integration strategies and local action plans. In the same vein, other topics such as participation, gender violence, child marriage, trafficking have been incorporated in the recommendations of the Review Conference for policy makers at international level.

All these International Conferences are important to explain a top-down Roma women mobilization. Making steps towards a different Romani women's mobilisation, using Sordé (2006)'s words, "the mobilization of the Romani women has a data of reference", referring to 1990, when the Association of Romani Women *Romi* was created, in Granada. Emerged from the concerned of a group of women that were experiencing that mainstream feminism was not taking into account, the problems of the Romani women, a small group of them founded *Romi* with the aim of fighting for the rights of the Romani women in a wide sense: in education, teaching literacy was an essential aim, while claiming for the social and political rights in the wider society (ERRC, 2007): María Dolores Fernández, one of the founders, explains this as follow:

"Our fight has two fronts: At home, we are fighting to get Romani women to study and have freedom. We also have to raise awareness about our problems and needs with different government bodies so that these are taken into account. In addition, we have to continue carrying out our family obligations (i.e. caring for our husbands, parents and children) that we know we cannot abandon."

The creation of *Romi* was important as in 1990 and 1991 they organized the first and second roundtable conference on Romani women in Granada. These would be some of the very first initiatives organized by Romani women and which they were the main protagonists (Sordé, 2006). The conclusions of the 1990 roundtable conference defined the working lines for the next years in the Romani women's agenda. At that time, Romani associations led by men started to include specific programmes for the Romani women, and Romani women started to join the boards of these associations.

The creation of "Romi" was indeed a turning point in Spain, and a precedent for what would come in few years, amidst a time where Romani women were starting to emerge as an independent movement from the RRM. In 1994 was held in Seville the *I Romani Congress of the European Union*, in which a group of Romani women of different countries prepared a set of conclusions that gathered the views of women, their problems and their demands at European level. Among the issues that were claimed in these conclusions by Romani women were the need to reinforce and develop educational actions, social and economic policies targeted to the Romani women and

oriented to overcoming of poverty, marginalization and ethnic discrimination; and the importance of promoting an intercultural education and the coexistence among all people, Roma and non-Roma (Ibid.).

The 90s was a decade in which we would see the emergence of a social and political discourse especially around Europe claiming the need for articulating Romani women-led organizations that could represent their own voices and demands, not competing with Romani organizations and non-Romani ones, but collaborating with them. A small group of Romani women activists in different countries were starting to engage in the struggle for their own emancipation, and, although their specific situations were in many cases not shared, the challenges they had to face were very similar, no matter if they were from Spain, Romania, Russia, Greece or Hungary: multiple discrimination and exclusions based on ethnicity, gender and low educational attainment, problems for accessing to healthcare system, because of their vulnerable situation high risk of being victims of sex-trafficking and forced-prostitution; virginity tests; domestic violence [as non-Roma women] (Izsák, 2009).

Challenging stereotypes, Romani women of different ages, from different countries, religious' affiliations, with academic credentials and also with no academic training, in less than three decades organized themselves creating wide solidary networks, establishing relationships of friendships, thus forging an activism underpinned by the Romani feminism, posing the basis for the organization of their struggles, the recognition of their existence, and also of the contributions that they can do to mainstream feminism (Bitu and Vincze, 2012).

In all, different organizations have flourished in Europe showing the social and political articulation of the Romani women's rights' movement. One example is the *International Roma Women's Network (IRWN)*<sup>23</sup>, created in 2002, promoted by two women Members of the European Parliament who are from a Romani origin, Ms. Lívía Járóka and Ms. Viktória Mohácsi. Both MEPs brought to the political debate the situation of the Romani women in Europe, this was key for boosting the creation of IRWN, an initiative that already was in the minds of many Romani women since many

---

<sup>23</sup> For more information: <http://www.advocacynet.org/partners/women/international-roma-womens-network/>

years before. It was the first registered international umbrella organization representing Romani women of all European Romani groups. IRWN arose as an initiative from Romani and non-Romani women from approximately twenty European countries concerned particularly about the access of the Roma, and specifically of Romani women, to healthcare (Izsák, 2009, p. 2). IRWN was set as a platform for cooperation of a group of individual Romani women activists who have cooperated among different issues, and knew among them from their previous collaboration in international conferences. Thus, IRWN also emerged as a platform that could be the interlocutor of the Romani women in Europe with other inter-governmental organizations as it is the Council of Europe, the OSCE or the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

Working for the betterment of the situation of the Roma women, IRWN lobbies the states to comply with the international conventions. In this regard, one example of advocacy work is the campaign led by IRWN targeted to the report of the forced sterilization of Romani women in Slovakia. The capacity of networking that IRWN has had, is of major importance as it has untied and connected different activists from all over the world. In all these organizations new discourses and strategies that pose the issue of the Romani women's and place it at the centre of the debate are being opened, thus making it a space at the public sphere, in schools, city councils, and mainstream communities and at different levels -local, national and international.

Another Roma Women's organization that proves the rise of the Romani Women's Movement is the *Joint Roma Women Initiative*, promoted by the Open Society Institute. With respected Romani women activists such as Nicoleta Bitu from Romania, and Ms Enisa Eminova and Azibija Memedova from Macedonia, the JRWI was launched in 1999 by the Network Women's Programme (NWP) initiative of Open Society Institute (OSI). JRWI focus is on policy development, the integration of women's perspectives into the main Romani women and works to create links between Roma women and mainstream women's rights movements (Izsak, 2009, p. 6).

More recently, in 2010 a major event for the Romani Women's Movement took place in Barcelona, focused on reaching to those very grassroots Romani women, from the 8-10 October 2010 was celebrated the *1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women: the*

*Other Women*<sup>24</sup> organized by the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen, - an activity which is deeply analysed in this dissertation. Women who participated in the Congress claimed the need to include the voices the 'other women' in each decision adopted by any association or policy that could affect the lives of the Romani women. This congress has been thoroughly analysed in the present dissertation, as it will be shown in the results.

All these events, the Congresses and the Platforms and organizations, with different working structures, evidence that Romani women, forming alliances with non-Roma women and men are deploying a strategy to make their voices heard an international forums, at national but also at European level, empowering their own Roma community and in turn contributing from their individuals' life-worlds to a more inclusive Europe.

Regarding specifically to the emergence of the Romani women's mobilisation in Spain, as mentioned above, the first Romani women association in Spain was "Romi" in 1990. Nine years later, many other local Romani women associations had been emerging, and founded, the first National Federation of Association of Romani Women. Kamira works for the empowering and the promotion of Romani women, by promoting the creation of new Romani associations and the networking, the access to resources and services. Kamira is composed by 24 associations of Romani women from different regions of Spain, and currently, the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen is the unique association federated to its from Catalonia. The main areas of work of Kamira are education, fight against discrimination, gender equality, women and equality, youth, promoting mobilisation, health, and social and labour inclusion.

Diverse associations of Roma women followed the path of these pioneer institutions around the State. Some of the entities that need to be highlighted are the Andalusian Federation of Romani women (Fakali), Andalusian University Roma Women Association (Amuradi), the Roma women association Alboreá, among others. Recently created, we need to highlight the Roma feminist women for diversity Association, with a great presence in the social networks. Their contribution is being very important.

---

<sup>24</sup> More information on the *1st International Congress of Romani Women: the Other Women* is available in: <http://www.dromkotar.org/>

All in all, what has been explained in this chapter will enable to better understand how the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen has contributed to the inclusion of the grassroots Romani women's voices in the Romani women's mobilisation, contributing to shape and foster a Romani women's movement that includes the voices of the grassroots women, and which is making a step beyond in the self and collective empowerment of the Romani women.

## CHAPTER 5. EU INITIATIVES FOR THE INCLUSION OF THE ROMA COMMUNITIES

It has been explained in the previous section how the Roma Rights Movement emerged with much dynamism in the 1990s, pushed by the worsening of the socio-economic conditions of the Roma communities around Europe but especially in the former soviet countries. Scientific literature has deeply analysed the impact that the change from the communist to the neo-liberal regime had on the Roma people, and how this resulted in large-scale unemployment and underemployment of the Roma, driving them to a deep impoverishment and the formation of a Roma underclass (Rovid, 2011). This led to the increase of intolerance and hostility towards the Roma, a scenario that coincided at the international level with the rise of the human rights approach. NGOs put their attention in the situation of the Roma in Europe, thus contributing to shape the discourse on the vulnerability of the Roma human rights and the urgency of addressing the *Roma issue*. For instance, during the nineties the NGO *Human Rights Watch* published a series of reports that were much-welcomed by the international community in which it reported the violation human rights of the Roma in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia within the areas of education, employment, housing, access to public and private services, and also addressing the issue of forced sterilization of Roma women (Veermersch, 2011; Sordé, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 1992).

In this sense, new schemes and regimes would be designed by the end of the nineties but especially during the upcoming years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to directly address the Roma question. Several authors have argued that the political regimes created to attend the need of the Roma tended to put more efforts on civil and political rights rather than on focusing on economic and social rights (Sigona, 2009). Some of these authors have also analysed in depth how the unsolved problems that still persist in dealing with the Roma issue relies also on how: “mainstream human and minority rights discourses operate within the neoliberal order providing an ‘acceptable’, although inadequate, framework for understanding and addressing Romani marginalization and anti-Gypsyism” (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991, in Sigona & Trehan, 2009).

In all, the aim of this chapter is to briefly introduce how the European Union has addressed the Roma Issue at an institutional level, creating new legislations and mechanisms to tackle not only anti-Roma discourses but also the Roma social exclusion. This will enable to better understand in a later stage how the EU institutional push for the Roma issue has also reinforced the Roma Rights Movement, at an institutional level, institutionalizing the aid, thus giving place to analyse the role played by the very lay Roma people, and the grassroots Roma associations.

In a subsequent section I explain some of the critical arguments emerged regarding the European Roma policies, describing on what arguments they are grounded and also the proposals ('lessons to be learnt') made in order to make the most of the aid and resources invested in interventions and research projects aimed at overcoming the Roma social exclusion.

### **5.1. The development of a EU legal framework for the Roma human rights' protection**

The EU direct involvement with European Roma started at early 1990s. It should be noted though, that already for the year 1969 the Council of Europe had taken the lead on the Roma issue when it adopted a text on Roma. Already in 1963 the Council had highlighted the Roma contribution to Europe's cultural diversity and the need to guarantee their rights (Council of Europe, 2012). The UN and other institutions such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) followed the leadership of the Council and embraced actions for protecting the Roma. However, as (Guy, 2009) explains, since 1989 on, financial means oriented to tackling the Roma inclusion increasingly shifted to the European Community (later the European Union) and its institutions.

The development in the EU of legal frameworks aimed at protecting its people from discrimination and to combat racism has been of importance for the Romani people and for member states as it has provided the victims with shields under which to rely in case of needing assistance, mechanisms to report and therefore institutions that need to be accountable. At any case, the development of the EU's Fundamental Rights Agenda



through the approval of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) equipped European institutions with mechanisms to take measures to combat discrimination based on ethnic origin, including discrimination against the Roma (Veermersch, 2011). The later approval of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2000 that would come into force with the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 -becoming therefore an integral part of EU law-, and the adoption of the Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC in the same year were other major steps for the overcoming of ethnic discrimination. As Vermeersch (2011) argues, the establishment of stronger fundamental rights within the EU opened up major possibilities for monitoring by independent actors such as international NGOs, some of which started to cooperate for the inclusion of the Roma with the own EU countries, for instance, in the context of the Decade for the Roma Inclusion (2005-2010 –described later). Additionally, concrete data concerning the respect of human rights and discrimination started to be collected specifically addressing the situation of the Roma people, for instance by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) or the Council of Europe. Besides all this, the European Commission would be able to rely on these fundamental rights and on the Directive 2000/43 to condemn the anti-Roma policies adopted by some EU Member States in the subsequent years.

The EU enlargement process has also been another window of opportunity for independent organizations to demand the monitoring of protection and anti-discrimination of the Roma communities. In 1993 an important event in the then European Community, the Copenhagen European Summit took place, in which the criteria whether a country was eligible to join the Community (later, the EU) were settled. One criterion included the protection of minorities, which would be a matter of concern especially for countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Sigona and Trehan, 2009). Minority protection was in a first instance not relevant for Western EU Members States; however, later on, the issue of Roma migration, initially as asylum seekers escaping from the wars in Yugoslavia, called into question the separation between the Eastern and Western halves of Europe of the “Roma issue” (Balibar, 2004). The Roma migration *became* an issue for Western EU Member States, even more when some of them radically violated the Directive 2000/43, and Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of EU citizens and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States.

Within a scenario of reactive and anti-Roma policies implemented from some Member States, the rise of xenophobia, and the worsening of the socio-economic conditions of the Roma people, the European Union needed to make a turn in its political agenda on the Roma, to include the social aspect as a political issue. Favourable to this turn was the increasing attention within the EU to progress towards a *more smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* and the goals set in the framework of the EU's Social Inclusion Agenda, known as the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010). The EU's Social Inclusion Agenda has yielded the issues for debate and has also provided a shared space for the Member State to undertake commitments concerning how to improve the situation of the Roma communities in Europe. Through *soft* tools such as the Open Method of Coordination Member States have been exchanging best practices and collaborating on shared concerns about the topics of the strategy (employment, poverty, education, inclusion of migrants, others) in relation to the Roma, what has indeed served as the basis for subsequent actions targeted specifically to the Roma communities.

In a times of serious issues of inequalities among the EU and in its member states but a favourable context for political activism for what have been mentioned above, the Romani organizations and the Romani people continued very active in the struggle for Roma rights. In this sense, the European Parliament<sup>25</sup> resolution on the situation of the Roma in the EU released in April 2005 supposed a turning point for the EU Roma communities, at least for its symbolical value. On the one hand, in this resolution the European Parliament recognized the importance of urgently eliminating continuing and violent trends of racism and racial discrimination against Roma, and it publicly stated that “whereas the Roma was not regarded as an ethnic or national minority group in every Member State and candidate country” (...) “the European Parliament called on the Council, the Commission, the Member States and the candidate countries to consider recognizing the Roma as a European minority. This was a chief progress for the Roma in terms of what it would later involve at the political level. In the same resolution, the Parliament urged the Commission, the Council and the Member States to activate all their existing means and tools to combat anti-Gypsyism across Europe, and

---

<sup>25</sup> European Parliament resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union. 28 April 2005. Brussels P6\_TA(2005)0151

it directly asked the Commission to ensure that the candidate countries to join the EU make real efforts to strengthen the rule of law and protect human and minority rights, thus referring to the de facto accomplishment of the Copenhagen Criteria regarding the protection of minorities.

The European Council view about the Roma situation was very similar than the one of the EP. In this regard, in December 2007 the presidency made public its conclusions regarding the Roma issue. In the conclusions, the European Council called the attention on “the very specific situation faced by the Roma across the Union and invites Member States and the Union to use all means to improve their inclusion.” (Council of Europe, 2008, p.14).

Later on, in January 2008 and drawing from all previous legislation on Roma issues that specifically recognized the vulnerability of this people, the European Parliament approved a new key resolution on a European strategy on the Roma, the one that would later endorse the EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion (European Parliament, 2008, p. 4). This resolution was promoted, among other MEPs by Lívía Járóka, a Romani women MEP. This initiative of the European Parliament was supported by well-recognised NGOs while at the same time national governments launched similar actions at the national level (Guy, 2009).

As observed, the European Commission was being urgently asked to move forward in the establishment of a set of institutional mechanisms that could coordinate forces and work for the Roma inclusion at the European level. Such demand did not come just by EU institutions such as the European Parliament or the Council of Europe but also from other stakeholders concerned with the Roma issue and civil society at large. In the path for the approval of the EU Framework for the Roma Inclusion, a major event took place in July 2008 in Brussels organized by the European Commission, the first “Roma Summit”. In this Summit more than 400 representatives of the EU institutions, national governments, and organizations from the European civil society participated. The summit’s aim was to tackle the specific situation of the Roma, recognizing the concrete challenge of this ethnic minority characterized by its long-persisting discrimination both at individual and institutional level and its far-reaching social exclusion. As it was put forward in the Summit, although there was a powerful framework of legislative,

financial and policy coordination tools available actually being used by the Member states, there existed an implementation gap in the Member States that needed to be overcome. The Summit was a major achievement in political terms as it also made part of the scaffolding of what would later become the EU Framework for the Roma Inclusion. Besides this, a tangible result from the meeting was the creation of the *European Platform for the Roma Inclusion*. This platform serves to exchange good practice and experience between the EU countries in the sphere of the inclusion of the Roma, and to bring analytical support and reinforce the cooperation among all the stakeholders involved in the Roma issues. However, after its creation, the Platform was received with some suspicion by some international NGOs as it was argued that the actual content that might be given to the concept of *European Platform* remained unclear (ERPC 2008, in Will Guy).

Under a clear context of ‘revival’ of the awareness rising of the critical situation of the Roma in EU and under the Europe 2020 strategy, in April 2011 the European Commission released a Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions establishing the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (EUFNRIS)<sup>26</sup>. Being aware that advances on non-discrimination alone had not been sufficient to surpass Roma social exclusion, EU institutions requested to endorse the framework in order to achieve the targeted goals: making sure all Romani children complete at least primary school; and to close the Roma and non-Roma gaps in the access to the employment, healthcare and housing.

Although the Commission took the leadership in addressing the problem of deep social and economic exclusion, the experience of Roma people living in Europe, it was well emphasized that the aim of the European structure created was that of supporting the work of the member states, never of replacing their primary responsibility for their Roma communities. This has been many times criticized as a lack of real commitment of the European Commission on addressing the situation of Roma in Europe; however, as Kovats (2012) has strongly argued, “focusing in the shortcomings of the Commission

---

<sup>26</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* (Brussels: European Commission, 2011).

distracts attention away from where primary political responsibility to bring about change lies, at the national level,” pointing out to the fact that the EU treaties keep competency for social policy to member states. Therefore, the key message sent to the stakeholders was that the improving of the situation of the Roma was a task that needs to be done by joining forces. The EU Framework goals should be pursued by implementing integrated actions that account and recognize the connection between all the targeted areas. Romani families are the ones experiencing the mutually reinforcing nature of the existing barriers, therefore, simultaneous, coordinated and integrated solutions should be advanced. The integrated approach should be developed alongside of mainstreaming and the principle of “explicit but not exclusively” or “transfer of evidence-based policies” as well as the rest of Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion.<sup>27</sup>

Given that the Framework is not a legal document but a political commitment from the EU Member States, it complements already existing EU legislation such as the Lisbon Treaty that states that the Roma people have the right to be treated like any other EU citizens. Drawing from this, it complements the task already initiated by the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, which was radically oriented to eradicate poverty by 2010. Other two-cornerstone legislation that the EU Framework for the Roma Inclusion complements is the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), and the Directive on the right to move and reside freely (2004/38/EC).<sup>28</sup>

As a strategy of the EU Framework, the Commission asked all EU Member States to elaborate a comprehensive strategy for Roma inclusion by the end of 2011, all taking into account the different national stages. Thus, each Member State would have its own National Roma Strategy, focused on the goals set out in the EU Framework but detailing how these goals would be achieved and thus pointing at the specific measures. This approach actually helped to solve the problem of who hold the competency by making EU Member States the final responsible for their commitments rather than the ones imposed by the EU (Kovats, 2012).

---

<sup>27</sup> The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion were presented at the first Platform meeting on 24 April 2009. They were annexed to the Council Conclusions on Roma Inclusion (Luxembourg, 8 June 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Working Together for Roma Inclusion. The EU Framework explained

Funding for the implementation of the Roma initiatives comes from European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme, and other sources such as EU Programmes (e.g. Daphne, Youth in Action Programme, Culture Programme).

Regarding the use of financial aid, the Commission supports that on those instances where Member States do not have the needed skills –the “know-how– or capacity to manage projects effectively, the Commission suggests that “the management and implementation of part of their national programmes could be entrusted to intermediary bodies such as international organizations, regional development bodies, churches and religious organization or communities as well as non-governmental organizations with proven experience in Roma integration and knowledge of actors on the ground“ (European Commission, 2011, p. 10). This is important because the Commission gives high value to the good management of fund dedicated to the Roma inclusion and make the State Members accountable for them. At the same time, such an opening of funds involved a new *market share* for many NGOs and experts who live from the Roma poverty acting as intermediaries in the management of funds and providing advice of how the intervention should be done, many times without even asking the own communities what their real needs are (Sigona and Trehan, 2009; van Baar, 2012).

#### *Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005-2015)*

Another important political effort of a very similar nature than the EU Framework for the Roma Inclusion is the “Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005-2015)”, an initiative launched in 2005 by the World Bank and the Open Society Institute. The Decade brought together governments, intergovernmental and NGOs as well as Roma civil society and is focused on the same four areas than the EU Framework: education, employment, health, and housing, as well as cross-cutting topics of gender equity, anti-discrimination and poverty. This is not an institution but a programme in which participating governments reallocate resources to achieve results which have been previously defined. In this sense, the Decade is currently constituted by twelve countries but open to new countries that want to join it. This initiative works according to the

“Decade’s terms of reference,” which involves national action plans, policy coordination, exchange of experiences, revision and demonstration of progress, participation and provision of information and expert support. Moreover, the Decade works in close cooperation with the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union, serving as a forum for Roma civil society organizations to get involved with governments on Roma related issues. In turn the Decade serves as a forum for governments to report on the implementation of their commitments.

At among the Decade’s achievements it can be mentioned that it motivated national and EU commitment with the “Roma issue”; it raised the overall awareness at the political level of Roma exclusion; it promoted the participation of Roma people in policy discussion affecting them, which was indeed a goal of the very Decade; and it motivated the creation of specific mechanisms and the mobilization of new resources for Roma inclusion (e.g. Roma Education Fund was created). Some of the problems recognized by the Decade were its ambitious mission and general priorities, the disproportional resources (“the adequacy of funding”); its non-enforcement capacity and thus, its incapability of guaranteeing the adhesion of governments to the commitments they initially assumed; or even more important, the shortcomings in the structure, all those structures created ad-hoc for the decade have been criticized for lacking mandate and qualified staff (24th International Steering Committee of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2012)

## **5.2. A look from the grassroots: towards an emancipatory approach**

“Every project leads to a new project. Every conference leads to the demand for even more conferences, for even more training. One Platform for Roma affairs follows another, with no results at all. This industry monopolises the discussion. It devours millions of euros in order to come to the conclusion that it needs even more money for new placebos. In the meanwhile, millions of Roma are being displaced, are being driven from one country to another, and are losing their homes. This Roma policy is Part of the Problem, and in no way part of a solution (...)” (Kawczynski, 2015)

The fragments from above are from an open letter from Rudko Kawczynski, former president of the ERFT, circulated on the Roma Virtual Network. The letter clearly summarizes what the major problems of what has been defined by some scholars as the “helper industry” (Kawczynski), the “gypsy industry” (Barany, 2011), or the “NGO-ization of the Romani movement” (Nirenberg, 2009; Trehan, 2009). There is a certain consensus around the idea of how the much positive political advances made by the RRM in pushing forward the *Roma issue* until achieving its mainstreaming in the political agenda of both governments and international organizations, this have had to some extent at its expense, the objectification and bureaucratization not only of the Roma struggle but also of the Roma plight: the Roma issue is somehow used as an *excuse* for the survival of many job positions of NGOs’ workers and experts, meanwhile poverty and social exclusion of the Roma people remain unaddressed. Aid and resources invested in intervention and research projects aimed at overcoming the social exclusion of the Romani people social exclusion have often been *placebos*. Research has evidenced how for achieving good results in the improvement of the living conditions of vulnerable people, it is not enough to count with the resources, but interventions should also be done based on at least two elements, scientific evidence of what have worked and also counting with the voices of the grassroots communities (INCLUD-ED, 2011).

Although we do have now a growing number of examples of good practices with Roma communities in Europe especially from the local level in the fields of education, employment, access to health, and social and political participation (Guy, 2009; Sordé et al., 2013; Flecha & Soler, 2013; INCLUD-ED, 2011), much more needs to be done in order to maximize the social impact of the invested funds. Romani people are tired of being the scapegoats and “subjects” of researchers-experts, *Gypsyloists* and social workers who come to them just when they need something from the Roma: “Many Romani families have often felt betrayed by ‘best-seller seekers’ who, after obtaining the necessary information for their novels, have forgotten about them. Roma hospitality, therefore, turns into a reluctance and refusal to be exploited” (Flecha & Soler, 2014, p. 233b).

Some scholars have analysed the impact that the emergence of institutional regimes and funding schemes since 1990 targeted to improving the Roma situation have had on the RRM. Similarly they have focused on how the destination of new funding has



facilitated the flourishing of new NGOs concerned with the Roma human rights, what have not supposed yet the expected shift in the Roma issue. In turn, lessons from the Roma movement and from mainstream social movements can be learnt regarding how to turn the path of this situation. In this sense, an aspect around which there is a wide consensus is that social intervention in order to be successful needs to count with the voices of the grassroots people and gain the support of the local agents (Guy, 2009; Kovats, 2012; Flecha & Soler, 2013, 2014; Niremburg, 2009; Sobotka & Vermeersch, 2012; Trehan, 2009).

Will Guy (2009) has contributed to the debate about the use of the EU funds, illuminating some ways that can lead to a more efficiency. Guy (2009) argues that some of the barriers that had hindered the success of the EU-funded initiatives - such as the PHARE funds (Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies)<sup>29</sup> - was that they tried to cover aims that were really unfeasible, at least within the established time. Besides this, the initiatives lacked support for the development of adequate strategies for economic and social development, as so did the instruments for delivering them. Another shortcoming that he mentions is that pilot investments were more commonly invested based on the basis of *ad hoc* allocations of funding with limited impact, rather than on serious assessments (EMS 2004a, in Guy, 2009). But although he reflects on the limitations of the EU initiatives, he also gives some insights on what according to him should be the path of increase the effectiveness of these programmes. He notes that there are some foremost criteria for the aid schemes to succeed such as a good budgetary planning, the capacity of influence of public authorities at the local level, that such schemes need to count with the support of non-Roma otherwise these will turn in resistances for the programmes. And eventually, another remarkable action in order to make funds more effective could be to design a more targeted, Roma-specific framework strategy, commanded by a centralized EU secretariat with its own budget (Guy, 2009).

In a pilot research carried out for evaluating the impact of a selection of EU-funded Roma projects in Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic, Guy and Kovats (2006) outline that although these projects brought additional resources and benefits, these

---

<sup>29</sup> For more information, see: "Briefing N° 33. The PHARE Programme and the enlargement of the European Union" [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/briefings/33a1\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/briefings/33a1_en.htm)

were inadequate for effectively tackling the problems of the Roma communities (p. 3). Main problems identified for their success was in terms of budget, time and expertise, what limited the sustainability of the initiatives. Additionally, Roma people were not consulted about the implementation neither had them real influence over the planning due to the timescale imposed by the programme. There are several remarkable “lessons to be learnt” from this evaluation, among which it is worth mentioning some of them: expertise is required to assess proposals from national governments for the use of EU funds; NGOs and media organizations should work together to ensure greater accountability of national politicians and administrators so that EU funding allocated for the Roma people is used efficiently; EU-funds should be used to develop relationships with local Roma representatives and communities, and there should be greater public awareness of EU-funded Roma projects in order to demonstrate the contribution Roma can make to the entire community (Guy & Kovats, 2006, p. 16-17).

The reflections of Sobotka and Vermeersch are quite in line with the ones of Guy and Kovats. Analysing the recent EU developments of policymaking on the Roma, these authors argue that since 2007 the EU has made discursively and in practice, a policy decision in favour of more broadly defined strategies of fostering social inclusion (Sobotka & Vermeersch, 2012, p. 801). But their argument is that in order for the EU initiatives to succeed, both approaches (the human rights and the social inclusion method) need to go hand in hand in the EU policy, as although there is a strong commitment by the side of the EU with the achievement of the Roma human rights, this might not be sufficient to providing the resources needed to empower the most vulnerable groups. What these authors state is that the issue of socioeconomic disparity continues downplaying the EU intentions. These authors argue that in order for the EU mechanisms to be a catalyst for “local social change” they need to find a balance between human rights implementation and social inclusion strategies. They will also need to work towards linking European, national and local policy structures, improving data collection and assessing the impact on the field. As well as Guy (2009), Sobotka and Vermeersch also emphasize the major role that local authorities play in determining the success of the NGOs initiatives with the Roma people. As they suggest, local authorities need to become involved in the integration of all their citizens; it is even a kind of moral commitment that the local authorities should assume and hence work towards this achievement: “There is an urgent need for EU policies to garner the full

support of the local governing elites and local majority populations. Without such support, even the most promising policies may not lead to lasting positive results on the ground” (Sobotka and Vermeersch, 2012, p. 802).

Within this debate, Trehan’s (2009) analyses the confluence of neoliberalism with the process of the ‘NGO-ization of the Romani movement, a phenomenon that has led to suppressing the Romani ‘voices from below’. Many NGOs speak for the Romani people instead of letting them speak by themselves, hindering the development of an autonomous, democratic voice that can really represent the needs of European Romani communities. Drawing her analysis from a ‘neoliberal human rights’ approach, Trehan argues that the current ‘Roma movement’ has been shaped by actors –and their neoliberal interests– who have little to do with the Roma community: “notwithstanding the critical contributions of an earlier generation of Romani activists (...), the creation of a ‘Roma movement’ dominated by NGOs subscribing to a neoliberal agenda was itself an imposition from outside the Romani communities and has been an arena of strategic instrumentalisation by elite participants (both Roma and non-Roma)” (Trehan, 2009, p. 54).

What Trehan stands for in front of this, is the need of listening to the *Roma subaltern*. Relying on a Gramscian approach, she points that there are currently some organic intellectuals among the Roma community along with Roma people who can count in order to let speak those from below and organize the Romani community. Along similar lines, Nirenberg’s critique tackles the ‘NGOization of the Roma issue’. Based on his own experience as Roma activist and working in international Romani organizations and their donors, he argues that since the 90s decade was when the donation started to be shaped, many NGOs leaders were strongly influenced by the donors’ interests. Thus, many of the newly-emerged NGOs, as they did not have a broad-based membership or an engaged board of directors, fell under the influence of their own stakeholders, which were actually the own donors and the same ones who establish the conditions –and the agenda (Nirenberg, 2009, p. 100). This explains why, at the centre of the debate -in terms of “who are the ones listened by institutional agencies and governmental bodies”- there are no longer the IRU or the RNC, but other international organizations that hold much power (e.g.: Soros Foundation). This in turn has raised the criticism by the side of IRU and RNC members who have manifested that their positions have been ignored at

international forums, defending the argument that they are the grassroots “Romani leaders.” As Nirenberg well-puts it: “the unelected (IRU and RNC voices) accused the unelected of having no right to speak of the masses” (Ibid., p. 102).

The issue of who is the most suitable representative of the Roma community at an international level and –even more challenging for the topic of how to better allocate resources– how to reach the grassroots communities, has been a central question among the RRM, and a topic of discussion within the social movements’ literature and that focusing on community organizing (Alinsky, 1989; Ganz, 2009, 2010). In what concerns the Romani movement, the debate is still contested, and it is important in so far as it is very linked to the debate on the professionalization of Romani activism (Trehan 2009; van Baar, 2013). Mirga and Gheorghe made some reflections in this regard in their paper elaborated for the PER in 1997. In this sense, both authors explained how among the majority of the Roma community leadership was developed by the elders, the ones who hold power. Elders or Persons of respect of the community were a source of legitimacy for the movement; however, this position was somehow confronted by the position taken by the state, which did not legitimize leaders rooted in the community but others who found a legitimate basis in their formal constituencies. The surface of new Romani organization in the nineties whose leadership were based on their constituencies was an alerting situation that a conflict would emerge for the clash with other traditional existing leaders of the communities.

But Gheorghe (2013) with great foresight of ideas went beyond the dispute of defending one particular leader, for pointing that Roma activists within the Roma movement should be clear and act together in order for the movement to have a common aim: “[the Roma movement’s aim should be] that of organizing, mobilizing and re-mobilizing the Roma, based on pursuing the struggle against racism and discrimination”. According to him, in order to do this, Roma groups need to establish alliances with a wide variety of stakeholders such as local authorities, civic associations, churches and political parties. So in his own understanding, the very Roma people are the ones that should take the lead in their social transformation and change the situation of their people. This needs to be done in order to overcome the picture of the Roma as poor and excluded, victims of society, an image that removes them from their capacity of taking action. Against those labelled as “Roma experts”, Gheorghe argues that many times this bring problems as it

represents the notion of a '*gadjo*' figure which tries to be Roma just to benefit from the label while building a personal career "at the expense of the Roma", in the sense Flecha and Soler (2013) referred. Gheorghe adds that these experts could always be criticized for not having real connections with the actual grassroots Roma even if this is not true. So in order to avoid constructed representations of the Roma culture and prove the real 'authenticity' of activists and leaders, Roma intermediaries can perform their tasks experiencing them from their own identities, ensuring the coherence with their values and principles, but maximizing the potential and uniqueness of the Roma contribution. Gheorghe's notion of how a leadership for the Roma movement should be recall Marshall Ganz's contributions regarding leadership in social movements and community organizing, an art that should be performed using the "heart" (the values), the "head" (a strategy) and the "hands" (actions) of people, from mobilizing the feelings and values of others (Ganz, 2010).

What has been explained in this chapter is required in order to understand how Romani women are organizing and struggling for the articulation of their own women's mobilization, taking the lead for social change in their families and in their communities, and setting up their own agenda within the Roma rights' movement. Constituting themselves as political actors at the European sphere, Romani women are playing a major role that is going ahead of legislation but has started to be taken into account.

## **PART 3. METHODOLOGY**

## CHAPTER 6. METHODOLOGY

The methodological rationale under which the present investigation is developed is a case study. All the research process has been framed under the communicative methodology (Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011), recognized for contributing to the scientific, political and social impact due to its transformative character and its potential to foster social change, especially with underserved and marginalized communities (Mertens & Sordé, 2014). This dissertation is therefore a case study of the Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen, in which qualitative methods have been used as the main data collection strategy.

This chapter is structured as follows: first I present the study's objectives and its hypothesis. Second, I explain the methodological framework rationale. Third, I explicate the research design, and then I share some reflections on the potential biases, the study's internal and external validity as well as the acknowledged limitations. Finally, I explain the reasons why I selected the Romani Women Association Drom Kotar Mestipen (hereinafter, DKM) to conduct the case study.

### 6.1. The study's objectives and hypothesis

As I have explained in the Introduction of this dissertation, the general aim of this research is to **conduct a sociological study of the organising that fosters and enables the grassroots Romani women to exercise and enhance their human agency as a way of both eradicating discrimination and engaging in a process of individual and collective empowerment.**

Drawing my theoretical framework on dual theories, on some specific considerations in between social movements, organising, leadership and associationism, all these read at the light of the Romani feminism, and taken into account the contributions from my literature review the Romani Rights Movement and the Romani Women's Movement, in order to contest my objective I have defined also a general hypothesis: taking the sociological study conducted on a Romani women organisation, I suggest that to some

extent **this mobilisation has specific features that have allowed the Romani women involved in engage in a process of personal, family, community and social transformation.** Particularly, I am interested in shedding light into whether **these processes of social transformations are actually challenging long-standing discrimination and disparities that they suffer by engaging in social mobilisation at the very grassroots level. Acting through networks of solidarity among the Romani women or with non-Romani women while claiming for a Romani feminism (Sánchez-Aroca, 2005), this social mobilisation is having an impact in their own lives (at an individual level), in their families (community level) and also in shaping and fostering a Romani women’s movement from below (societal level) which give voice to those women traditionally silenced (De Botton, Puigvert and Sánchez-Aroca, 2005, Sordé, 2006; Brooks, 2012; Oprea, 2012).**

This dissertation is a case study of a Romani women association through which I look at a wider social reality, how the Romani women exercise their human agency in order to rise up a single voice and claim for their rights, as women, as Roma and as not academic. From this broad study of the Romani women’s human agency I concrete my research on four specific objectives.

### **Specific objective 1.**

First, **to carry out an in-depth analysis of a Roma association of women as a case where the Romani women’s human agency is effectively fostered and enabled, understanding and defining which are the underlying features that make possible that this association becomes a hub of social change for Romani women involved in its activities.** In order to understand and define which are these features, I delve on an analysis of the own association, and more specifically, on some aspects regarding the dynamics of the association. Through this specific objective I will answer some questions such as *Which are the elements identified in the associations (regarding its structure, ruling principle, membership composition, activities) that make it to have a single character? Which are those essential defining elements of the particular Romani women’s mobilisation from the bottom-up?*



**Sub-hypothesis 1:** Drawing from literature revised, I state that the association studied presents **particular characteristics that make it being a site where Romani women’s agency is effectively fostered and enhanced**. In line with the general hypothesis, at both the decision-making processes and the governing structure of the association there is a **centrality of the voices of the grassroots Romani women**, “the other women” (Puigvert, 2006). Thus, its protagonists are those non-academic women who have been traditionally excluded from public spaces of debate and decision making. Additionally, the association **fosters a public narrative** (Ganz, 2010) among its members and participants which unites them for a common struggle, eradicating discrimination and their individual and collective empowerment. Another underlying feature is that the discourse and the practices of the association are not just oriented towards denouncing the plight of the Romani women, but towards tackling it by looking for the most effective solution and thus, implementing them (Gómez, Racionero, & Sordé, 2010). Therefore, I state that this association is underpinned by a **solution-based rationale**.

#### **Specific objective 2.**

My second specific objective states as follows: **to examine the impact of the Romani women’s collective agency organised in a Roma association of women in broadening their opportunities**. Thus, *I wonder through this specific objective, in what ways the Romani women’s collective agency organised in a Roma association of women broadens the opportunities of Romani women involved in its activities? So, how the actual opportunities of the women are enhanced? What are the perceived changes in the women’s lives and routines once they get involved? In what ways the broadening of their opportunities enable them to engage in a process of individual empowerment?*

**Sub-hypothesis 2:** in order to establish sub-hypothesis 2 I draw from the idea of *opportunity* of Amartya Sen, related to his capability approach (1999) in which opportunities are defined as those arrangements that society makes that together with other elements (political freedoms, economic facilities, transparency guarantee and protective security) influence the individual’s substantive freedom to live better. Thus, capability is an aspect of freedom, concentrating in particular to substantive opportunities. Sen’s capability approach shifts the attention from the actual means of living to the opportunities that a person has. This is of key relevance for this study: **I**

**suggest that participating in the association broadens the Romani women's opportunities in the field of education, employment and social participation, what empowers them and deeply enhances their human agency.**

### **Specific objective 3.**

The third specific objective focuses on looking at the impact on the community level: it aims at **exploring the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women in broadening the opportunities of their own families.**

In this research the way how I understand the idea of *family* is that of the *extended Roma family*, linked to a specific way of organising life in which all people with who Roma themselves consider kin is included, and with who they feel identified with their homes, their culture, or their way of doing things. This way, care and relations is also extended to an idea of family and more related to that of a community. This clarified, by means of addressing this specific objective I will be able to respond to the following questions: In what ways the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women broadens the opportunities of Romani women's families? What is the impact of the women's mobilisation on their own families? How are they perceived within their families and communities once they get involved in the association? In what specific ways the Roma association support the Romani women involved to become *agents of change* within their families?

**Sub-hypothesis 3:** drawing from specific elements of the Romani feminism such as the group as a way of organising, the idea of intergenerational solidarity, the claim for respect and equality for all the Roma people (Sánchez-Aroca, 2005), and also taking into account the acknowledged value of the family within the Roma culture, **I suggest that once Romani women get involved in the association they are not solely the ones who are empowered, in turn, they become agents of change within their own families translating to their homes many of the issues and debates discussed at those spaces shared in the association. Thus, particular changes are experienced within the families once the Romani women engage in the social mobilisation:** the way how they are perceived is changed, gender roles sometimes negotiated and Romani women become also positive role models for other people within the community. These

are some of the reasons that facilitate them to be “agitators” within their own families, capitalizing their human agency gains on their families and communities in terms of influencing the broadening of their opportunities (as previously defined).

#### **Specific objective 4.**

Finally, the fourth specific objective tackled in the dissertation **is to explore the impact of the Romani women’s collective agency organised in a Roma association of women on shaping and fostering the own grassroots Romani women’s mobilisation at the community level and beyond.** Drawing from this, some of the questions that will guide this specific objective are the following: *In what ways the Romani women’s collective agency, when organised, contributes to shape and foster the grassroots Romani women’s mobilisation at the community level and beyond? Through which specific strategies and actions it operates at the different levels? How the Romani women’s mobilisation and the Romani feminism is contributing to shape a more inclusive feminism?*

**Sub-hypothesis 4:** I point out that the Romani women organisation studied is contributing to shape and fostering the Romani women’s movement from below, thus giving voice to those traditionally silenced (De Botton, Puigvert and Sánchez-Aroca, 2005, Sordé, 2006; Brooks, 2012; Oprea, 2012). This has been possible as this organisation is using strategies that opposes exclusionary ways of working, asking for the demonopolization of the expert knowledge (Beck 1997) at different levels, including the own women at all the decisions, and knitting networks of allies with institutions that work with a similar approach.

## **6.2. Communicative Methodology**

I conducted this study employing the *communicative methodology of research*, a methodological approach characterized for its dialogic orientation that has been widely recognized by its transformative potential (Mertens & Sordé, 2014). As explained by Gómez, Puigvert and Flecha (2011), communicative methodology is a tool to ‘explain,

understand, and interpret social situations which aims at changing society, -driven by utopian dreams of equality and justice' (p. 237). Several publications specifically on methods' journals have analysed in-depth the reasons why this methodology is effective in contributing to the scientific, social and political impact of the research' results, outlining the suitability of this methods to conduct studies with Roma (Flecha, 2014; Gómez, 2011; Mertens & Sordé, 2014). These publications have pointed at the own premises on which the communicative methodology stands as well as the methodological strategies that it uses in order to include the voices of the 'researched' subjects as key elements to illuminate new knowledge for informing social change.

Regarding the premises of the communicative methodology, this approach draws from the theoretical contributions of the contemporary sociological tradition. From Habermas (1987) it adopts the dual conception of reality, including *systems* and *lifeworld*. Bringing this idea to the methodological field involves on the one hand, integrating the knowledge of the *system*, understood as the one from the international academic community, all the knowledge and theories that researchers possess from their academic background; and on the other hand, integrating the knowledge from the individuals' lifeworlds, that is, the knowledge created by the interpretations and the generalizations that subjects do based on their own experiences (Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011). The communicative process of research involves incorporating both, *systems* –brought in by researchers- and *lifeworlds* –brought in by 'researched subjects', those traditionally silenced in academic research. In this study, the development of knowledge about a Romani association of women and its derived impacts on different dimensions arises from the dialogue between the accumulated scientific knowledge on the Romani women's rights movement, the Romani feminism, and those factors that move cultural minorities to participate in civic associations and shape social movements, and the knowledge that results from the own experiences and meanings of the Romani women who have engaged in the studied association. Thus, communicative methodology assumes the universality of the language and action (Chomsky, 1988; Habermas, 1984): everyone has linguistic and communicative competencies, so everyone can contribute to the dialogic creation of knowledge. This is a key premise on which the communicative methodology is built, the idea that social reality is a human creation in which meanings are constructed communicatively in interaction among people. The communicative approach assumes the disappearance of the interpretative hierarchy between the researcher

and the researched subject, assuming that this relation should be based on arguments that both parts provide and not on their social or academic position (Habermas, 1987). Research is conceived as a form of an egalitarian dialogue that involves the construction of knowledge based on intersubjectivity and joint reflection. All these lead to the postulates of the equal epistemological level, the assumption of the communicative rationality, and recognition of people's common sense as being able to interpret the reasons for action.

During the research process the importance of the interpretations of the subjects is considered with Schütz' phenomenology (Schütz & Luckmann, 1974), which make possible strengthening the role of typifications in building ideal types. The CM also includes Mead's symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) which emphasizes that interactions make people's interpretations change, and thus do not only depend on the individual subject. While researchers and the researched subjects engage in an intersubjective dialogue both of them can be changing their initial conceptions of reality, contemplating the points of view of the other and maybe integrating them into their own *lifeworlds*. This is other of the premises of the communicative methodology, the recognition of people as *transformative social agents* (Freire, 1997), that is, acknowledging people's ability to reflect and interpret their reality, creating knowledge and building on their own practices. Garfinkel's ethnomethodology framework (Garfinkel, 1967) is considered for a better understanding of the subject's insights in their contexts.

The communicative methodology can be used either in qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods studies for doing investigations, it allows the involvement of end-users throughout the research process and thus, the agreement between researchers and end-users of all methodological strategies –quantitative and qualitative– implemented in the research, as well as the validation of the results by the “researched subjects”, and its dissemination. Different methodological strategies are used by the CM to include the researched subjects during the process of research. The inclusion of the subjects in the own research teams in order to ensure that the voices of the researched communities are taken into account since the very beginning of the process is one way of breaking with the conception of researched subjects as mere objects of researchers. Another strategy implemented in CM investigations consists in the creation of ad-hoc advisory councils,

a consultancy body of the whole investigation in which there are represented the voices of the vulnerable social group on which is focused the study (Munté, Serradell, Sordé, 2011). These are just some of the strategies used by CM that allowed to include grassroots people in meaningful ways, what enriches the own research process and in turn makes increasing its own transformative potential, for the own excluded communities and for society at large (Flecha, 2014, p. 252).

In all, the transformative character of the communicative methodology has made it to be extensively used in studies related with the Roma, as it is committed not only with analysing and describing reality and denouncing the exclusionary components, but also to identify the transformative effects of actions that have demonstrated to be successful in overcoming them. The communicative approach in relation to Romani studies have moved from “researching about what excludes” to “researching about what works”, based on the participation of the Roma community throughout the research process. This has been a process followed not only in the FP5 Workaló project, but also in FP6 INCLUD-ED project, and other Spanish-funded research investigations focused on the Roma in which I have had the opportunity to participate as junior researcher: DROM-IN project (2009-2011) and TRANSROMA project (2012-2015). All these projects have counted with the participation of researchers of Roma origin in their research team, and they have had the support of an advisory council that has assessed and validated the results of the investigations. Besides this, the FP5 Workaló and FP6 INCLUD-ED have also informed several recommendations and communications approved by the European Commission and the European Council, leading to a recognized political and social impact<sup>30</sup>.

For my study, the way of bringing in the voices of the Romani women, the ‘researched’ subjects, was not only at the time of collective data, but also for achieving consensus regarding the interpretation of results. I double-checked with the Romani women and

---

<sup>30</sup> European Parliament resolution on the situation of Roma people in the European Union: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+MOTION+B6-2005-0274+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN> (Accessed on December 2014); European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on educating the children of migrants (2008/2328(INI))  
Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of education and training (2010/C 135/02)  
Communication from the EC (January 2011). Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda.  
European Parliament resolution of 9 March 2011 on the EU strategy on Roma inclusion (2010/2276(INI))  
Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving (June 2011) (10544/11)

with the non-Romani women my interpretations of their narratives. This was done in subsequent discussion sessions with them, a processes run by *communicative rationality* (Habermas, 1984) implicit in the communicative approach.

In order to collect data I used both general research methods with a communicative orientation such as interviews, and also specific communicative methods such as communicative observations and communicative daily life stories. For the analysis of data, besides interpreting the results distinguishing among the transformative and exclusionary elements that are characteristic of the communicative approach, as explained above, I met with participants and I discussed my interpretation of data.

In line with the transformative character of the communicative approach, one goal of this study is to illuminate on knowledge that can strengthen the Romani women's mobilisation showing how Romani women are successfully organising at the very grassroots level. This approach commits with what Wright (2009) calls *emancipatory social sciences*, that sciences that (as said at the introduction to this dissertation) looks not only to denounce what do not work but also to create scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project that enable overcoming human oppression, a sociology that 'announces' strategies and actions that do work (Freire, 1996). It also commits with Burawoy calls the *public sociology* (2005), aimed at motivating dialogue among sociology and expert knowledge with the very diverse publics, making that the sociologist to engage with the multiple publics in multiple ways, putting scientific knowledge at the service of society and thus responding to social problems. In all, this dissertation aligns with all these approaches, establishing dialogic relations among *the sociologist-experts* and the *publics*, pursuing also to connect sociology with the needs of "the other" Romani women with the aim to create emancipatory knowledge.

## **6.2. The rationale: case study**

I have gathered different type of data in order to construct an *instrumental* single case study (Stake, 2005) of the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen. Yin (2003) has defined a case study as:

“(1) an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; (2) the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result; relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion; and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2009, p. 13-14).

My case is defined as an instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) as by studying the concrete case of a Roma Association of women the present investigation is aimed at embracing a broader endeavour, understanding how organising is conducted in order to foster and enable those grassroots Romani women to exercise their human agency in order of both eradicating discrimination and engaging in a process of individual and collective empowerment. Thus, by previously identifying a set of evidences that have allowed me to choose the case of the Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen as a site where grassroots Romani women exercise their agency (already exposed in the previous section), I look through this reality in order to understand and be able to extract further conclusions to the broader social reality of the Romani women and to the social reality of the Romani women’s movement.

Based on Yin, in designing my case study I establish my units of analysis. In order to do this I have to go back to my specific research objectives, what led me to determine that my unit of analysis are first, the own women who participate in the association (mainly Romani women members and Romani women who are participants of its activities), and also the Association itself, as it is the site where their agency is performed. Drawing from this, my conclusions will be derived from analysing the *lifeworlds* (Habermas, 1987) of the Romani women involved in the association (as members and as participants in its activities) in relation to different levels of analysis (explain in more detail in *Data analysis* section):

Level 1: association’s organising features (SO1)

Level 2: individual level (SO2)

Level 3: community level (SO2)



**Table 1: Analytical Model**

	<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Unit of analysis</b>	<b>Level of analysis</b>
1	To carry out an in-depth analysis of a Roma association of women as a case where the Romani women's human agency is effectively fostered and enabled, understanding and defining which are the underlying features that make possible this association becomes a hub of social change for Romani women.	Association	Association's organising features
2	To examine the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women in broadening their opportunities.	Romani women and Association	Individual: impact of the Romani women's collective agency on the own women's
3	To explore the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women in broadening the opportunities of their own families.	Romani women and Association	Community: Romani women's family and its close surroundings. Impact of the Romani women's collective agency on their families
4	To explore the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women on shaping and fostering the own grassroots Romani women's mobilisation at the community level and beyond	Romani women and Association	Societal: Lifeworlds of the grassroots Romani women on the Romani women's mobilisation at the grassroots level.

### 6.3. Data collection

In order to collect the necessary data, I have used different sources of evidence, ranging from specific fieldwork carried out for the investigation, to secondary documentation and archival records collected (grey literature) from the DKM. Regarding the fieldwork carried out for the study I employed specific qualitative data collection techniques such as communicative observations, communicative daily life stories, interviews and communicative focus groups (used for the validation of the findings).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See Annex 2: Table 1. Summary of data collection. It summarizes the data collection process, including for each specific objective its unit of analysis, the methods used and the type of participants involved.

**Table 2. Summary of the data collection techniques**

	Profile and number
Document Analysis	Secondary documentation and archival
Communicative observations	2 c.o. of intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting.  6 c.o. of DKM assemblies  Total: 7
Interviews	Non-Roma women members of DKM: 5  Romani women activist member of other Romani women's association: 2  Total: 7
Communicative focus groups	1 Romani and non-Romani women members of DKM  Total: 1
Daily life stories	Romani women members of DKM: 6 1 Romani women from Shine Association of Romani Women (pseudonym): 1 Romani women participants of some DKM activity or which have been involved in the association in the past: 15  Total: 22

The main part of the fieldwork was carried out from March 2015 to June 2015 (interviews and communicative life stories); nonetheless, some specific daily life stories that were difficult to reach within these months were conducted also in the month of July and September 2015.

For this research, **the study participants have been divided into three groups** which I called group A, group B and group C:<sup>32</sup>

**Group A. DKM members** (6 Romani women and 5 non-Romani women). These are Romani and non-Romani women who agree and believe in the association's objectives and participate in its activities through different ways, and who attend in a regularly basis to the association's assemblies.

---

<sup>32</sup> See Annex 3. Table 2. Fieldwork Study Participants

*Characteristic profile of the Romani women:* middle and low SES background, diversity of ages; three of them have completed university degrees, the others have primary education or secondary education. Two of them are non-Spanish: American and Romanian. They have also diverse religious beliefs.

*Characteristic profile of the non-Romani women:* diversity of ages, middle SES background, all of them have completed university. Some of them are university lecturers, other are secondary education teachers, and other work in social services.

**Group B. DKM community of participants** (15 Romani women). These are Romani women who have participated and/or are engaged in the DKM's activities (intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting; Romí Training; EU-projects' activities; 1<sup>st</sup> international Romani Women Congress). They have been selected according diversity of profile: women of different ages who have participated in the different editions of the different activities. Contacted through Group A (members of DKM).

*Characteristic profile:* these women range from those with very low SES background, women who have not academic credentials and are in difficult economic situations, with a family economy amidst the formal and informal sector, and with family responsibilities; to those other women of low-middle SES who have completed middle or upper training programmes and are currently working, whose personal economic situation although difficult, is more stable. Within these group I have added those other young Roman women who had completed their training internships in the association studied.

**Group C. Women who represent Romani women's associations which collaborate with DKM.** (4 women). These are women selected to participate in the study foremost for representing members of other Romani women's association with which DKM have collaborations (in order to cover specific objective 4).

*Characteristic profile:* These are 4 women of different background: three of them have similar background than women from Group B, and actually can be considered part of the community of participants of DKM (see Annex 3 in order to have a fully description of their profile). The other woman is non-Roma and has academic credentials, she is a representing member of the Federation of Associations of Romani Women, Kamira, reached through DKM members.

#### *Document analysis*

Secondary documentation and archival records become one of the main sources of evidence to answer specific objectives one (organising and features of the association) and four (impact at the societal level). Specifically, annual reports, reports submitted by DKM for justify funding of the different projects it has led, minutes of meetings and assemblies since year 1999 to the present have been the archival documentation of the association that has been consulted. Additionally, secondary documentation issued by Roma organisms provided by DKM has also been consulted (e.g.: publications of the International Romani Union, the OSCE, the Open Society Forum). Other information consulted has been different documents available in the DKM website and other European Roma associations.

#### *Communicative observations*

This dissertation focuses its attention in understanding which are the underlying features that make possible that DKM becomes a hub of social change for Romani women (specific objective 1). Communicative observation has been one of the research technique used to address those issues related the strategies and actions developed by DKM, as well as the mechanisms that operate behind the Romani women's mobilisation. This technique has allowed me to observe and describe situations in relation to these aspects should be registered due to the subjects involved in it: e.g. Romani women who had never attended to a Romani students' meeting, or specific month assemblies of the association. I was particularly interested in paying attention on how interactions took place among people involved in these activities, Romani and non-Romani women, focusing for instance, on capturing the strategies followed by DKM members in order to promote the participation of grassroots Romani women or make them to be the real protagonists of each activity carried out.

As a technique of data collection observations allow to directly witness a phenomena. When conducting a communicative observation, the researcher and the subject of the observation deal and share in position of equality the meanings and interpretations of the actions, their attitudes, motivations, skills or other elements characteristics of the non-verbal language (Gómez et al., 2006). Thus, the difference with participant observation is that in the communicative observation there is a dialogue just before the beginning of the observation in which the researcher explain the objectives of the research and the strategy to be followed after its end in order to validate the results. Participant observation *per se* is characterised by its participative nature: the researcher gets close to the activity as participant, not just to get close to the other but also to try to get something of the experience they have down on paper (Stake, 2012). Researcher access to the social reality of the subjects, taking notes and registering the descriptions and reflections in an accurate way perceived in the natural context. The result of the participant observation is not dialogically shared with the researched subjects. This is different under the communicative approach, what in turn can modify the final interpretations made by the researcher about the results of the observation: there can be different interpretations about the same phenomena observed and experienced with the researched subjects; however, intersubjective dialogue among the researcher and the subjects that have been observed after the observation allow to reach an agreement about the results (Gómez et al., 2006).

Among the different activities in which I have been involved in DKM, I decided to conduct communicative observations of two intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting (Campclar, Tarragona, June 2013; Terrassa, November 2016), and of some assemblies of DKM. Thus, 7 observations were carried out.

#### *Communicative Observations*

I have conducted communicative observations in two Romani Women Intergenerational Meetings and Six assemblies.

Although I have participated as a volunteer in four of its editions: Badia del Vallés (2011); Bon Pastor (November, 2012); Campclar (June, 2013) and Terrassa (November 2015). Specifically for this research, I observed and participated in two Romani Women Students' Meeting, the editions of Campclar and Terrassa.

The aim of this observation was capturing the organisation and developing of the sessions of the students' meeting, focusing specially on two moments of this event: the positive role models' roundtable (Romani women who explain their experience as students and engage in a dialogue with the rest of the participants), and the working groups' sessions. Each of these two sessions lasted around 1 hour and 30 minutes. Thus, if the entire Romani Women Students' Meeting lasted 5 hours, I was particularly interested in the working groups' sessions. For the Students' meeting organised in Campclar (June 2013), the discussion in the working group was focused on how to achieve more participation of the Roma families on the school, the barriers and the actions that can promote it.

In a later stage of the research, I participated as observer in another Romani Women Students' Meeting, this time the one organised in Terrassa in November 2016. Given the advance stage of my research (almost at its end), by means of this observation I could observe differences with the one of Campclar (the way how local organisers were involved, interest in the topics, presence of more diverse participants), and contrast how with the past of the time more women are motivated to participate.

To capture relevant phenomena I focused on four aspects during these two observations: how Romani women members of DKM promoted the engagement of grassroots Romani women in the discussions (participating expressing their opinions about the topics that were being discussed); the role adopted by non-Roma women during the developing of the activities; the nature of the questions raised by Romani women participants in the meetings; and the working environment generated among the participant women during the sessions (e.g.: describing if the topic raise generated tension, positive debate, reluctance, etc.)

Regarding the assemblies of DKM in which I conducted communicative observations, these were six assemblies developed between January 2014 and January 2015. I used two criteria in order to decide which of the monthly assemblies would be of interest to be observed and registered for my study: first, regular assemblies in order to fully capture the everyday decision making of the organisation. Second, assemblies in which there were issues related to the association's strategies and activities to be decided (this

ensured the observation of how the decision-making within the association works). I paid particular attention to five aspects during these observations: type of relations among the participants; working environment; explanation of the issues treated (if topics were explained in detail, providing all relevant information, and ensuring that all the members were able to follow the discussion); developing of the interactions among Romani and non-Romani women members; and mechanisms used to reach consensus. Each assembly observed lasted for about three hours, what involved a total of 18 hours (approximately) of observations of the assemblies. Before starting the observations I informed the members of DKM about the objectives of my study and I ask them for consent. I also explained them that if they agree to participate in the research I would need their collaboration in order to validate my results.

Validation of results took place in a subsequent communicative focus group organized with them (September 2015), in which I shared my results and we agree about some issues of my observations among which the other members of DKM have different interpretations.

During the observations I kept a personal journal in which I registered all thoughts, reflections, and findings related to the elements I was more interested to observe for both types of observations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), the Romani Students Meetings and the DKM assemblies. I added all these notes to the qualitative software I used for the data analysis in order to proceed to its codification and analysis (Atlas.ti software).

#### *Semi-structured Interviews*

I conducted a total of 7 interviews. Particularly, I interviewed **5 non-Romani women members of DKM** (1 of it was a collaborator of the association) in order to gain understanding of the overall working of the association and better contextualize the study. I also interviewed **2 women who represent Romani women's associations which collaborate with DKM** (Romani and non-Romani women). Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 1 hour and 45 minutes. I tape recorded all interviews and later transcribed them.

I conducted these interviews with:

*Non-Romani women members of DKM.* I conducted 5 regular interviews with non-Romani women who are members of the association. These women have similar SES background: middle-class with university degrees. As in the case of the Romani women member of DKM, interviewing the non-Roma women provided me key information about the defining features of the DKM. Among the interviewees was one collaborator of the association who is set in Tarragona and supports the association when it has to develop activities in that region. The views of the non-Roma women was especially relevant in order to explore what moves them to establish networks of solidarity with Romani women and how this capitalize for the effectiveness of the association's strategy. Besides this, other issues such as the DKM strategies in order to guarantee that the voices of the Romani grassroots women are the center of the debates and thus how to avoid that non-Roma people seize the power and undermine their interests (e.g.: in the associations' assembly or in other forums of debate for the Roma women) was also asked. Among these 4 interviews conducted, two of the non-Roma women were founder-members of DKM. As in the case of the Romani women founder of DKM who was interviewed, specific questions about the beginning of the association were asked.

*Representing members of Romani women's associations with which DKM collaborates:* 2 interviews. I interviewed a representing member of KAMIRA, the Federation of Association of Romani women to which Drom Kotar belongs and with which it collaborates. I also interviewed the president of the grassroots Romani Women's association from Badia (pseudonym). Thus, interviewing these women who are from outside DKM was important specially in terms of thinking about –each of them from a concrete position– two issues, first, the role that the association develops in contributing to empowering the grassroots Roma women and, second, to strengthening the Romani women's mobilisation

#### *Communicative daily life stories (CDLS)*

As a data collection technique, the aim of a communicative daily life story is to establish a collaborative dialogue on the subject's reality by means of thought, reflections and analysis. It is a cooperative process of understanding among the researcher and the researched, different from a regular life story as the communicative one is oriented toward transformation (Gómez et al, 2006). In a communicative daily



life story researcher and researched engage in a process in which both of them set their own premises on how to deepen in their respective lifeworlds. This enables the researcher accessing to the researched subject's understanding of his or her own lifeworld and, through a joint intersubjective dialogue compare such lifeworld to the present-day theoretical debate (Aubert, Melgar, & Valls, 2011).

This technique was used with two different groups of participants. On the one hand with Romani member of DKM: Group A. On the other hand, with women from the community of participants of DKM: Group B. Given that the same technique was used with different groups of participants, two different protocols were elaborated (it was opened and indicative, according to the levels of analysis inquired).

I will proceed to describe for each group of the study participants how I used the CDLS technique.

#### *CDLS used with Romani women members of DKM (Group A)*

When using it with Romani women who are members of DKM (Group A) I deepened in those elements related to level of analysis 1 and 4 (Association's organising feature and societal level). Specifically **6 Romani women members of DKM** participated in the study carrying out a CDLS. I sought to capture the details of these Romani women's experience about their involvement in DKM how their own lives have changed since then, the perceived impact that their participation in the association has had in their communities, and their reflections on the Romani women's mobilisation and the role that DKM played in it. Among these Romani women there were one of the founder-members of DKM, in her case, specific questions related to the historical background of the association were asked, as well as the evolution of the women's mobilisation at community level and in Europe. Among other information, through these CDLS I was able to know how the relations among Romani women and non-Roma women were established; deepening in the analysis if this becomes an asset for the association and in which way.

#### *CDLS used with Romani women Community of Participants of DKM (Group B)*

When I used this technique with DKM community of participants (Group B) I inquired in elements related to specific objective two and three: focused on exploring the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in the association on the own women, and also on their families, that is, understanding the processes of individual and collective empowerment of the Romani women once they get involved in DKM.

I conducted 15 CDLS with Romani women. CDLS facilitated that Romani women who have participated in some of the activities of DKM to narrate and reflect about the impact that this concrete experience had on their own lives and also, through them, the impact on their families.

Criteria followed to select them was first, women who have participated in some of the activities organized by DKM and diversity of editions (intergenerational female Romani women students' Meeting; Official trainers course; other activities –for instance, the one derived from the EU-projects); and second, women of different age (from 17 years old to 50 years old). The communicative daily life stories allowed me to know in-depth their experience in participating at some point of their life in an activity organized by DKM, and explore if this have involved some change for their own biographies. My role during the daily life stories was to guide the dialogue, making concrete questions that made the women consider the daily life changes occurred since they become part of the DKM community of members. The daily life stories lasted about 1 hour and 30 minutes, and as the interviews, all of them were taped and transcribed.

I also used this technique with **Romani women from Shine Association of Romani Women (pseudonym)**, as these women have directly participated in activities of DKM, and as they explain, one of the main motivation for setting up their association was the support received by DKM members. Thus, I was interested in gathering specific data about the process of how these very grassroots women have passed from being receptors of the activities to being founder members of their own association, from a biographical standpoint.

*Communicative focus groups*

I have carried out one communicative focus group with Romani and non-Romani women member from DKM at the end of the research study in order to validate the results. In these focus groups, women have been asked to give their opinions and express their feelings regarding the findings obtained. A natural dialogue was established with them about those features of the association that I identified that make it being an ‘emancipatory project’ for Romani women, and how this turns into a project of multiple impacts at different levels contributes could have contributed to the achievement of several impacts in different levels. Thus, under the framework of the communicative methodology of research, this focus group contributed to the validation of the research results, putting in dialogue the results of this research with the voices of the researched subjects. In the framework of a communicative methodology, it is necessary and appreciated the opinion of the stakeholders.

#### **6.4. Data analysis**

Data analysis has been an on-going process during the data collection phase. As I was collecting the data from the fieldwork I was reflecting among it in a process of constant dialogue with my theoretical framework and literature review.

I transcribed all interviews and communicative daily stories except from one CDLS from which I took notes. Once I had all the interviews, the CDLS and also my own notes derived from observations and other documentary, I analysed the data according four levels of analysis, defined according of my specific research aims:

*Level 1: association’s organising features* (Specific Objective 1): through this level of analysis I inquiry on those features related to the own association such as elements related to its organisational structure, its ruling principle, membership composition, activities, etc.

*Level 2: individual level* (Specific Objective 2): through this level of analysis I look at the impact of the Romani women’s collective agency organised under the framework of my case study on the own women’s lives.

*Level 3: community level* (Specific Objective 2): through this level of analysis I explore the impact that the Romani women’s collective agency organised in the Romani

Association of Women studied has their own families –extended family, in the sense of the closed community.

*Level 4: societal level (Specific Objective 3):* I look through this level of analysis at the impact of the Romani women’s collective agency organised in the Romani Association of Women studied on how it contributes to shape and foster the Romani women’s movement at the grassroots level. In turn, at this level I look at two spheres of the Romani women’s movement, the community level (neighbourhoods of Catalonia), and the European level (European mobilisation of Romani women)

This process enabled me to consider for each level of analysis the impact of Romani women’s lifeworld on each of it, taking into account both systems and human agency, which in turn I defined as the *transformative* and *exclusionary dimension* used in the communicative methodology that guided my research approach (Puigvert, Christou, & Holford, 2011). For transformative dimension I considered all those data that involved a transformative evidence of the Romani women’s agency (*lifeworld*); for exclusionary dimension, I considered all those data that evidenced a hindrance of the Romani women’s agency, and how it was manifested in the different levels of analysis.

Coding scheme is represented in Table 3, in which it can be observed the specific categories defined for each level of analysis, and for some categories, concrete subcategories (dimensions) defined.

Table 3: Coding Scheme

	<b>CATEGORIES ANALYSIS</b>	<b>Transformative</b>	<b>Exclusionary</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Association’s organising features</b>		
	System of decision making: Mechanisms; ruling principles	A1+	A1-
	Reach of Romani grassroots women: Strategy, leadership, narratives		
	Rationale and activities [successful actions/solution-based approach]		
	Relations with other Roma association [system]		
	Contact with public organisms at the community level		
	Relation with men		
	Funding and Transparency		
	Internal structure: Composition; ways of recruitment		
	Other		
<b>2</b>	<b>Individual. Impact of the Romani women’s collective agency on the own women’s</b>		

	educational opportunities		
	employment opportunities		
	health (access to health care, self-esteem, happiness, satisfaction with life)		
	expectations		
	Cultural values		
	empowerment related to the own capacities		
	Romani women traditions		
	Involvement in spaces of social participation		
	Prejudices/stereotypes/racism		
	others		
<b>3</b>	<b>Community. Romani women's family. Impact of the Romani women's collective agency on their families.</b>		
	educational opportunities for children and other family members		
	employment opportunities for family members and other community members		
	family and community health care		
	Betterment of family relations: family cohesion		
	Solidarity networks		
	Violence		
	Interactions among Romani women		
	Role models		
	Expectations		
	Romani women's traditions		
	Prejudices/stereotypes/racism		
	Others		
<b>4</b>	<b>Societal. Impact of the Romani women's collective agency on the grassroots Romani women's mobilisation</b>		
	Romani feminism		
	Engagement in the activities of DKM		
	Social participation		
	Activation of associational life (creation of others associations)		
	Triggering of grassroots Romani women leadership at the community level: public recognition at the community level Presence of the DKM discourse at public spaces of debate at the community and regional sphere. Collaboration with other associations Fostering the creation of new community associations Assessment of Romani women that want to create their own associations		
	Impact on the EU level: public recognition at the EU level Presence of the DKM discourse at public spaces of debate at the European sphere. Collaboration with European associations		
	Impact at the media: community and European sphere		
	Prejudices/stereotypes/racism		
	Other		

- Level 1:** information regarding the association's structure (organisational form, decision-making structure, among other), its ruling principle, its membership composition (specific information regarding background of its members, community of participants, volunteers, gender compositions, role of men in relation to women if intervened), working rationale of its activities (funding, criteria, partners institutions). As exclusionary elements: burdens related to funding, constraints for carrying out activities, barriers to reach all proposed objectives.
- Level 2:** information regarding opportunities: education, employment, and social participation. Data related to traditions, and cultural values. As exclusionary elements: the negative impact of the system: discrimination, gender stereotypes, racism.
- Level 3:** similar than level 2 but in relation to family. More emphasis in those Roma cultural values related to family, and the presence of solidarity networks within the family and the closed community. Exploring the expectations in relation to the own children and other relatives. Also gender roles and betterment (or not) of family relations. Information regarding opportunities: education, employment, and social participation. As exclusionary: the negative impact of the system on Romani women's family (unemployment, low educational expectations, educational failure, because of discrimination, stereotypes and racism).
- Level 4:** deepening in all those aspects related to Romani feminism; aspects related to the Romani women's engagement in the social mobilisation (in engaging in the association, in attending those spaces of social participation), and way how after having engaged in the association their 'public life' is activated. Data analysis related to level of analysis 4 is explored at two dimensions, the community level (at the neighbourhoods) and the European level (the case study works also at the European level). As exclusionary: barriers and limitations that have encountered Romani women to advance in shaping and fostering the Romani women's mobilisation.

The way I proceed was the following. I initially read each transcript several times, highlighting those quotes that were more relevant and significant for my research

questions. After this initial contact, I coded transcripts according previously defined categories and subcategories (those topics, themes and issues that I considered of major relevance for the qualitative analysis and synthesis). Once I have the information categorised I analysed it –if it was the case- according subcategories within these categories. All data collected was analysed according to the different level of analysis, however, for instance, in the case of non-Romani women interviewed, this data was just analysed in light of level 1) association, and 4) societal level. This led me to codify the transcript several times to make sure that I was understanding data in their own context (Maxwell, 1996). So data gathered from members, from community of participants and from representatives women's from other associations of Romani women was understood in relation to its related specific research aim. In all, coding served me to interpret and storage all data (Stake, 2010) rather than for organising the findings.

## **6.5. Bias and Validity**

My personal involvement in the DKM as a volunteer since October 2010 facilitated me to have access to the informants (Romani and non-Romani women and community of participants of DKM) as well as to its other archival documentation. This opened up different personal opportunities for me, being one of the most valuable the opportunity to get to know first-hand the life-worlds of the Romani women, their backgrounds and personal experiences, realizing that as a sociologist I could be also committed to them to do research in order to inform knowledge that can contribute to improve the lives of these women and their communities (Flecha & Soler, 2014). My personal involvement in DKM as a volunteer of its activities (e.g. participate in the organisation of the Roma Students Meeting, supporting Romani women to write their study reports for the trainers' course, among many others) has not supposed for this dissertation to be less scientific or rigorous. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state, as qualitative researchers we face in the present time a moment in which we are no longer objective and neutral observers of the reality, we become the interpreter of the others' voices what supposes focusing on those previously silenced; this is indeed “a concern with moral discourse” (p. xi). Quite the opposite, engaging through intersubjective dialogue with Romani women was of major importance in order to overcome ethnocentric and relativist

approaches that are so often present in some studies with the Roma (Vargas & Gómez, 2003).

Acknowledging this, throughout this study I have taken special care in order to avoid several sources of bias and threats to ensure validity. I had to constantly consider my condition as a non-Roma researcher studying Romani issues as it poses a crucial validity threat, namely reactivity (Maxwell, 1996). This was first advised by my tutors but also by some of the Romani women with whom I have debated in depth during the process of elaboration of this dissertation. I countered it by reflecting and discussing on the effects that my identity may have had for the interviewees.

First, being a non-Roma researching on how Romani women involved in the Romani women's mobilisation had affected their life –in several ways- could have had an effect on interviewees who are not of Roma backgrounds. Many of the women with whom I talked quickly saw that they could trust and share their thinking and visions about what was going on within their families and communities after starting to participate in a DKM activity; nonetheless, I explained in detail that this time I was doing an specific research and that our talks would be used for my study on the Romani women's mobilisation and on the Romani women's associationism. Second, while I knew that many of the Romani women trust me, I also knew that I was an outsider when talking with and interviewing the Romani women and other members. In order to address the threat of reactivity, as I conducted this study, I always remained in constant dialogue with Romani colleagues and other members of DKM.

Since the experience of gaining agency and empowering while participating in the Romani women's mobilisation through organising in DKM could be a sensitive one for many people (very emotional moments and in turn very tough ones), I kept this in mind during every second of each interview, so that I would respect each person's personal freedom. Throughout the data analysis process, I shared and discussed the analysis with members of DKM in a communicative focus group, and while I was writing the results and structuring them I looked for their advice several times (Merriam, 1998).



## 6.6. Ethical Standards

The present dissertation, and the investigation underlying it, meets all the international ethical standards required in order to conduct a rigorous and excellence study, and mostly needed when working with vulnerable collectives as it is the case of grassroots Romani women. In doing so, I have followed international well-known code of ethics. Like many research programs worldwide, the European Commission establishes the Ethics for Researchers procedure (European Commission, 2013) in order to determine the most important ethical issues that facilitate research excellence. Such issues are the following: *privacy and data protection, informed consent, research on human embryos and fetuses, dual use, animal research and research involving developing countries*. In this sense, the informed consent is an officially recognized document which includes the most essential elements of the research ethics in several guidelines and international conventions (United Nations, 1966). Through the informed consent, which also implies the form of addressing privacy issues, the voluntary participation in research is being guaranteed by the participant.

Informed consent is required in cases when the research involves the participation of human beings, when the research uses human genetic material or biological samples and when the research involves personal data collection (Directorate-General for Research Science, 2010, p. 14). Informed consent forms are characterized by three mechanisms: adequate information, voluntariness and competence (European Commission, 2013). These elements established that the researcher should inform the interviewed people mainly about the research objectives and the possibility to refuse participation or to decide not to participate at any time during the research, even if there was an initial consent. Participants also should know that no consequences would take place if they decide not to give their consent or if they later decide to stop it during the research process. Researchers should also take the responsibility that all participants have fully understood the implications of their participation in the research and all the information provided. Even informed consent use to be more common in areas such as the clinical, the European Commission considers it relevant for all types of research, including the social sciences (European Commission, 2013).

For this research I developed a written Informed Consent which I distributed among all the participants in my fieldwork.<sup>33</sup> I explained in detail to all of them the general objectives of my research, the university to which I belong, and especially all information related to the interview or the communicative daily life story to be performed with them, highlighting that it would be tape-recorded if they agreed. I also explained to the study participants that their identity would be anonymised and kept under special protection, and that they were free to do not respond to any of my questions. All this information is explained in the Informed Consent. In all cases, in all interviews I verbally asked the participants for their consent, and all of them agreed. This specific question and their answers are tape-recorded.

## **6.7. Limitations of the Study**

Besides presenting a rigorous scientific research, two main limitations emerged regarding the advancement of this study and the final conclusions that will be drawn from it.

The first limitation refers to the scope of the fieldwork. When I first planned my fieldwork and the four levels of analysis according to the specific objectives defined I intended to talk with all the DKM founders and other people who have witness the association flourishing. On the one hand, with Romani women members who have participated in the activities of the association (defined as Group B of the study participants), and on the other hand, with those women who had been involved or are still involved in the Romani women's mobilisation and with whom DKM collaborated (e.g. key figures within the Romani women's movement at different levels) (defined as Group C of the study participants).

Regarding the first group, although I carried out enough fieldwork for that I wanted to look at, I wanted to reach those women who had participated at the initial editions of the associations' activities. Even though I contacted Romani women who had been involved in the association since its very beginning, it was not possible to reach all of them for different reasons. One of them is the fact that many of these women are in an

---

<sup>33</sup> See Annex 4: Informed Consent Forms

unstable situation. It should be mentioned that I have had the opportunity to be in contact in other informal spaces with them, although not interviewing them for this dissertation. For instance, I had a short informal conversation through telephone with two of them (e.g. Valentina, whose case is explained in Chapter 11) but I had not considered them as part of my fieldwork. Another reason was attached to a particular woman who was very much involved in the founding who passed away. For the research, this was in this case a limitation in terms of being able to compare through the narratives of the very women their changes of perceptions and their access of new opportunities after more years of having participated in the activity. Again, the case of Valentina is a very suitable example in this regard. Regarding those women who have been involved in the Romani women's mobilisation at the Spanish level or at the European level, I have had the opportunity to know some of them in institutional and academic spaces (meetings). All these informal conversations have been crucial in informing my own understanding of the movement and the role played by DKM within it. To formally have had interviewed them could have been interesting in order to gather more specific information for addressing specific objective 4.

A second limitation of this research is in relation to the field of study in which it is framed, the Romani women's studies. In relation to other research fields and even within the field of Romani studies, Romani women's studies is highlighted by its novelty. This supposed a limitation for my study as there is scarce literature about the processes of social mobilisation of Romani women in Europe, a phenomenon that shows both -as mentioned- the novelty of the field but also the gap in the literature. Drawing from this reality, the specific limitation this involved for my research was the difficulty of positioning within it, and also the challenge of taking as a reference research studies that did not specifically cover my interests.

## **CHAPTER 7: JUSTIFICATION OF THE CASE: THE ROMA ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN DROM KOTAR MESTIPEN (A ROAD FOR FREEDOM)**

*“the other people had more experience than me, for me that was a new... the important aspect was to do it together, everything that resulted from the dialogue of Romani and non-Romano women.... I think that this is one of the most important things of Drom Kotar, is one of the success of the association, it is of all and for all (...)” (Carmen, Romani women member of DKM)*

In this chapter it is presented the case which I have selected to study in this dissertation: the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen. Reasons provided justify its selection and enable to understand its suitability to address all objectives presented in the previous chapter. Data provided is structured as follows: a first section deals with the association's historical background, then I present some considerations about its internal structure, after that I explicate the association's main activities, and finally I provide the association social and public presence at different levels. Data presented has been retrieved from archival documentation from the own association, historical documentary information reviewed, data provided from founder members, and data retrieved from the association website.

### **7.1. Historical background**

The Roma Association of Women *Drom Kotar Mestipen* (“A road for freedom”) was created in 1999 by a group of Romani women and non-Romani women of different ages, academic backgrounds, professional profiles and socio-economic levels who pursued a common objective: to struggle for the equality and non-discrimination of the Romani women by promoting their participation in educational, social and cultural spaces. Thus, DKM was the first Roma women association of Catalonia. The identification of high rates of early school leaving among Romani girls, the under-employment or unemployment of Romani women, and the lack of representation of

Romani women's voices in Romani mainstream associations and other women's associations were some of the causes that moved DKM founders to create a "Roma Association of Women" (not an association of Romani women), in which Romani women and non-Romani women could work together bonded by relations of solidarity with the Romani people, for reverse these situations and thus contribute to overcome the social exclusion of Romani women.

In writing their statutes, DKM founder-members defined the following objectives of the association:

- To work for achieving the equality and the non-discrimination among Romani women and men within the Roma community
- To overcome the double discrimination that suffer Romani women (based on gender and on ethnicity) as well as racism and sexism that generates it.
- To collaborate with other associations and organizations that struggle for achieving equality based on the respect and the promotion of the own differences.
- To foster and enabling egalitarian access of Romani women and girls to all educational, social and labour spaces as a way of fostering the equality of rights, opportunities, and results among all cultures.
- To promote the image of the Romani women as the one who transmits and encourages the Roma cultural identity.

Thus, according to DKM members, what united them were the relations of solidarity and friendship they had already created due to sharing some of their daily spaces: some of them were work colleagues; some of them knew each other from an adult education school in which one was the teacher and the other the student, and also, the relationship established through other organizations that supported DKM creation. In this sense, in 1999 two organizations committed with the social inclusion of the Roma and working from very different fields supported the creation of DKM: the private foundation Ujaranza,<sup>34</sup> and CREA Research Centre.<sup>35</sup> In these institutions there were men and women involved in research and educational transformation working with Romani

---

<sup>34</sup> Ujaranza was constituted by Roma and non-Roma people and aimed at promoting the social transformation of ethnic minorities through dialogue and the development of the identity

<sup>35</sup> CREA, Community of Researchers of Excellent for All, was founded in 1991.

communities that saw the necessity of promoting a Romani women association just in the way that DKM founders were thinking. One of the DKM's members, explained how the name of the association (*Drom Kotar Mestipen*: "A road for freedom") have been chosen:

Regarding the name, it was also something that we discussed a lot and thought very deeply: Roma Association of Women, in order we all be represented, and we do deliberated, I can't remember exactly where these debate took place, if it was at the president's home ... or where.. (Victoria, non-Roma woman)

As observed, DKM did also receive the support of feminist Romani men and non-Roma men, whose commitment with the project that DKM founders wanted to rise up was of major help in order to carry it out. The association does not have its own local, it shares a rental space with FACEPA, the Federation of Cultural and Educational Associations of Adult people.

Year 2000 was important in so far as members of DKM consolidated their initial group, and carried out three activities that were essential for the future of the association. First, they presented the association to local public institutions (Barcelona City Council) and obtain public funding to carry out what would be the first DKM funded-project. Second, they started to perform diverse activities within Romani communities (at the neighbourhoods) and mainstream local and Catalan society in order to let DKM to be known by the Romani communities and specially by Romani grassroots women and those women who were already organized within mainstream Roma associations -as women-sections of these associations. For instance, the way of promoting the dissemination of the association within Romani communities with Romani grassroots women was through carrying out informal meetings with them.

Long and fruitful conversations among DKM members since the very beginning led them to establish a set of "not-written" criteria that they wanted to be the working principles on which the association should be based, and this is the way how it is explained in DKM's website: based on the equality of difference and on the egalitarian dialogue among all members; the globalization of the information, meaning that all

women participating in the assembly celebrated every 15 days should share all important information related to the association and those considered important topics upon which to work; a strong work team: once the participants decided working on a concrete topic, organize the work through *commissions* in order to ensure that someone is responsible of working in the agreed task, and that it will be carried out.

## **7.2. Internal structure**

DKM distinguishes from what is known in international literature as Paid Staff Non-profit Organizations (PSNPOs) (Smith, 2000) as it is mainly run by volunteers. In relation to its internal structure, DKM fits the majority of characteristics of the definition of a “grassroots association” (GA) provided by Smith (2000, p. 804): “locally based, significantly autonomous, volunteer-run, formal nonprofit (third sector, civil society) groups that manifest substantial voluntary altruism as groups and use the associational form of organization and, thus, have official membership of volunteers who perform most, and often all, of the work/activity done in and by these nonprofits”.

DKM currently has two paid staff who are in charge of doing the reporting work and the administrative tasks derived from the funded projects that the association has. The first time that DKM had a paid worker was in 2000. This association relies on a wide network of volunteers, Roma and non-Roma people, mainly women but for some of its activities (especially those that are specific and require logistics, or taking care of children while Romani women are participating in other activities) also men.

*Who is a member of DKM?* In this specific case, there is not a fixed definition neither a set of established formal criteria to meet in order to consider that one woman is member or not of DKM. Members of DKM are those Romani and non-Romani women who agree and believe in the association’s objectives and get involved in its activities in order to achieve them, attending in a regularly basis to the assemblies. It worth explaining here that DKM do not has a clear distinction between those women who are “members” of the association, and those other who are “participants” of their activities. In December 2014 the association had 38 women registered as official members in its Official Register of the Association, which reveals that it is not big in terms of

membership. However, the “dromitas community”, as the president of DKM refers to all those Romani women that participate and benefit from the activities of DKM, is much larger. This reflects one of the features of the Roma culture, as extended families have very often porous boundaries. An example that clearly illustrates this is a Roma wedding where there is not a closed and fixed list of invitees but an open at the same time than controlled one. If someone from the family invites someone else, he or she might not need the formal permission of the new weds to formulate the invitation, it is understood that anyone brought by a close one is more than welcome to join the festivity.

Beyond its members and the “dromitas community”, DKM counts for their regular activities, such as the intergenerational Romani Women Students’ Meeting, with the support of volunteers who provide the association with logistical support. These volunteers can be relatives of the DKM members, friends, community members, and other people who voluntarily collaborate in specific situations, for instance, at the time of organizing the sessions. The tasks of these volunteers, who can be women or men, are technical, but indispensable for the success of the activities.

Regarding the budget and its annual accounts, since the year 2010 and as a unanimous decision of the DKM members, the association has its annual accounts posts in the website. For the last year 2014, the net assets of DKM was of €458.630,82, of which €145.188,35 were funding that the association obtained from projects.<sup>36</sup>

### **7.3. Activities**

In this section I will describe the activities that DKM develops, distinguishing among two kinds of activities. On the one hand, specific activities that can be considered as *structural* to the association: organized on a regular basis and emerged at the core of DKM. On the other hand, other long-term activities that the own association considers that are working lines, that is, activities that are implemented mainly through funding that DKM obtains from participating in competitive calls, at local, national or the EU

---

<sup>36</sup> For more information see: <http://dromkotar.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/BALAN%C3%87-DE-SITUACI%C3%93-Del-01-01-14-al-31-12-14.pdf>



level. Among these activities are grouped all those ones derived from the EU-funded projects.

On November 30, 2001 Drom Kotar Mestipen organized the workshop “Romani women of Barcelona in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. This event was celebrated in the Civic Center of Barceloneta, in Barcelona and more than 70 people attended to it moved by a common interest: working to make that the “Romani women’s voices be heard and taken into account in the different social spaces, such as education, labour market, health, and social participation” (Sánchez, Clavería, & Fernández, 2003, p. 108). Somehow this was the precedent and most similar event to what would be in the future a “Romani women students’ meeting”. This workshop launched the association to the general public but also to the Roma community; it was a 5 hours event in which four key topics of concern for the Romani women were discussed: education, health, employment and social participation. After briefly introducing each topic, participants divided in three working groups in which these topics were debated. Conclusions obtained in the working groups were essential as they established the roadmap of the association for the next period. First, in the field of education, Romani women clearly stated that they wanted the best for their children: “Romani women we believe in education as the way to overcome social and cultural inequalities that Roma people suffers” (Ibid., 109).

The overt need for finding and promoting positive role models for the Romani girls and women in the field of education, Romani girls also wanted to reach university, for this in the Workshop Romani girls and the other participants defended the existence of an educational institution that respect the Roma culture, and education that foster the high expectation of the Romani girls students. “School should be open to the Roma culture, so we will be able to have Romani women in positions of power in society”, this said the president of DKM of that moment, Emilia Clavería. Second, in the field of labour market, conclusions were in line with the ones of education, linked to them, participants affirmed that with high academic levels Romani women would have more and better labour opportunities. So given the barriers found because of being Roma, racism they confronted, the association understood that its way of overcoming barriers in the labour market was through broadening the educational opportunities of the Roma women. Third, regarding social and cultural participation, the position defended was the one that

all voices should be included in order to be listened, to incorporate positive role models while respecting the differences from an egalitarian position. The emphasis was on collaborating with other Roma associations from the territory, working and organizing the mobilization in a network while using IT and promoting its use among the Romani women. Finally, in the field of health, many issues were raised, but two should be remarked here. On the one hand, the need to provide training and counseling to the own families; and on the other hand, the need to provide also training to the healthcare personnel.

In the workshop was validated officially the idea of organizing the **intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting** (“*Trobades d'estudiants gitanes de Catalunya*”).<sup>37</sup> Although the first Romani students' meeting had been carried out in Hospitalet in 2000 with just two participants (a Romani girl and her mother), the need and the importance to continue doing this activity was proposed and agreed in the workshop of Badalona an year after. There were the girls themselves who asked us to do something. They were feeling “alone” in their neighbourhoods. Thus, the *Trobades* were a public demand claimed by the young Roma women to fulfil their daily situation.

What are the intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting? This is one of the most successful activities of DKM: encounters of Romani students (girls and women of different ages) in which a space is created aimed at discussing a previously proposed topic by the local organizers and the DKM members, with the final objective of finding solutions to the Romani girls school dropout and absenteeism. The meetings are carried out twice a year or once a year (it depends on the women's will) on a Saturday afternoon, in order to ensure that girls can assist to the meeting and do not quit attending their regular school. The Romani students Meetings are not held in the headquarters of DKM, they are normally held in a school from a neighbourhood where there is a large Romani community, and a group of Romani women who wants to organize the meeting in their territory. So for the organization of the Romani students meeting what DKM do is co-organize them, giving support since the very beginning to a group of “chairing committee”, grassroots Romani women encouraged by leading the event. For previous experiences of the Roma Students meeting, this has been one of the key aspects in order

---

<sup>37</sup> In this dissertation I will refer to the “Romani Women Students' Meeting” using both terms: “Romani Women Students' Meeting” and also its name in Catalan “*Trobades*”.

to reach the Romani women from the territory: keep the protagonisms of the organization to the local women, and DKM members being in charge of technical and logistical issues, bringing in to the new editions the “lifeworld” knowledge accumulated from previous editions.

Regarding the structure of the Romani students’ meeting, the event is organized around a selected topic, which has been decided among DKM members and discussed with local organizers, thus, at the beginning of the meeting, there is the presentation of the topic (“the problem”), after that, there is a round-table of experiences with Romani girls and women who have studied in the past, are studying and are what in DKM call “positive role models”. And after that, participants are divided in workshops: in each workshop is discussed some of the topics previously debated. At the end, for concluding with the event, there are collected all the conclusions of the workshops and united in a general conclusions of the meeting.

In year 2015, there have been already celebrated XVII editions of the intergenerational Romani Women Students’ Meetings, these in the following places: Hospitalet (Barcelona 2000); Besós neighbourhood (Barcelona, March 2003), Terrassa (November, 2004), Viladecans (November, 2005), Montcada (2005); Gràcia neighbourhood (Barcelona, May 2006); La Mina (Barcelona November 2006), Lleida (January, 2007); Sant Roc (Barcelona, 2007); Sant Cosme, Prat de Llobregat (January 2009); Reus (June 2009); Badia del Vallés (October 2011); Bon Pastor neighbourhood (Barcelona, October 2012); Campclar (Tarragona, June 2013); Figueres (Girona, October 2014); Terrassa (November 2015)

Another of the activities celebrated on regular basis by DKM is the **official trainers course in the specialty of schools canteens for Romani women**, what is also named in DKM as the “**Romí Training**”. This course is organised every year, is free and is recognised by the Catalan Government (Generalitat de Catalunya). The aim of the course is the labour inclusion of the Romani women that do not hold academic qualifications. This course has an overall length of 308 hours (158 hours of in-class lessons and 150 hours of internships). In addition to this, 25 hours of work are dedicated to the elaboration of a Course Report, which is submitted and evaluated by the organization that offers the course. This course is a prove of the interested showed by

Roma woman on training and finding a job. They are deciding to enrol in these courses being totally free, there is any institutional reason which make them to do so. This is just because they want to work and not to be on welfare. Indeed, the idea of this course was result of asking the Roma women about their needs.

The course also contains contents related to the Roma people history, in concrete, an extra module organised and added by DKM in which aspects of the Roma history and culture are explained.

The educational profile of the Romani women has never been a hindrance for those women who lack from basic educational skills in order for them to take the course. In the case that an illiterate Romani woman wants to take the course, the evaluation can be done in an alternative way (oral exam). But as in the majority of the cases, for the elaboration of the Course reports, DKM provides support for the course participants, as the majority of them tend to be women who have never written a similar report. With the support of other volunteers from the association, these Romani women can do their own reports.

Offering the Romani women the possibility to get training in a sector related to hospitality and school with the option of obtaining an official certification was considered by DKM member a very strategic move. This because DKM considers that one of the tasks that need to be done is the promotion of Romani women in public spaces, such as schools, other educational spaces, hospitals, in all, different spaces where Romani women need also to be present and create referents for other Romani women who will come after them. Currently, 7 Official Trainers Course have been organised between 2005 and 2015, and between 2006 and 2015, 73 Romani Women have obtained the official diploma.

In both of the activities already mentioned, the Romani Women Students' Meeting and the *official trainers course*, DKM organises a babysitting service for the children of the Romani women who are participating in these activities. The aim of offering a babysitting service is enabling the Romani women participation because many times they do not participate in these kinds of activities because of their family responsibilities. In the Romani Students meetings the babysitting is organised by

volunteers, in the Official Trainers course, someone who is contracted to cover the position.

Another of the activities that should be mentioned here is the “1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women: the Other Women”, which was celebrated from October 8-10, 2010. To it attended 303 Romani women from 15 countries: Spain, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, France, The Netherlands, Hungary, Ireland, England, Italy, Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia, and Ukraine gathered in order to dialogue and debate about the difficulties they faced and how to approach them finding common solutions.

In relation to the other long-term activities carried out by DKM, these are activities that respond to the working lines of the association promoted by projects funded by public or private institutions. All these funding achieved has been in competitive and public calls to which DKM has presented a project proposal and has won them. There are two clear working lines that the association has developed thanks to the funding obtained: the promotion of education of adult Romani women; and the validation of the non-formal and informal competencies of Romani women in order to promote their labour inclusion.

DKM has directed several projects related to these working lines at local and the European level. Three of them have been funded by the European Commission (Educa-ROM; Rom-UP, Rom-Act) and one by the Open Soros Foundation. Directing these projects as well as participating as partner institution in others, have made DKM step by step to gain presence in Europe, especially in the area of the promotion of the Romani women education and the access to the labour market, obtaining effective results recognized by the institutional institutions (e.g.: the case of the project Educa-Rom), and also establishing a wide network of contacts with of other Roma associations. In what follows are described the projects that DKM have led in the past or is currently leading:

*ROM-ACT. Widening Roma women’s access to non-formal and informal learning validation systems. (2013-2014).* The ROM-ACT Project is funded under the Grundtvig-GMP call of the European Commission, and it is aimed at widening access to non-formal and informal learning validation systems among Roma

women in Europe in order to strengthen their educational, social, and labour inclusion.

*ROM-UP. The inclusion of Roma through quality successful educational experiences.* (2012-2013) The objective was the inclusion of the Roma community with educative successful actuations. This project is financed for the program of Lifelong Learning of the European Commission and participation of 8 entities of different European countries.

*EDUCA-ROM. Inclusive teaching material for adults: the Roma.* (2005-2007). Educa-Rom was a Grundtvig project whose objective was the promotion of inclusive education for adults in Europe, in 4 different countries and 5 organizations. For this project DKM was awarded as the best Grundtvig project of the year within the category of formal, non-formal and informal education. The award was granted on the May 7, 2009 in Prague by a Member of the European Commission, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic, Ján Figel, who congratulated DKM for the work done in Educa-Rom, as being a role model in Europe for its work for the inclusion of the Romani women.

Burma Project. Inclusive teaching material for adults: the Roma. (2005-2007). Educa-Rom

Grant Agreement for the production and edition of deliberables (DVD) about the *Meeting of Romani Students of Catalonia* (2012). Foundation Open Society Institute.

Besides these projects, DKM has also participated as partner institution in other EU-funded projects and Spanish-funded projects.<sup>38</sup>

#### **7.4. DKM: Becoming the Grassroots Romani women ambassadors**

---

<sup>38</sup> All this information is available on the DKM website.

DKM members knew since its very beginning that participating in social, political and cultural spaces of debate and decision-making bringing the voices of the grassroots Romani women had to go hand in hand with their promotion of educational and labour market inclusion.

If in 2001 DKM participated and collaborated just with regional organizations such as FACEPA in 2015 DKM is a recognized association not just at the local level in Barcelona, Catalonia or Spain, but also at the European level. The international outreach of DKM clearly enlarged after the organization of the “1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women: the Other Women”, an activity that was successful because DKM was able to gather together grassroots Romani women who have never participated before in these kind of spaces of debate. The capacity of the association to operate at the very grassroots level while in turn participate from key debates related to Romani women’s at the EU level is a topic analysed in this thesis, but in turn something pointed out by the DKM members: the association’s capacity for having kept its initial sense: “working with the very grassroots Romani women while at the same time being at the core of the debates related to the Romani women in the EU, vindicating always that the grassroots Romani woman wants to be there, and needs to be there” (Carmen, Romani women, founder member).

In what follows are described the social and institutional spaces where DKM is present as a representative organization of the grassroots Romani women, considering the local, Catalan, Spanish and EU-level.

First, at the local level, DKM participates as an invited association by the Barcelona City Council in the meetings for the *Local Council of the Roma People* (Consell Municipal del Poble Gitano). The collaboration of DKM with the City Council started as early as the association’s origin. The local administration was the first public organism that funded a DKM project, which was oriented to the creation of the website and to the promotion of the association.

At the Catalan level, DKM is member of the Roma Advisory Council of the Catalan Government, which is in charge of developing and implementing the Romani Integral Plan for the inclusion of the Roma people.

It also participates in the Board for the Diversity in Audiovisuals (Mesa per a la Diversitat en l'Audiovisual), which gathers people representing different cultures with the aim of contributing to foster a better coexistence, respect, knowledge and exchange among people of different religious and cultural affiliations and the sharing of the experience and recreation of the Catalan culture.

Regarding DKM participation in other non-profit organizations that operate in the Catalan level, the association also participates as an active member of FACEPA (the Federation of Cultural and Educational Associations of Adult people), and it also participates in the activities of the Unitarian Platform against the Gender Violences (Plataforma Unitària contra les Violències de Gènere).

Considering the Spanish-based level, DKM is member of KAMIRA, a Federation of Associations of Romani Women, among whose collaboration has become very narrow within the last years, specially working among the issues of the empowering of the Romani women, and the concern of how to deal with gender violence and trafficking in human beings, what also affects Roma communities.

Finally, at EU-level, the success of the Congress and the impact it had at the different European countries evidenced the strong capacity of DKM of reaching grassroots Romani women not only from Catalonia or Spain but also from 14 EU countries. This supposed a turn for the own associations' history, as since the Congress the association has gained another position in Europe, whose members are aware why it is this, and because of this they want to continue struggling from this stand.

DKM is invited member of three recognized organizations that operate at the EU-level in which in each of them it brings the voices of the grassroots Romani: the International Romani Women Network (IRWN), a Network whose support was very important for the organization of the Congress. Valuing the importance of the work that IRWN does as an umbrella organization of Romani women associations in Europe and its nature of trying to articulate a common position regarding key issues among which Romani women is better to go together, the position of DKM regarding IRWN has always been the one of proposing ways and channels to reach the most vulnerable Romani women



for also including them into the discussion as sometimes IRWN has not directly represented them. The second organization is the European Women's Lobby, in which it is member since 2010. And finally, the other space in which DKM participates as an invited member bringing its knowledge and specially its "know-how" regarding how to work with the grassroots Roma community, is the *EU Civil Society Platform against Trafficking in Human beings*, approaching the plight of sex and labour trafficking in human beings.

Besides DKM participation in all these spaces, the association has appeared since 2000 in uncounted occasions in media: local, regional or national TV channels (when the organization of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Romani Women Congress), as well as at the time of celebrating the intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting, or invited to other TV gatherings, in television, radio or newspapers. Just as an interesting data, a quick *google* internet search of DKM gives a record of 3970 results.

For the reasons provided in relation to presence at the community level and also at the European level, reduced internal structure, mission oriented to social transformation, its social and public presence at different levels, this case is suitable in order to carry out my general objective under this research and through them deepen in all four specific research objectives.

## **PART 4. RESULTS**

## **CHAPTER 8. ROMANI WOMEN ASSOCIATION AS A HUB FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

In Chapter 8 I describe and analyse those underlying features of the Romani Women Association Drom Kotar Mestipen which I have identified. I will argue that these features are rather than stable, independent and defining characteristics of the association, interlinked elements that orientate the working approach of the association, as both a grassroots association and a collective actor. Findings of this chapter will set the basis for further analysis defined at different levels, the impact of this collective actor at personal level, community level, and societal level.

In order to identify and define these features I have analysed the collected data based on the following categories: (1) elements related to its leadership; (2) basic ruling principles; (3) membership composition; and (4) activities' approach. Five main features have been identified: a leadership based on narratives of social transformation with a strong presence of the Roma values and the Roma feminism which uses positive role models; the principle of cultural intelligence as a way of explicitly stating and looking for *de facto* ways in which all women have a say no matter their background; solidarity as a principle that already present among the Roma is enhanced by the association activities and promoted within the movement; *diversity of backgrounds* among its members; and finally, what I call it 'successful-based rationale', that is, the DKM way of approaching and developing the activities that it implements.

Qualitative evidences presented in this chapter have been extracted from the communicative fieldwork and also from documentary information reviewed such as minutes of assemblies, agenda, project's reports, minutes from international meetings, and other archival data.

### **8.1. The power of narratives**

It is not the aim of this section to focus on the analysis of the impact of the Romani Students Meeting, as this will be done in the subsequent chapters that explore the actual

outcomes of the organised Romani women's agency at the local level in relation to this same activity. In this section I analyse the leadership of the Association in the light of the women participants' narratives, which are used as tools of organising in the intergenerational Romani Students' Meetings to inspire other women to participate. Thus, taking as a reference the narratives of the positive role models of the *Trobades* enable me to discern those elements which are behind the narratives and act as a common frame of mobilisation of the Romani women in DKM.

Good morning, I'm Quimar and I am delighted to be here with all of you. Right now I am a biologist, which honestly makes me very proud of myself because the truth is that I always wanted to go to university and besides I always loved science and how science can be used to help people (...) <sup>39</sup>  
(Quimar, Romani woman member of DKM)

(...) education represents the key to access to many different future opportunities. We the Roma need it as a way through which to overcome barriers such as discrimination or exclusion in the case of the Roma people. For me it has been so important... it has changed my life and the lives of those who surround me... all are very proud of me, of me that as a Romani women I've been able to reach till here (...) to be a positive role model for other Roma who come behind me (Aurora, Romani woman member of DKM)

Quimar is now one of the youngest members of DKM, and as it could be observed her speech is full of trust, motivation and empathy with the "Other Romani women". Aware of the triple discrimination that Romani women suffer because of her own living trajectory, in her story she explains her own educational path and her memories to engage other Romani women in order to do not leave the school, dreaming with being someday in the university, because "to continue study do not make us less Roma, but more". Aurora is a Romani young women aged 26 years old, who got to know DKM also through a friend, this time a Sunday morning in the street market. Now with a degree in law and as a PhD student in Sociology, she explained how nervous she was

---

<sup>39</sup> See the entire narrative in Annex 1

the first time she participated as a positive role model in a Romani students' meeting. Since then Aurora has become one of the most committed Romani women activists members of the association, engaging some of her neighbours in its activities, and explaining in the evangelical Philadelphia Church in which she goes every day, and of which her father is Minister, how other Romani women can continue studying as she has done.

These are two examples of narratives, one of the roundtables of the *Trobades*. In it, usually four or five Romani women who have had a successful educational experience explain and share their stories with the other Romani women who are in the public, and then these women have the opportunity to raise questions. The use of referents in the Meetings constitutes an illustrative way to exemplify the way DKM deploys its leadership.

Since 2000 many Romani women by sharing their stories in the *Trobades* share not just “their personal story”, but also, in terms of Ganz (2010) “why they have been called to act”. In order to explain the power of storytelling for social movements Ganz relies in Bruner contribution regarding meaning making and “narrativity”, the answering of the “why question” (why this matter). Bruner (1991) states about the meaning making and what he calls narrativity: “We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative—stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on” (Bruner, 1991, p. 4-5). Thus, according to Bruner, all human being has a narrative necessity, stories pervade our daily lives, stories make sense of our lives, and this is because stories has a deep potential to helps us to answer the “why questions” that we face in our daily life.

Going directly to Bruner's contributions and Ganz's reflection on public narratives helps us to understand the reactions of those women who participate in the meetings and are there listening to the narratives. The experience of Tatiana and how she got involved in DKM after listening Aurora (*Trobada* celebrated in El Bon Pastor, 2012) shows the transformative potential of these stories:

“When I attended to the Romani Students Meeting in Bon Pastor in 2012 and I saw all the women there, explaining their stories, the story

of Aurora and also the story of other women there... when I saw all that, that made me feel so good... I realised that I also could achieve it.” (Tatiana, Romani woman member of DKM).

Tatiana is now one of those women who acquired this transformative discourse, as she has undergone through a process of change in her own personal life in starting to participate in the association activities:

“I think that Drom makes you see in other women that it is possible. Role models are very important (...) so if other Romani women have been positive role models for me, I hope I can be a positive role model for other women in this neighbourhood... women that know me and know my situation (...) We are struggling for improving the future of the Roma people, for the Roma women”. (Tatiana, Romani woman member of DKM)

Tatiana final statement is very illustrative: “We are struggling for improving the future of the Roma people, for the Roma women”.

In all, in DKM it is very present Freirean idea about persons as “transformative beings and not beings for accommodation (...) history is possibility and not determinism” (Freire, 1996). What stands for is that in the stories of those women who participate as referents in a DKM Trobada, they have common elements that link them, what make that other Romani women feel also represented: the collective action frame of the triple discrimination, Romani women who have faced multiple discriminations for being women, Roma and traditionally with no access to formal education, but even more important, the transformative way of challenging it that is characteristic of DKM. What can be observed is that DKM promotes positive roles in order to raise narratives with potential of social change. Consider the narrative of Sandra, a Romani women aged 22 who participated as a role model in the XIV Trobada in Bon Pastor in 2012:

“(...) My referent has always been my mother (...). When I'm doing my internship in the hospital and I see Roma people they thank me and they congratulate me because they see a Roma woman in the hospital. In the

future I want to work in a hospital and demonstrate that it is not true what some people often say: "Look, she's a Gypsy, she can't study". Yes, I'm Roma and I'm very proud of it. I also want to say that when I finish my studies of nursing and I get married, if God allows me, I also want to do a master in midwifery" (Sandra, Romani woman)

Thus, claiming for equality while preserving the value of family, which includes respect for the elderly, care for one's family members or also values related to kinship solidarity, DKM members use a public narrative that on the one hand recognises the triple discrimination that Romani women suffer, but on the other hand call grassroots Romani women to engage in the mobilisation and take the lead in their own change.

In the following quotation Carmen, a Romani women and founder member of DKM, explains how DKM since its very beginning have tried to engage grassroots Romani women, "made bigger the DKM family by involving Romani women who share the same values, but leaving prominence aside", what has not been always an easy task for the association:

"At the *Trobades* (...) the issue about prominence is somewhat difficult, it is a tough issue. And Drom's strategy to attack prominence is the same in all cases: leaving prominence to other women: and Drom stays aside."

In all, these narratives that defend the Romani women empowerment (the idea of accessing to education, better employment opportunities) and in turn do not break with their cultural values create a strong meaning making among them, what bring them to envision new dreams and horizons. Indeed, it is through these public narratives that Roma women achieve to link their personal story with the 'now' and the 'us' in terms of what Ganz (2010) defines the spheres in which leaders adapt their own narratives using the heart so the values that define them; and the head, those strategies implemented to accomplish the mobilizing of feeling and values of other people.

## **8.2. Cultural intelligence: everyone has a say**

The idea of cultural intelligence refers to the ability of everyone of reaching a cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, and effective understanding independently of the “academic” intelligence of the subject (Flecha, 2000). In other words, it refers to all the different types of knowledge that a subject has, which emerges from human interaction –verbal and non-verbal– and in different contexts. Thus, cultural intelligence is a human capacity, as everyone is able of engaging in egalitarian dialogue. This concept describes in a very good way a ruling principle that underlies the approach of DKM: the idea that all women’s voices matter and all of them have something to contribute to the debates, and based on this idea, the need to look for strategies to ensure that all Romani women have.

Relying on data analysis of the communicative fieldwork with the Romani and non-Romani members, DKM assumes the cultural intelligence of its members and participants, explicitly using this as an element for the women’s empowerment.

DKM implements this principle within its decision-making structures (month assemblies, working commissions) and its activities by means of ensuring that all these are spaces of participation in which grassroots Romani women are not only directly engaged but also in which they can freely express their opinions and rise up new proposals: it is their space.

The principle of cultural intelligence it is indeed very present in the foundational objectives of DKM, linked to the idea of meaning creation, which is, avoiding the loss of meaning that Max Weber (1992) diagnosed for our societies. DKM members recreate meaning through creating dialogic spaces of interaction in which women realize that without their voices it is not possible to improve their lives. In these spaces, such as the association assemblies, the Roma Students’ Meeting, or other informal spaces, all women, no matter how many they are, are the protagonists, because they are the ones who have the most valuable knowledge.



In the following quotation, the narrative of a Romani women member of DKM helps to better understand how the association transmits the principle of cultural intelligence in one of its daily activities:

I thought ... maybe they see something in me that I'm incapable of seeing, and maybe is not that difficult... I think that there are very few places where you can say: "Well, I don't know how to do this" or "Can you help me, please". So what I noted in Drom was that this was very normal: "I don't understand". We can ask. We can look for other examples... I don't know. There's always an example: lead by example. Esther, Pilar, Victoria... they had never told me: "this is the unique way you can do it".. (...) I didn't feel confident to do it. I never felt when I went to university that I was intelligent, or that I could be able to get good marks... So when I arrived to DKM and they told me: you can do it, ... I have never experienced that (Maria, Romani woman member of DKM).

As observed, Maria, a Romani women member of DKM, explains that she felt very empowered and relaxed in appreciating that other members of DKM trusted her at the time of writing a project proposal. Initially Maria felt that she was not able to do it because she was not intelligent enough, she was not "an academic". But then she got lot of trust from the other members of DKM. Petra, a Romanian Romani women member of DKM, felt in a very similar way the first time that she attended to a DKM assembly. She was very surprised in realizing that what she proposed in the assembly was taken into account. Petra's voice was listened, what really called her attention as she thought that as in other associations in which she had participated in the past her proposals have been barely listened because of hierarchical structures:

Participate in the assembly, rise a proposal and that all women there accept it from the very beginning... is like... having that feeling that you have a voice, and that fills you of desire of continue, because you have the feeling that there you are being listened to. (Petra, Romanian Romani woman, member of DKM)

Similarly, Maria also explains how once, while participating in the assembly she was surprised in the way how Monica (a non-Roma member) created the environment in order for Raquel -Romani women- would feel comfortable to participate and engage in the discussion, as she was the first time that was attending to the association's assembly and was a bit nervous:

“There was a woman that had very very long hair, and she was in the Congress. She lived in San Roc I think, a place a Little far. In those days they went to assemblies. And she said, I'm very nervous about being here. And Natalia told her: Ah, and why? We are with family. And then Cristina changed topic a Little and said “See....you look so pretty, you always wear purple...” And, I don't know, the dynamics changed and made it that the approach of the woman changed...Changed the topic redirected the focus....Very normal. Very easy. And so the woman was a little bit more calm...And Natalia said, then let's start and if you want I can speak in Spanish because we have another girl here that does not understand much of Catalan neither....In a very inclusive way”. (Maria, Romani woman, member of DKM)

If we analyse the Romani students' meeting, these are not events in which who participate and who “give the talk” are the members of the association. Opposing to this, as already explained, there are spaces dedicated to working in reduced groups in order for participants to be able to talk and to express their concern. This do not follow a dramaturgical orientation (Goffman, 1959), but it is the own criteria of the association, to work for the needs of the grassroots Romani women. A way of doing it is through listening the grassroots women in the students' meeting, including the women's concerns as priority working areas of the association and thus constantly creating original ways that enable channelizing the girls and women's needs (e.g. the Romi Youth Space, the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress, informal gatherings created at the headquarters of the association to talk either about processes of competences' validation or gender violence prevention). This is a commitment of all members of DKM.

Sulamita, one of my interviewee who worked for a year in DKM in 2007, explains how she was very nervous the day before the celebration of the Students' Meeting. She emphasized the importance of ensuring debate among women at each working groups, what would allow DKM members to build on further work once the meeting have finished:

“I woke up that day very nervous, I didn't sleep, just because I wanted that everything goes good, that people do the task they have assigned correctly, that we have lots of participants, and that in the groups of debates there were debate so we could be able to work on that later... So you are there, organizing that. For me it was such a big event; I have never organised something similar (...)” (Sulamita, Romani woman, former participant of DKM)

A similar structure than the one of the Romani students' meeting was followed in 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women in order to promote dialogue among Romani women and specially, ensure that the ones who had never participated in this type of spaces could have a say. Non-Romani women and academic Romani women who participated in the Conference were asked to leave the floor to grassroots women, this as a way of evidencing the cultural intelligence that underlie the event. In relation to this, Esther, member of DKM, emphasized how important was for many Romani women who has never gone out form their homes and towns taking a plane and attending to Barcelona. As Esther explains in her narrative, in the Congress, all these women were listened with attention, by non-Roma women academics, by other Romani women, by Romani young girls... These “Other Romani women” had the same feeling than Petra and Maria, that of their voices truly mattered:

“(...) We gathered women that usually don't go out from their home at all, women full of responsibilities, we gathered them alone, with no husbands, with no children... I know that we say this a lot, but this is very important, because you have to put it in the place of these women: in their daily life... so we take out from their routine, we put them in a plane, they dress up very beautiful and came here. And at the Congress they were listened, we ask

them questions, they were able to raise questions, to say what they want, they have translation in 4 languages!” (Esther, Romani woman member of DKM)

In all, in adopting a transformative approach and acknowledging that every Romani woman has something to bring about (everyone has the capacity for acting), DKM recognizes and exerts the principle of cultural intelligence. Being aware of this and keeping in mind some of the theoretical contributions of dialogic feminism regarding that “everybody is capable of reflecting, acting and theorizing about feminism, as well as to create cultural practices that have never existed before” (De Botton, Puigvert, and Sánchez-Aroca, 2005, p. 38), the windows of opportunity that DKM opens to bring about contributions to mainstream feminism and to Romani feminism itself is still to be explored and is what I will do throughout my analysis.

### **8.3. Solidarity networks guiding Romani women’s relationships**

DKM foundational objectives capture the importance of solidarity for both the organization and the Romani women’s mobilisation given that one of the goals of the association states as a core principle:

“Romani women and non-Romani women of different ages, academic backgrounds, professional profiles and socio-economic levels who pursued a common objective: to work for the equality and non-discrimination of the Romani women by promoting their participation in educational, social and cultural spaces”.

As a starting point members of DKM knew that achieving the equality and non-discrimination of Romani women involved foremost and first of all, working together strengthening networks of solidarity among all women, promoting egalitarian dialogue, communication, and meaning creation in all activities oriented to the “Other women” (De Botton et al., 2000). Thus, the idea of building networks of solidarity among all grassroots Romani women and the *Other women* as a strategy to struggle against the triple discrimination has been always present among members of DKM.

Solidarity underpins DKM and can be identified at different levels of its discourse as well as among its members, as a positive reaction against the triple discrimination that Romani women suffer. Solidarity in the sense conceived by the dialogic feminism defended by Puigvert et al. (2000) is an essential element in order to achieve social transformation of gender relations, and indeed is essential for Romani feminism. Far from post-modern relativist trends, the ‘Other women’, and the “other Roma women” defend the right to have equal opportunities to education, and as well as the right to choose to work at home (Puigvert et al. 2000, p. 101). But, how solidarity relations are promoted within the frame of the association?

First, evidences form social relations based on solidarity have been identified among Romani women at the time of participating in the association’s activities. This will be explained in Chapter 11. For what is of our interest here, solidarity is also enhanced within the structure of the association. Consider what Carmen says about it: something that emerged from the bottom-up, which impregnates the way of working of the association:

“working together, as all have to be the result of the dialogue among Roma women and non-Roma,... And I think that this is one of the most important things of DKM.. this is one of the success of DKM... because is of all of us, for all of us...”.

[And she continues:]

“I don’t know, I think that it is a solidarity that emerges from below.... It is authentic... if a Romani women have to do something and comes to DKM, and knocks our door, we will stop doing what are doing and we will help her, it can be whatever.... I that related to organize things, we have been very dynamic.. it is a very authentic solidarity... And I think that this is a huge contribution to the Romani feminism, as it multiplies everything...It is a vaccine against discouragement”. (Carmen, Romani woman member of DKM)

She says that it is a solidarity that “multiplies everything”. In fact, her view is in line with the view of Esther when asked about how the association approaches the demands of those women’s who attend to DKM asking for support or assessment any given day. Her narrative is interesting for two reasons. First, because she is one of the women who experiences the daily life of DKM so she knows in-depth the working system of the association. And second, because she gives a view from a structural approach regarding relations of DKM with other agents, and how solidarity is perceived by them:

“For instance, we can be talking right now and Cristina comes, or we are in contact with Maria from Shine association in Reus... we have relationships with women from the very grassroots (...) Sometimes they ask for topics about which we can’t give an answer, so although maybe we don’t know about health for instance, we look for a solution for the person, we look for the information and we provide that information (...) So they have us because when they need an information, that maybe if they go to the civic council or somewhere, there they get that information, but they don’t have the same trust... But these women come here and they ask either to me or to some of the girls who are here. And what we will do? We will stop doing what we are doing and we will help them. We never say to a Romani woman who comes to Drom: I can’t help you now because I have to finish a report... Because people goes first” (Esther, Romani woman member of DKM)

In all, solidarity in DKM is enhanced because emerges from the bottom-up, enhancing trust among women and on the association, and looking at attending the women’s need.

#### **8.4. A “Roma Association or an Association of Romani Women? When diversity of members’ background is one of the most rich assets**

What I want to explore in this section is to what extend diversity of backgrounds’ profiles within DKM membership involves an asset for the association. In this sense, fieldwork conducted analysed in light to literature revised enables to identify at least two ways in which such diversity plays an asset for the association. The first one is the

capacity of reaching very diverse constituencies of Romani women. The second one is the capacity to access to wide networks of external contacts outside the Roma community, key knowledge and salient information.

Diversity among women's members of DKM has been a key feature since the very foundation of the association till the current time, observed in their members' profiles in terms of age, nationality, ethnicity and political affiliation. In fact, Drom Kotar is defined not as an Association of Romani Women, but as a Roma Association of Women, as it includes Romani and non-Roma women. I have introduced this issue in the presentation of my case study in the methods section. However, it deserves a section to analyse in what regards this diversity of backgrounds among its members has become an asset to the association for achieving its goals. Although Romani and non-Romani women who integrate DKM are very diverse, all of them share a common interest: struggling for improving the situation of the Romani women's living condition and making true the goals of the association. Biographies and stories of the Romani and non-Romani women members converge therefore underpinned by these common aims. Some of the stories of the Romani women member of Drom Kotar are the following:

“I was born here, In Barcelona. My mother is Portuguese and my father was born in Extremadura. I am the eldest of four brothers and sisters. All my life I have seen my mother selling at street markets. My mother provided for us by selling in the streets (...) I always went with her and helped her to load the stuff. At times they got the stuff from her; sometimes she got fined, and she was exhausted at the end of the day. So that I grew in such an environment which I do know well (...) my mother is illiterate but she always worked as a cook in several restaurants. I tell her, why don't you try to pass the elementary education exam?” (Tatiana, Romani woman member of DKM)

“.. I was studying at the Law School, I think I was in the second year at the time, then, at the streets markets, because I have my stall here in the Zona Franca and Ana Belén also sells her stuff... My parents have been doing this activity (streets markets) all their lives. There she was, Ana Belen, also selling with her parents, the stalls are very close together. She was my

cousin's friend, then at day's end we used to go out together for a short while, we bought a little something or strolled around the market, we all went out together. I remember we agreed to go out together, I hardly knew her (...) and she said "hi, you are to take part in an activity of Roma women students meetings that are organised by the DROM ... that's how it all started ... (...)" (Aurora, Romani woman member of DKM)

"(...) my mother is from Malaga, my father is Serbian and they met in Chicago where I was born and where I grew. My mother kept saying that we were a Roma family, you ought to discover more things, the US is not everything... So when I was 11 I came to Spain for the first time and started to know the Roma people in Spain... (...) I joined the Francis Parker in Chicago where they encouraged me to consider the possibility that I could study at a great University, my mother always encouraged me to do so, to study in a top University (...) I then finished my secondary education and enrolled the UW Madison: I studied education as well as dance (...)" (María, Romani woman member of DKM).

A bit of their personal stories presented, what is therefore that what connects Tatiana's story whose family roots are Portuguese, with Aurora's story marked by her socialization in the Pentecostal church, or Maria's totally different biography as an "American Romani women" as she herself identifies?

What they share is their Romani cultural traits, which in turn are the ones to which many Romani women from Catalan neighbourhoods or European communities can feel attached to. Indeed, this is because Romani women within DKM transmit their experiences and their way of living their culture through egalitarian dialogue among each other. This is what Petra, a Romanian Roma member of DKM explains:

"Perhaps, relationships established at the Drom's meetings, when we gather there to enjoy a cup of coffee, is like building a bridge between Roma women across the world (...) Indeed, but if you are a Romanian Roma woman, or Moroccan...but when at the time of talking and creating this opportunity... that is very important and of course they start telling things to



each other...being supportive to each other” (Petra, Romani woman member of DKM).

However, non-Romani women members of the association, although they do not share this cultural identity, they do share the same struggle together with the Romani women; even if each of them ground it on different reasons. Victoria, a non-Romani women, founder member of DKM explains that many Romani women who participate in the activities of Drom Kotar although seeing her many times at the association’s events, do not know that she is a member; this because she reminds always “behind the stage”, leaving the prominence to the Romani women:

“Relationships with Roma women, most of them don’t know me or don’t class me as Drom, because as I am usually involved in the technical side, covering bureaucratic issues... and that happens (...) It is the fact of prioritising that if talking to Roma women becomes necessary, it is more advisable that entity’s Roma women do it, Ana, Emilia, Manu... (...) But I do want this role; I believe it is very important; we act as a bridge amongst them.” (Victoria, non-Roma woman member of DKM)

That said, on the one hand, counting within its constituencies with Romani women who come from very different communities is a central element in order to engage the very grassroots women. Directly engaging Romani women from the local communities in which DKM have created synergies involves creating new allies and establishing new contact points and collaborations. For example, the case of Tatiana, who comes from Bon Pastor, a neighbourhood from Barcelona where there are a large number of Roma people, or Aurora, from Zona Franca in Barcelona, another area with a huge Romani community, have involved for DKM to bridge these neighbourhoods closer to the association. The same has happened with La Mina, from where Carmen comes from. I will not develop further this point here as it will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 10, when studying the impact of the association at the local level.

On the other hand, considering the second asset identified, how diversity within its constituencies involves access to wide networks of contacts, key knowledge and salient

information, this is explained by the different professional positions that members of DKM have, their different backgrounds in general. And there is an important issue on which members of DKM agree and literature on grassroots association is in line with (Smith, 1997): DKM members and participants are not economically dependent on the association, they have their own jobs: some of them are university teachers, secondary school teachers, workers from the public sector, housekeepers, shop assistants, bartenders, students, ... among others. This element makes DKM members participating at very different professional spaces, either at the grassroots level as it is the case of secondary teachers such as Pilar, housekeepers such as Tatiana, or shop assistants such as Soledad or Eva, or at public spaces due to the professional position they have at regional level, or at the EU level because of having to attend to professional meetings related to education (due to their job).

This second element positions DKM in a privileged situation in terms of foreseeing its strategy at the time of developing its activities and also because the social capital of its members plays a key role here (Edwards and Mc Carthy, 2004; Edwards & Marullo, 1995). As Esther explains, each member of DKM has its own job and they contribute with their own knowledge and their positions to the association's aim. She explains for instance how DKM is working now on the topic of trafficking of human beings because a member of the association insisted it was very important to deepen in it, Esther says she would have never thought that even this social problem existed among the Romani community:

“(...) For instance, we are going to start working the whole trafficking issue, and this is going to be done why? Because a Dromita insisted in that this was a line which it was very important to be in, because as to myself, a Roma woman that lives in Badalona, I will never really learn about that there is a problema of trafficking with people (...) In DKM we have contacts beyond my context, I can learn about what is happening in the Czech Republic because someone has gone to a meeting for her job or for whatever (...)” (Esther, Roma woman member of DKM)

Counting with members with very diverse profiled within its constituency have been also of importance for the association's public recognition, in the sense that Drom Kotar

has been asked to represent its constituencies by decision makers in public spaces or also to participate in media debates. Evidence of this is the uncountable news appeared in local (Barcelona), regional (Catalonia), national (Spain), or even European media channels (radio, newspapers and TV) that record a DKM activity, either some of the editions of the Romani Students Meeting (the “Trobadas”), the 1<sup>st</sup> International Romani Women Congress, or other activities or projects organized by DKM. As Esther explains to me when I asked her why she thinks that DKM has such public recognition (after the International Congress its public recognition has increased), she remembers me that this is not because she has appeared several times in TV and she has a good “political discourse”, but she emphasises that it is because it is the result of commitment and years of intense and good work:

“People know Drom Kotar but it is not because I have appeared several times in TV... it is because there is a solid work behind what it... I think that Drom has a long trajectory that stands and demonstrates its reputation”  
(Esther, Roma woman, member of DKM)

In all, diversity of members’ profiles have been one of the elements in DKM organizational form which have enabled the association to reach different constituencies and acquired more public recognition with the pass of time at local, regional and European level. Beyond that, having different profiles allow them to carry out together the activities successfully, learning one from each other, and developing them strategically.

### **8.5. Focusing on what works to eradicate discrimination: Successful action approach**

As mentioned, since its beginning DKM emerged aimed at responding to the needs of Romani women by looking for the most effective way of channelling their demands, considering that many non-governmental associations as well as public institutions were not effectively tackling them needs of the Romani people and the specific demands of Romani women. It used to happen that the own community was not being taken into account at the time of shaping the policy agenda as well as their voices were ignored

when a policy was developed: policies were done “on the Roma” rather “with the Roma (Ramon Flecha & Soler, 2014). The effect that these actions had on many Romani people was no other than their disengagement from these activities promoted by those social or political actors –sometimes Romani people– who left them at the margins since its very beginning. Some of my informants felt also “disengaged” by this way of doing. For instance, in the case of Aurora, when asking her about how she perceived associationism she replied:

“(…) We did not know a lot of associations and the truth is that those we knew did not work either in overcoming inequalities, in fostering the inclusion of the Roma people woman, but best worked with more families that had certain resources and gave grants…” (Aurora, Roma woman member of DKM).

Linked to what Aurora explains, another member of DKM, Georgina, who worked in the association in 2002 explained me in her interview how the predominant model within the Catalan Romani association at the beginning of the 2000 was not really the one that was closed to the community needs but that model of association oriented to applying for funding to offer a project/service which is time-limited:

“What associations used to do was to form a powerful board in order to produce powerful projects. Then it was known that the local administration would support you since it has political implications. Thereafter you present to the Generalitat, Town Hall or the Ministry some projects. Since there is a Roma people national development plan, you know you will get it. And they receive the grant to carry out, for example, a one or two months activities, or it could also be a Board members’ cost cover grant, as it is understood that the entity performs an informal job of community mediation (...) This is the most spread model. Since the recognition of the Roma people, the comprehensive Plan, here in Catalonia, made things change. There are still certain practices that are not allowed. But there are still things to be done...” (Georgina, non-Roma woman member of DKM).

According to her, first the formal recognition by the Catalan Government of the Roma people (November 2011)<sup>40</sup>, and then the approval of the Integrated Plan for the Roma Inclusion (2005-2008) involved indeed a shift in the Roma policy in the Catalan region, and therefore in the type of actions that are funded. The reason for this was because the Integrated Plan requires for accountability in order to provide funding. However, there is still “work to do”.

DKM emerged as a reaction to the “exclusionist approach” traditionally used *on* the Roma (Gómez & Vargas, 2004). Victoria, one of the founder members of DKM put it in a very illustrative way when saying the idea that “we [DKM] couldn’t make Romani women lose their time (...) DKM was founded in order to be something different”:

“Both Roma and non-Roma women at the entity, knew for sure that many things had been forged, that they had been used (...) what should we do as a group? With evidence, as a group, we cannot make others to waste their time, and the fact of not wasting time, gave us plenty of basis about communicational methodology, a lot of issues, “The Other Women”, we already had some theoretical basis at a general level, with all kinds of participants (...)” (Victoria, non-Roma woman member of DKM).

That said, I will proceed now to explore in more detail how this is executed through what I have called the “successful-based rationale” of the association in the design of its activities. Grasping from Victoria’s explanation, and also from Aurora, Pilar, Maria, and other of DKM members narratives and the own documentary revision it can be observed the “what work” support of the activities selected and implemented. In this regard, in what follow I will explore this *successful-based rationale* of the main activities of DKM and how this is always ensured by the association’s members looking at advancing to increase the opportunities of Romani women as in terms of accessing to education, labour market, or accessing to spaces of social participation. When approaching DKM EU-funded project, another important issue will be discussed, the one of transparency and to in relation to economic funding, and how this constitutes another aspect of the “successful-based rationale” of the association, perceived by

---

<sup>40</sup> See “Resolució 1046/VI del Parlament de Catalunya, sobre el reconeixement de la identitat del poble gitano i del valor de la seva cultura” Butlletí Oficial del Parlament de Catalunya, December 3, 2001, p. 21. Retrieved from [www.parlament.cat/activitat/bop/06b240.pdf](http://www.parlament.cat/activitat/bop/06b240.pdf).

members themselves, and by participants, as part of the culture of excellence of the association.

*Official Trainers Course in the speciality of school canteens: evidence of what works*

In the methods' part, I have already explained in what consisted this course: DKM coordinates an official vocational training, and run by an official organism accredited by the Catalan Government to all those Romani women who are interested in getting a diploma with further possibilities to find a job. Thus, the course is recognized by the Catalan Government and once those Romani women that follow the course obtain the diploma they are eligible to work as *schools lunch monitors*. However, what is the advantage for Romani women to obtain this type of official certification? DKM argument to offer this training and no other type of training is that by acquiring this official certification Romani women can access to job positions where they are visible in public spaces, what is indeed a positive element to overcome prejudices against the Roma or for instance, in those cases which Romani women are employed in schools where there are Roma students, they can be also referents for them. In the following quote Aurora captures really well the deep importance of offering to Romani women a type of training which is evidence-based, and not a training that can be solely entertainment and folkloric:

“If Roma women ask for something absolutely legal, as for instance a flamenco course, or whatever, that could be positive, but there is another activity more focused towards education and that women themselves ask for it, we are going to give priority to the one focused on education since it will have a more positive impact (...)” (Aurora, Roma woman member of DKM).

For instance, Lourdes, Leticia, Angeles, Patricia or Coral, all of them Romani women who have coursed the Official Trainers Course offered by DKM, highlighted when dialoguing with them about what have meant for them having passed through this training, the official character of this certification. It should be considered that the most of the time those women who access to this training have low levels of formal

education, many of them have not even finished primary education and this is the first official diploma in their professional record. For instance, Angeles explains what supposed for her obtaining the course and why this is different than other courses:

“I would have never imagined so (...) it has given me great security (...) No way, never! And everything thanks to this course, as otherwise I would have done it ...” [Belen is now the Coordinator of the Canteen of the School where she works, in Sant Josep Obrer, Reus]

### **Leading EU-funding projects**

Some of the topics discussed in *the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women (October 2010)* organised by DKM, were later assumed as working lines of association, translated into practical application through EU-funded projects. The association's members considered that continue working assuming the demands of those Romani women who had participated in the congress was not only a need but also their responsibility. Esther, a member of DKM explains about the two EU-funded projects that DKM had led after the Congress:

“All those contents that full of meaning Romani women expressed in the Roma Declaration of Barcelona and in the Conclusions of the Congress, we continue working on them after the Congress... specifically in two projects that have had lot of social impact, ROM-UP and ROM-ACT” (Esther, Romani woman member of DKM)

As she mentions, one of the EU-funded project that DKM led after the Congress was the *ROM-UP. The inclusion of Roma through quality successful educational experiences* (2012-2013). This project was integrated by eight institutions of different European countries and it emerged from the need to improve the educational level and life condition of the Roma people.<sup>41</sup> ROM-UP main goal was the creation of an *International Romani Network* aimed at raising awareness of the successful educational

---

<sup>41</sup> For more information about Rom-UP project visit: <http://rom-up.eu/>

experiences that have already been scientifically proven to be effective in the promotion of the social integration of Roma children and the students in general, in terms of pursuing educational success (ROM-UP guide, n/d). The project emphasized two key ideas: the evidence-based of the educational experiences to be recognized by ROM-UP, and the direct participation of Romani people in all the relevant phases of the project. Thus, Romani people were not just the *research objects*, the ones who are asked, but in ROM-UP they were also the ones who were actively participating in the project as it happens in the communicative methodology of research (Gomez, Sordé, Racionero, 2010). Some of the educational experiences finally identified in the project were the decisive family and community participation programmes implemented in the schools as Learning Communities in Spain; the Romani Students Meeting; programmes of family and community education; the project “*Decreasing the Dropout Rate of Roma Children from School*” implemented in Bulgaria; the inclusion of Roma culture classes into the curriculum of state schools in Bulgaria; socio-medical centres for Romas (women’s place in Aliveri), in Greece; the interactive groups: heterogeneous ability classrooms with reorganization of resources; Roma families learning (ROFAL) COMENIUS Regio Project (IRELAND); or the Pre-school programmes (Romani Criss).

As an impact of this project, the Catalan government which was one of the partner institution of this project (specifically, the Department of Social Welfare), has promoted the implementation of family and community participation programmes in different schools where there are high rates of Romani students. This is a direct social and political impact achievement of the DKM led project.

The second EU-funded project directed by DKM derived by one of the lines discussed during the 2010 Congress was *ROM-ACT. Widening Roma women’s access to non-formal and informal learning validation systems*. (2013-2014). Acknowledging the importance of non-formal and informal learning validation throughout Europe (CEDEFOP, 2009), when DKM raised the proposal of ROM-ACT it was in line of the Action Plan on Adult Learning of the EC (2007) which states that assessment and recognition of skills and social competences, no matter where and how they are acquired, are of high importance for those people who do not have basic qualifications and therefore, of much importance to enable their integration in society. However,



although the validation of prior learning could be indeed of major help to advance towards the social integration of disadvantage groups, DKM knew that for the case of Romani people and particularly Romani women (as it happens with other at-risk communities) accessing to these type of information and opportunities of validation is very often difficult due to the many barriers faced (lack of information; funding; not understanding of procedures). All these barriers confronted by Romani women had been widely discussed during the Romani Women Congress a couple of years before.

Drawing from this motivation and in line with the EU challenge of overcoming the exclusion of the Roma (EU Framework for National Roma Integration for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020), ROM-ACT aimed at bringing up the current non-formal and informal validation systems in Europe to the needs of non-academic people and disadvantaged groups as the Roma community, as well as the access of non-academic people to the non-formal and informal learning validation systems. More specifically, the project goal was widening access to non-formal and informal learning validation system among Romani women in Europe in order to strengthen their educational, social, and labour inclusion.

Thus, currently, once the project has ended up, 37 Romani women (2 from Spain, 4 from Ireland, 11 from the Czech Republic, 3 from Romania and 17 from Greece) from 5 European Countries have passed through the process of validation of their formal and non-formal leaning and obtained some type of certification officially recognised by their national countries. As an output of the project, a DVD has been created in which some of the Romani women who have passed through the process of validation of their prior learning explain their experiences, motivating other women to do it. For the case of Spain, Cristina explains what has involved for her participating in ROM-ACT and in the process of accreditation:

“I am here to explain what the project of accreditation is. It is a title, a certificate that validates all the experience that we have and puts it on a piece of paper. Why do I want to validate my skills? Because I know that this title, this certificate, this diploma, whenever I apply for a job, all the experience that I have acquired through my life will be valued. With this title I have the confidence, the certainly that I will have many more

opportunities than if I did not have it.” (Cristina, Roma woman, Rom-Act project, 2013-2014).

Although the ROM-ACT Project has reached its end, it continues achieving social impact. For instance, more Romani women in the area of Catalonia are showing their interest in validating their prior learning competencies, and this is due to the task of dissemination that DKM is doing at the very grassroots levels, but also through the ROM-ACT facebook and twitter account. DKM still receiving petitions of explaining the ROM-ACT project and how it have worked the experience of the validation of competencies with the Romani women in European forums it participates with other institutions that work with vulnerable communities. Finally, on February 2016 Drom Kotar was communicated that ROM-ACT had been selected as a “Success story” by a panel of experts from the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. According to the Commission, “Success stories” are finalised projects that have distinguished themselves by their impact, contribution to policy-making, innovative results and/or creative approach and can be a source of inspiration for others. This is indeed a major recognition of the impact of the work done by the association together with its partners at different European cities, aimed at bridging the validation of learning closer to more Romani women in Europe.

### *Transparency is part of excellent work*

From data analysed in relation to (2) management of funding and (2) activities, specially evidences gathered from minutes from the assemblies and the interviews of founder members and other members who have worked in the association, what can be observed is that another issue of which members of DKM has since its very beginning watched over is transparency on financial account: ensuring that funding received from public administration is correctly used and managed.

For instance, Victoria explained that DKM has since its very beginning a set of non-written principles that guide its well-doing and transparency. For instance, member of the association or participants are never paid to do so, only covering the travel or living expenses derived from their participation for instance in international travel. The public

funding achieved through competitive calls is entirely dedicated to the development and implementation of the activities of the project:

“(...) It is an issue of excellence. European Commission says: be careful! You are the best but maybe you don’t have enough money to assume that project. So for this reason we have to be very meticulous at the time of managing money. For instance, Drom have never paid to any women, nothing... And within Roma associationism as well as in other types of associationisms, we do know that there are associations that live from public funding, they obtain their salaries from it, or other complements... Women who volunteer in Drom have never obtained any money, they know that they will never be paid for that (...)” (Victoria, non-Romani woman member of DKM)

In the above mentioned quotation Victoria also mentions another central debate that is of much relevance within Romani associationism: the EU-funding and the challenges that grassroots associations face at the time of navigating within EU resources and how to correctly approach EU-funded projects which are of an important amount of capital, when the annual budget of a grassroots association is limited. Related to the idea of the “NGO-ization of the Romani movement” (Nirenberg, 2009; Trehan, 2009) aid has not been always correctly used as it has also happened with mainstream associationism in relation to the EU-funding. The challenge here as stated by Guy and Kovats (2006), is how to correctly use funding, while involving the local level, and even more, as Victoria explains, when associations as DKM prepare excellent projects proposals, win competitive calls, but they often do not have the technical capacity to assume the wingspan that it supposes:

“(...) We have found problems that we produced very interesting projects but that in view of our economical situation, sound but limited, we have difficulties to carry out such an important project like this one. We have had many problems with these recent European projects, powerful ones indeed, above all with regard to finding a bank guarantee. Because we are

small...But we did not give up until we succeeded (...)" (Victoria, non-Romani woman member of DKM)

In the case of DKM, achieving a financial support has been possible because the association counts now with a prestige. But it is indeed a limitation for grassroots associations that wants to open up a new trajectory in Europe not having this "know-how" on how to apply this type of funding. For many grassroots associations that have some trouble to survive at the local level it seems that finding allies at the European stage would be a way out and a way to survive at the long-run. This issue will be analysed in Chapter 10.

Finally, it is worth to highlight here that on the exclusionary side, different interviewees have remarked that being loyal to the principle of transparency does not come without some costs. Different barriers have been identified in this sense during the fieldwork. First, persons or organizations that insists on DKM members to proceed in irregular ways or not to be so strict with it, as if it was not that important. When from the DKM they are very clear that would not be co-opted, a wide range of reactions have been experienced that goes from getting angry to the association to critiquing them for being "too strict". Second, in different occasions there have been attempts to tarnish DKM reputation, as it is hard to believe that the transparency principle is so carefully observed. Of course, I was told how all these false accusations were coming from people who have themselves not done so or who are hiding others who are actually not respecting this principle, and therefore, they would like to see DKM do the same. A real case was an evaluation of the Integral Plan for the Roma people in Catalonia, whose evaluators mistakenly attributed to DKM much more public funds than the ones DKM had actually received, insinuating that there had been deviation in the allocated funds. The fact that DKM has so clear and well-organized accounting system helped them to quickly prove that this was a false accusation. This is something very well-known among the grassroots Romani women I interviewed, as at the end, the Roma population in Catalonia or in Spain is rather a smaller one, and with plenty of connections from within and with the outside. Finally, third reflection was provided by my interviewees. The work with grassroots Roma makes DKM to be exposed to really limit situation of extreme needs, in which someone could think that the organization should address. However, even in the most urgent cases, DKM has never done this type of support in

terms of funding at the organization level, it has been always helping the person in question by connecting them with the official sources or at the personal level, as it can be understood that this would imply the violation of the transparency and anti-corruption discourse.

### **Summary**

In chapter 8, I have analysed the underlining features that helped understanding why Drom Kotar Mestipen has an emancipatory character in terms of contributing to the self and collective empowerment of Romani women. Five features have been identified as characteristic of this grassroots association, what in turn make it a 'hub for social transformation' within the Romani women's mobilisation. First, the way how it constructs public narratives among Romani women, in which diverse Romani women (from different territories, sometimes form from different backgrounds) feel identified on a common ground, the values of the Roma cultural identity and the Romani feminism, is of deep strength of motivation and force to mobilise other Romani women to join the association and the movement. Second, solidarity networks guiding women's relationships and within the association. Third, the idea of cultural intelligence within its decision-making structures, that is, that everyone has a say, no matter their cultural or educational level. Forth, regarding to its internal structure, the diversity of backgrounds among its membership composition, what involves an asset for the association. And finally, the working approach in its activities based on an evidence that of looking on what works to ensuring success. Having identified this in this initial chapter will help to advance in the understanding why the association has impact on different levels, what will be explored in the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER 9. GOING TO THE GRASSROOTS: ORGANISING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

*It is 15.30, we are in Campclar, a mostly Roma neighbourhood at the outskirts of Tarragona, in the Mediterrani primary school, this time preparing everything because the XV Romani Women's Students Meeting will start in less than an hour. I can hear Carolina, a non-Romani women volunteer in the school saying: "Romani children this time are even more motivated than their mothers... they also want to participate in the Meeting!" There are some Romani men also, inside the school and also outside, with their wives and their children. Buses start to arrive to the school and the environment in the schools looks like chaotic, but local organizers from Mediterrani School and members of DKM have already agreed how tasks should be distributed, everything is under control: non-Roma women are in charge of the kindergarten space, microphones, and other logistic stuff... The protagonists this afternoon are Romani women. Two buses arrive, with Romani women and children from Barcelona, some towns from Lleida, this time anyone from Girona. The president of DKM explains me why: "today was not a good day from the group of Romani women from there..., so they are not attending, is a pity". There are nervous in the room, expectation, motivation... Romani women of all ages, they take their accreditations, and pass to the main room, local authorities and men are just invited to join the Welcoming session, then they know that they should leave the Meeting, is time to start the Trobada! .... (...) [Notes taken from the observation of the Campclar Romani Student Meeting, 2013]*

This chapter is aimed at analysing how Drom Kotar has contributed to the organising of the Romani women's movement at the local level in Catalonia. I do that, first, by studying how the association organises Romani women when developing its intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting. Then, I move on in order to explore the impact that this activity has generated at the local level in terms of triggering new mobilizations and organizations.

### 9.1. Women participating in a Romani Women Students' Meeting

I make the comparison with dance. In dance there is that moment of body-mind connection, it does not matter what has happened before and what will happen in the future, is just that moment. And in DKM I think that they cultivate the importance of being at that very moment: to be there. As you have attended today, is perfect, is enough (...) And this I think that is very important to work with grassroots Romani women, because unfortunately many of them have very difficult lives... And it has to have flexibility hand in hand with no judgment... [of their situations] (Maria, Romani woman member of DKM)

Maria's words reflects in a very good way how DKM conceives participation: **a type of participation** focused on directly engaging grassroots Romani women, what involves thinking first in their needs, in their personal and family situations. This involves flexibility but not at the expense of risking the activity goals. Thus, instead of asking Romani women to attend -for instance- to the association's headquarters at the time of developing an activity what DKM members do is attending themselves to the different neighbourhoods. This is also creating a non-initially intended effect, the one of organizing Roma women themselves.

As Georgina explains, **this way of working initiated by Drom Kotar** in order to reach the very grassroots Romani women represented a new way of doing for the Romani associationism in Catalonia, as it has never existed before:

“Go to the neighbourhoods. Neither those most older associations have done that (...) because doing event of so many people involves, going ... I mean, the event don't start that day, it start much earlier. Normally, those already set associations think that events should be organised at their headquarters, so they decide everything.... So the day of the event they say: Let's see who is here: those people will come, those others who already confirmed me attendance will also come... So they are not used to do a previous work at the neighbourhoods” (Georgina, non-Roma woman member of DKM)

Thus, this way of working set up by DKM within the Romani associationism in Catalonia means involving the own women since the very design of the activity that is being developed to its end, what requires planning it much before than the day of the celebration of the event. So how Romani women participate in a Romani Women Students' Meeting?

Women can engage in a *Trobada* in multiple ways, what counts is that they attend and have a say, that they come back to their homes and their neighbourhoods daring with new dreams and thinking in new challenges for themselves. For each *Trobada* there is a "chairing committee" which is in charge of its local organisation. Most of the time it is composed by women who have never organised any public activity. But this does not involve a problem, the chairing committee always counts with the support of DKM. During the period of organisation of the *Trobada* there is an intense activity of "agitation", first at the neighbourhood where it will be celebrated (contacting all the stakeholders), and also in other Catalan territories (informing other communities about the day, the topics, setting up the logistic in order to enable those Romani women and girls who want to attend from different cities). What the chairing committee has to achieve is involving as more Romani women as possible during its organisation and the day of its celebration, of this will depend generating more debate and more impact and agitation in the neighbourhood.

Let's observe the narrative of Sulamita, who was in the organization of the Students Meeting of Sant Cosme in 2007, she explains how the organising of this *Trobada* started much earlier than the day it was celebrated, and this was in order to ensure that it really could count with the participation with people from the neighbourhood:

"I remember getting ready, go there, and start mixing with the rest of the mothers, little girls, local Roma women; it was a somewhat slow process until the Meeting day. It was a great Meeting, plenty of new situations, a lot of participants and then at a district that is not particularly near, with a lot of new faces...many models..." (Sulamita, Roma woman)



Asumpta, member of the chairing committee of the Students' Meeting celebrated in Figueres in 2014 also explains how she, together with other women who participated in the organisation of the event, contacted with different stakeholders at the neighbourhood. She emphasises that she has never participated in organising an event of such dimensions:

“(...) We have to do more *Trobadas*. They helped us very much...We asked shops in the neighbourhood to help us. The supermarket, the bakery. DKM assumed things and it was a success (...) I had never been in something like that...” (Assumpta, Romani woman)

Another example of the diverse forms of participating in the *Trobadas* is for instance to act as rapporteur in the reduced groups of debate. Eva, a Romani woman aged 26 who participated in the *Trobada* of Campclar with her cousins explained how while she was in the reduced groups (in the discussion) she was invited by a DKM member to be the rapporteur in one of the reduced groups:

“And then, the day that I went to the *Trobada* she tells me: “take the computer and take notes of all that is being said”... (Eva, Romani woman)

Soledad, who was doing an internship in DKM at the time when the XV edition of the *Trobadas* was being organised in Bon Pastor, in 2012, explains that she could not imagine that a grassroots association with a reduced structural capacity could be able to gather so many women in a Saturday afternoon:

“(...) No way was I going to imagine that said association was going to achieve 300 women in Catalonia from all over the place, obviously not only from our district. We hired coaches, putting everything on place so that those women could meet, until I saw it with my own eyes, I would not believe it (...) I could not believe it in the sense that they could gather some 300 women from anywhere in Catalonia since it is very hard for us to go out in the streets. We had to be there at 4pm, on time, but we are not punctual (laughters). And they were only women as their husbands did not attend!”

Petra, a Romanian Romani women member of DKM who get involved in the organising of the *Trobada* of Figueras, also keeps a very vivid memory of this event. She emphasizes that the most that she liked of the edition celebrated in Figueras was the passion with which women from there organised it:

“I loved our last meeting in Figueras, I did love it, since it was organised by local women in Figueras. It was great the way they organised it. We go there, we give our support, we organise it from the Drom too, but we empower them to do it.” (Petra, 35, Romanian Romani woman member of DKM)

All in all, since 2000 DKM has been engaging Romani women from neighbourhoods where almost anyone dare to work due to prejudices and stereotypes. Pilar remembers how some non-Roma people reacted at the beginning of organizing the *Trobadas*:

“In those Meetings, the ones in Sant Cosme, we were told that that they all were going to kill each other, the different families, that how on earth would we put all of them together there, and with the centre opened, as the opened centre in the end did not treat as well...but it was fine...” (Pilar, non-Romani woman member of DKM)

Uncountable Romani women in Catalonia has experienced now a *Trobada* in Sant Cosme, El Prat, Terrassa, Besós, Gracia, Bon Pastor, La Mina, Reus, Terrassa... or at many other Catalan cities and neighbourhoods; many women attend to them year after year being them the ones who have to “move” their own territory. DKM is just in charge of “generating the waves”:

“The job of the Drom is not going there on a daily basis and having a mediator working every day, or daily taking the children to school. It is precisely generating waves, to move the territory. Generating public debate in the territory, generating said positive expectations with respect to Roma people, thereafter make that themselves, after those interactions wish to change everything (...)” (Georgina, non-Romani woman member of DKM).

This goes in line with what says Carmen when states that the organisation of the Students' Meeting in the different neighbourhood counting with the local Romani women have later a sounded impact on the territory, organising their own mobilisation:

“The fact of organising the Meetings in different districts was, on the one hand, as a result of their calling us, but now it also helped to organise things in the mentioned district. Then, as a result of that Meeting, there were women who actually got hooked to it. And it has been like that from the very beginning. And since we had no problem whatsoever, no fights, no prominence, we said “We Drom organise it” because what we were actually after was for those women, those ones in the district, 2 or 3, we sat down with them: and how do you want to do it? And by doing that it is generated great involvement that it would not be possible otherwise. Fine, you may organise an incredible Meeting, great, but you don't do it from scratch...”  
(Carmen, Romani member woman of DKM)

Another strategy to achieve grassroots Roma women participating to the Romani student's meetings is for instance to provide buses for women from other neighbourhoods who want to attend the Meetings. While other associations, organisations, working on Roma women issues, even at European level, are thinking on how to reach what we call here the “other” Roma women, the DKM implement mechanisms not only to reach those women to keep them connected. One example is through the bus services which DKM provides across Catalonia, for all those women who wanted to join the *Trobada* in a different territory. Carmen, who participated in the III edition of the *Trobades*, celebrated in Terrassa in 2004 explains how it was:

“That one was amazing, people didn't have place. Such nerves...People arriving and coaches, and more people, ...we had not had such a big one [Trobada] ever...there was not enough place for so many people in that place...what stroke me from that one was that we went to do the sensibilisation in that school and when we had already done it and one teacher was explaining that how were they supposed to allow Access to Romani women while they were there as volunteers, that they were going to

rob them, because they [Romani women] only do what they are told by the men, so that if men didn't come to do anything, if men did not let them...(...) When she saw that room, with 300 women there. Grandmothers, girls, party afterwards. It was awesome (...)" (Carmen, Romani woman member of DKM)

Summing up, involving the own Romani women in the activities and going to the ground showed the Romani associationism and the mainstream Catalan society another way of working with the Romani people, full of hope, solidarity and rigurocity, it gave back the communities their agency, working for themselves in order to go out from poverty, succeed in education and thus achieve better living conditions.

## **9.2. DKM strategy: Working with all those with whom you share aims**

Before proceeding to the subsequent point I want to make some considerations on the strategy used by DKM in order to reach its goals. In Chapter 1 when discussing about the assets that involved for the association counting among its membership with diversity of backgrounds I mentioned the issue of how this involved access to wide networks of contacts. As briefly introduced, this can be used as a strategic resource at the time of establishing allies with those actors who share the same goals than the association at the time of developing an activity –improving the situation of the Romani women. Drawing from this, strategy is therefore considered as the output of a leadership team, a result of interactions among the individuals authorized to strategize on behalf of the organisation: a good strategy (...) is an ongoing process of learning to achieve a desired outcome by interactive with others to adapt to constantly changing circumstances (Ganz, 2009, 11). DKM deploys in such a strategic way the fact of counting within its constituencies a wide diversity of people, what provides it from an extend network of contacts and very diverse tactic repertories. This wide network of contact makes DKM to work with diverse people and find allies at diverse social spheres: at the grassroots levels (in all the neighbourhoods of Catalonia, at different regions of Spain where there are large communities of Roma people), within the

academia; at the stage of politics; within the Catalan, Spanish or even European Romani activism, or other spaces.

This together with the importance of family in Romani feminism, is what also explains that DKM has always counted with the collaboration of men as a way of advancing towards its goals. Men have not been part of the association, but they have collaborated in some of its activities and still doing it. For instance, Romani and non-Romani men can participate as volunteers in the Romani Student's Meeting developing some logistic activities such as preparing the rooms, or taking care of children, or Roma men were invited to participate at the welcoming session of the 1<sup>st</sup> Workshop of DKM celebrated in Barceloneta in 2001, as well as they can participate at the welcoming table of the Romani Student's Meeting. But men do not participate in the assemblies of the association and therefore, they have never decided any political line of the association. The way how Carmen describes the involvement of men in DKM is illustrative in so far it explains that those men that collaborate with DKM are those who stands for the promotion and equality of Romani women in mainstream society:

“Drom has always collaborated with men, since the very beginning. But not all men, those men who are really committed to Romani women... For me, realising that those men existed was so exciting!” (Carmen, Romani woman, founder member of DKM)

Beside this, working also with non-Roma people, women and men have been of major importance for the strategic development of DKM. The collaboration of Roma and non-Roma women within DKM has been often criticised within a reduced sector of the Romani Rights' Movement in Catalonia. The argument for this lied in considering that there were not a real collaboration among Roma and non-Roma women within DKM, and that power was copped by non-Romani women members of the association. However, this critique is not evidence-based: the aim of the members, no matter their ethnic background is working for the improvement of the living conditions of the Romani women, in a transparent basis and in an altruistic and voluntarily way. According to the founding members of the Association, this has been a critique that the association has had since its origin. As Carmen says, those who promoted this critique

thought that through it the prestige of the association could be damaged within the Romani movement in Catalonia:

“But in Drom Kotar have been always Romani people. It has never been something that the “gadje saviours did for the Gypsy”... We have always looked for the inclusion of Romani women within it... It has never been something created from the non-Romani world to the Roma: from-to, never... But this is something which has been argued and criticised since the very beginning, and is a lie” (Carmen, Romani woman member of DKM)

Working all united, Roma and non-Roma women has made DKM stronger in order to use more strategic mechanisms and reach more spaces of debate that make the association advance towards achieving its goals.

### **9.3. Inquiring on the impact: the activation of the associational life**

Deepening on the impact that the intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting have on their public could be assessed at least in light of two dimensions, the individual one, that is, the impact on rising the educational expectations of the Romani women and broadening their social opportunities; and the societal one, which can be observed in terms of activating the associational life among its participants, that is, fostering that those Romani girls who have engaged in them continue participating in other spaces of social participation, or either generating new ones. The impact in relation to the first dimension will be explored in Chapter 11. What will be considered in what follows is impact in relation to the societal dimension, and specifically, how the Romani Students Meeting have contributed in those neighbourhoods where it have been organised to the activation of an associational life. I will argue that from this activation of associational life some women have created new Romani women associations in their own territories, and other have become community leaders.

#### **9.4. Contributing to the creation of new Romani women associations**

Many Romani women that had not been previously engaged in any type of associational activity, once they engage in organizing, for instance, in the Romani Students' Meeting, or once they start volunteering in DKM, have passed from being at the shadow to become authentic community leaders. This has been the case of Aurora, Carmen, Petra, Sulamita, Tatiana, and many Romani women who interact with the set of resources available in DKM.

Organizing the Romani Students' Meeting in a neighbourhood where there are high rates of Romani population and there are Romani women that are not organised, put the seeds for them to join the mobilisation and take the lead in the change of their own social change. Many of the Romani women want to participate in spaces of decision-making offered by civic associations such as Drom Kotar but the daily responsibilities they have to deal with just becomes a barrier to assume other challenges. However, DKM although locally based and mainly volunteer-run it has always provided logistic support in terms of assessment to those Romani women who have expressed their intention to constitute an association.

Sulamita, explained how for the Romani women students' meeting that she supported to organize in Sant Cosme, Barcelona, the criteria to select that neighbourhood, was also according to her, because there was not any Romani association working there. Indeed, this became a reason to go to that area and stating to establish a relationship with the Romani women from there in order to promote the movement:

“We had a meeting and it was decided that it should take place in Sant Cosme... I believe Sant Cosme was mentioned because at that time there were no Roma people entities, nor men or women, neither educational groups, nothing, it was as if they were out of place. I think that it was the reason behind it, to foster the movement. To cause that effect over the young ones, so that the Roma people would step forward and form an association. And, incidentally, I believe that then something came up there with some women that I don't know if something more formal was actually done, but the core idea was there and with that... you think that you fulfil

your objective, even though there is nothing thereafter...moving that person inside..."it is true, let's organise something" (...)" (Sulamita, Romani woman)

According to Romani women participants in the fieldwork, after the Trobadas the activation of the associational life of the territory is very often promoted. For instance, Sulamita experienced this in the case of the students' meeting in Sant Cosme, and Carmen in the case of Hospitalet:

"They held another Meeting in Hospitalet and then afterwards...those synergies were taken advantage of. They are not Roma women association, Lacho Bajo Calí...The fact of having arranged several events there makes the territory more invigorated. I am not saying that only the Drom has done any such a thing, but that the Drom has also done it. And it was done without any recognition or anything. We got criticised for it. We were aware that if after a Meeting a group of women would come up wishing to organise a meeting, we were very pleased...and that is really nice: it is another type of leadership" (Sulamita, Romani woman)

Therefore, many women engaged in the students' meetings found in them and in the atmosphere created around them the triggering opportunity to set their own association, as they can also feel that they count with the support of Drom Kotar, or in other situations all the motivation and organizing capacity of these local group of women articulated around the *Trobades*, once they finished become into asking for collective claims for women themselves.

The *Shine Association of Romani Women* (pseudonym) located at the neighbourhood of Sant Josep Obrer in Reus constitutes an example of this case. DKM members accompanied members of Shine during its process of creation, assessing their members and supporting them in different tasks they needed to carry out. Angeles and Coral, founder-members of Shine Romani women's association, explained me how at the time where they organised the Romani student's meeting in their neighbourhood in 2009 in Reus they were not formally constituted as an organization. However, although having



to face several barriers DKM was the unique organisation that helped them to constitute their association.

(Talking about the beginning of Shine association with two of its founder members):

Angeles: “the association presentation act was done after the Meeting because as nobody helped us, we decided that since my brother-in-law with another lad created another association, they moved around, being men they moved even more, they were listened at, we thought we could gather together, to see if we could move even further... It was that of presenting the association (...). One day we presented the entity in the city hall, publicly...here in the Hospital...The Roma man that works in the Generalitat came down...who also talked much but did Little...He, in principle, we went to see him in Barcelona, it was him who called us...he told us that we had to go...and we went...and he introduced a very pretty picture of it all, everything very well...we told Ana and they thought it was fine” (Angeles, Romani woman)

Coral: “They support us a lot...!” (referring to DKM members)

As Coral and Angeles narrate, although they faced many resistances, DKM members supported them in creating Shine. A Romani women’s association that truly included the voices of the grassroots Romani women was needed in Sant Josep Obrer:

“I think that was pushed the creation of the Association was celebrating the Students’ Meeting in Reus, because it was formally constituted two months after it. And I totally understand it...! Anyone who participates in a Trobada gets the strength to do whatever go want; you are there, doing everything, getting new ideas, seeing how people collaborate!” (Esther, Romani women member of DKM)

Esther, who was in the following up of the process of constitution of Shine association explicates how organizing the intergenerational female Romani students’ meeting in

Sant Josep Obrer in Reus was the triggering event to empower members of Shine to make them feel that they could do it. However, although they did it, resistances that this group of women have encountered posed by other mainstream Romani women from the city, have forced them to work together with the Romani men local association. But members of Shine association continue participating in activities organized by DKM.

Esther also reflects about the barriers that the Shine association encountered:

“That’s why, in Sonakay, after Meetings took place... precisely because they had to manage alone. We were invited. They presented the entity very seriously. But it is true that launching an entity is very complicated. But they started from scratch. Getting the premises...establish contact with the City Council, mixing with other entities in the territory...” (Esther, Romani women member of DKM)

In Badia del Vallès, the organisation of the Romani Student’s Meeting there was the perfect occasion to launch the local Romani Women’s association from Badia, Badia Romani Women’s Association. Founder of the Association was supported by DKM in all the bureaucratic administration task in order to open up the organisation. Additionally, presenting the association in a day where approximately 200 Romani women from different cities of Catalonia were there reinforced the association’s member to launch their project with more energy:

“The Meeting took place in October 2011 when we actually presented the association. And from then onwards, everything went very well. At the time of the Meeting there were more young ladies, now many of them are married. There were pretty girls ... The Mayoress of Badía came ... what an impact it had ... 300 Roma women...” (Raquel, Romani woman founder of BRWS)

Another case is the one of Petra, the Romanian Roma member of DKM. As being herself Roma and immigrant, after many conversations with other members of the association, she together with other members of her Romanian community in her neighbourhood decided to create Savoré, an Association of Romani Immigrants. Thus,

having their own association would be a good way to visible the group and organise their demands:

(Speaking about Savoré) “DKM has provided us a lot of support: look, you need this. Or how to do that, or if you need, we can go with you to the different institutions where the association need to be registered” (Petra, Romanian Romani woman member of DKM and founder of Savoré)

Petra also explains how in promoting at the different neighbourhoods the activities that DKM do she has got in touch with new Romanian Roma people:

“(...) We are pretty active through our friends, as well as through the Parish. In Parallel (Hospitalet) is the largest group of Romanians. I have now found another community in Santa Coloma and we are going to see the way to get in touch with them, most probably through the Drom since they have their own contacts there. Because the instructors’ course is being carried out there and we go in different boroughs, we go there and contact them, so that we get to know more people from other communities (...)” (Petra, Romanian Roma woman)

The way of working at the very grassroots level of DKM, empowering Romani women and let them speak allows that they activate their own social networks and some of the times these efforts succeed and they formally become associations of Romani women.

### **9.5. Romani women from the shadow to become community leaders**

In those sites where formal grassroots associations have not emerged, there are active women who have not remained at the margins of the Romani women’s mobilisation. As the fieldwork evidence, many of these women turn into active community leaders, active figures within those social spaces in which they participate. Some of these women are DKM members who from their own working positions and their own daily lives mobilise their extended families and their communities, thus putting in them the

seed for the struggling for their rights, being themselves referents for the youngest Romani girls and thus accompanying them in a path for social change.

In this sense, I have been describing through the preceding chapters the story of Aurora and how because her extraordinary educational trajectory and because her involvement in the Pentecostal Church she is a strong referent in her community. Aurora is an example of passing from the shadow to become a community leader:

[Talking about the first time she met DKM] “(...) I hadn’t further expectations. It was that... get a job and get some stability, I think that these were my expectations... But of course, when I started to collaborate with Drom and I realised that I can defend the right of the Roma people, and the rights of the Romani women, and when I started to research... I got involved in activism... All these was more much interesting, much important for me, much exciting (...) I didn’t find the meaning on the idea of being a lawyer” (Aurora, Romani woman member of DKM)

Other examples can be spell out such as the one of Maria, the American Romani women member of DKM. As described in Chapter 8, for girls’ adolescents she captured their attention as she was the first Romani women that those adolescents met that could speak English, and in turn that wanted to spend her time to teach it to them. But this had a very transformative impact of that adolescents’ life stories. As the Nobel Prize and Neuroscientist Eric Kandel (2007) explains, social experience modulates our brain, as different kind of stimuli is able to change our neural connections related to learning and memory. This has indeed influenced the memories and the motivation of Jasmine and Antonia to get back to their studies in the next academic course. Therefore, Maria achieved mobilizing a group of adolescents, and right now, living out of Spain, in the United Kingdom, she is doing a similar community work, bringing to them the DKM working approach:

“The Meetings, how work should be done, persevering to have a group of women only. At first, John wished us to have a group where men could participate too, and I said no, that we needed a social area, that mothers have to feel like women, not just mothers. Because they said no at the beginning:

no, I'm a mother, I can't leave my children. But now they say they want a job... And this clearly reflects the job of Drom Kotar, the discourse that I have experienced and that is dealt with from the Drom (...), the level of confidence that women have, is a lot bigger, even with their children, with their husbands (...)" (Maria, Roma woman member of DKM).

The example of Sulamita, from La Mina, also reflects how she indeed develops a strong task of leadership within her community. Leticia, also from La Mina, without knowing that Sulamita had worked in DKM many years ago explained me about the importance of having Sulamita working now at the Civic Community Center, as she really helps Romani children with the school activities, not only with instrumental content –to what she was strongly concerned- but also because she is a referent for Romani girls of the community. In turn, Sulamita says about this issue:

"I like to treat this issue seriously when talking to the little girls. I tell them: I am glad that you are in the adults' school, I am happy about this change, but be aware that it could have been much easier for you...had you carried on with your own matters, with the secondary school, you could have been graduated, at your age... And I see it now from another angle much more mature, because I was just like that at that age, I was just another Roma girl, I had their same incentives, also their identical lack of motivation" (Sulamita, Roma woman).

Similarly, Asumpta, from Figueres (Girona) involved in the organising of the Trobada celebrated there in 2014, explained how the success of the event (it was a participation of more than 200 women from across Catalonia), moved her and the other Romani women from the neighbourhood to organise in order to articulate specific educational demands to the school authorities:

"Esther came and we then decided that we had to apply for the graduation that it had to be obtained in that very school. We then spoke with the School Master and she herself spoke to the Mayor, we were given an affirmative answer, since then it was the school with a bigger number of Roma students

it would be carried out there. We say that all of them should attend; not only Roma girls but all of them who wish to attend” (Assumpta, Roma woman).

It has been showed in this section how the influence it is through the model of leadership and participation of the association and always empowering grassroots Romani women, letting them speak, creating opportunities in order to bring major debates that are taking part at the macro level to the very grassroots level.

### **9.6. Empowerment that generates social change**

“You have a goal, you have to get the diploma”: This was what Nuria, a collaborator of DKM told to Belen, a Romani women aged 39 and mother of one young girl aged 23, who was doing a upper-level training course in social integration in Tarragona in 2009 in order to motivate her to do not drop. Belen’s aim was to obtain her diploma and then to dedicate her knowledge to help her people to improve their living conditions. She started her studies in social integration as an adult student dreaming that someday she could focus her professional career in the educational sector, on something in which she could contribute to help the Romani girls and boys to succeed in education. Against her expectations in a course called ‘social integration’, what she found in her training programme was that when she explained about her future intentions to her teachers, rather than motivating her to work for the Roma people they discouraged her and suggested that doing that could be a waste of time:

“Integration teachers said to me: forget about it, because with that you will go nowhere. And, I, of course... how am I going to clear my mind since it is my vocation and what I want to do. It was never respected... I was so disgusted.” (Belen, Romani woman)

But Belen ignored her teachers and realizing that they would not help her, she decided to look for by her own: she searched on internet about Romani associations, and so she found DKM. As many other Romani women who call every day to DKM to ask about its activities, Belen contacted the association. She spoke with Lucia, a member who was

that day in the office. Since that moment in 2009 Belen has been collaborating in DKM although she lives in Reus. What Lucia did was explaining about DKM, and given that in 2009 DKM was organizing the Romani Students' Meeting in Reus, in one of the travel Lucia did to Reus, they agreed to meet personally. Talking more in-depth in Reus, Lucia explained to Belen about the Romani Students' Meeting that they were organizing there, and she later on she introduced Nuria, a non-Romani women collaborator of DKM who was a volunteer in a primary school in Campclar, a neighbourhood mainly inhabited by Roma people. For Belen meeting Nùria was key for finding motivation, she was the one who empowered her to carry on to continue her studies.

Hence, in ending up her training, in 2012 she also involved as volunteer in the IES Mediterrani secondary school. She would see in the upcoming years major changes that would happen in that school thanks to the collaboration of the school authorities, the Roma families, volunteers such as her, and other stakeholders among which was DKM one of the most important.

Belen finished her upper-level training programme in social integration and now she still collaborating as volunteer in IES Mediterrani secondary school which works as a Learning Community. If in the course 2009-2010 this school was characterized by high levels of absenteeism, school failure, and in general social conflicts. For the course 2014-2015, Belen explains that the situation in the school has totally changed: Roma parents participate in the school's activities, they enter to the classes for instance at the time of developing *interactive groups* (a 'successful educational activity'), or also when implementing after school activities. The school is open to the community, and Roma parents participate in courses of Catalan, some of them are participating together with their children in *dialogic literacy gatherings*, and other are participating in classes aimed at obtaining the high school certificate. Belen is the Roma women volunteer of reference in the school for many Roma families and for many of the Romani girls students of the school, having her within the classrooms have become a magnet for other Roma, although at the beginning was not easy because she was not from Campclar:

“It is true that the fact of being a Roma woman is very important for them,

but likewise, not for the fact of being Roma, that's it, fine... I remember that when I started the classes, the other children, when they saw I was Roma, they said, but she is Roma, but is it true? Of course, now all those children, after three years getting to know them, now a look, a gesture of complicity, that is really rewarding, likewise with the mothers, they come in, get in the classroom... and they ask me, Belen will you be here next year when we study the secondary compulsory school? Will it be you? Will you be with us? It is so important for them to have a model, a lot of those girls set me as an example with the teachers: "I want to be like Belen"... (Belen, Romani woman)

The relationship among Belen, Nuria and the school board of IES Mediterrani with DKM has continued during those transitional years since the school changed its model of working to becoming a Learning Community, what enabled that the own school is more open to the community.

The organization in June 2013 of the XV Romani Students' Meeting in IES Mediterrani was another important event, which not only mobilised the school but also the entire Romani women's community of Campclar (Tarragona). As Belen explained, all Romani women and girls were very engaged in its organization, because they felt part of it. Núria, the collaborator of DKM who is volunteering at IES Mediterrani explains how for the organization of that Romani Students' Meeting all the community was excited:

"Residents were thrilled to see Roma people from other places and talking about education there. The Roma mother that was taken as a model, called Filo, spoke, it was clear for her that it was important to talk about their experience to other Roma people so that they get trained as well as contributing to be trained". (Nuria, non-Roma woman collaborator of DKM)

These events were important as they were gradually setting the ground for the educational and social change that is taking place in the IES Mediterrani. DKM participated as partner institution in the EU-funded project *EduRom. Promoting the access of Roma to LLP, VET and employment through family education in Primary Schools*, coordinated by the University Rovira & Virgili. Edu-Rom draws from the EU-



funded project *ROM-UP! The inclusion of Roma through quality successful educational experiences* led by DKM, and its aims was to improve Roma key competence skills through family education courses in primary schools facilities in order to impact also in their children academic results, as well as to encourage the non-formal and informal learning validation of Roma to facilitate their access to LLP, VET and employment, all these with the final goal to overcoming school failure and early school leaving within the Roma community, and promoting the participation in school of families and all the community. One of its concrete aims was to implement and transfer the successful educational actions (SEAs, in its terminology in English) that have been previously identified as effective to improve the educative inclusion and results of Roma children, such as programmes of family education, literacy gatherings, interactive groups, etc. Some of these SEAs are the ones which have been implemented in the IES Mediterrani school since 2011, and in which Belen has participated as volunteer, monitoring the activities and being herself the teacher. She explained to me how many of the Romani girls but also some of the Muslim girls from the school say to her that they want to be like her:

“There was a girl with whom I started to develop interactive groups in the third year and now she is in the 5th year, she says to the teacher...one day we were at the Teachers’ room and she said to me: And who are you? I am so and so... You are Belen, oh! You know Isabel keeps saying she wants to be like you! And her mother always says that you wish to be like Marta! And the girl, while I am with the little ones comes and gives me a hand. I am the model for her, whatever the reason was, because we share the same culture”. (Belen, Romani woman)

All in all, for Belen knowing DKM, as she herself says, has not only increased her expectations as Romani women who wants to work for her community, but also has increased her social opportunities in wider sense. Belen is now contracted as in-paid staff in the school, working part-time, giving support in the school-activities in classes of family education and also the classes of high-school training. But a side of her contract, Belen continues very involved in the school, volunteering there as she considers that working with the Romani mothers is essential for promoting that the Romani girls do not drop out.

With shine in her eyes, Belen explains how the last course the authorities of the school after hard negotiations with the Catalan Government and also with the collaboration of DKM, have achieved to have the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> course of the secondary school in the same IES Mediterrani, which used to be just a primary educational center. This reform is aimed at avoiding that students do not drop out when finishing the primary education. When Roma students from Campclar finish their primary education at the age of 12, they have to move to another school to course the high school, which is out of the neighbourhood and the quality of education they receive there is not good: an indicator is that till the moment there is not a single Romani student from *barrio* who have obtained the compulsory education.

Belen is one of the Romani women who is participating of the change in IES Mediterrani, making possible that now Romani girls and Romani boys do not drop out, and looking forward that they attend to class and nobody steal their dream of going someday to university. For her, the change is in the school, and she feels very happy of having the possibility now of contributing to the change there:

“Being Roma is a sentiment, it is a meaning. In the school it used to exist very serious conflicts, but they have disappeared now...”

The story of Belen and how she reached DKM, and the relation that now she has with the association illustrate the impact of DKM at the grassroots' level. A transformative discourse that instils hope, the creation of relations of solidarity among Núria (a non-Roma women) and Belen, and also among Belen and other DKM members such as Lucia. Her story also reflects the respect of equality of differences, for instance, Núria is a professor in the University Rovira i Virgili, both volunteer as equal in the school, pursuing the same dream. The positive results that are being achieved in the school are the outcomes of the work that is being done between teachers, students, family members, volunteers, stakeholders such as the own DKM which is directly collaborating, and the relations of solidarity that are being constructed daily, and a solid evidence-base in the activities that are being implemented counting with the participation of the community. All these elements are present in the organising of the Romani women promoted by DKM and in turn, issues that help understand how the

engagement in the association activities contribute to broaden the women's opportunities.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have analysed how DKM by the organisation at different neighbourhoods of Catalonia of one of its central activities, the Romani Women Students' Meeting, is contributing to organise the Romani Women's movement in Catalonia. Argument developed is that because of the main interest of the association is how to improve the living conditions of the Romani women and how to create more spaces of social participation for them, also linked to the own features of the associations, the Students' Meetings are organised in a way that they promote different types of participation: they are oriented to engage Romani women, and they are designed looking for their own implication in them –grassroots Romani women to be their protagonists. By setting up a new way of doing, DKM promotes a type of participation that consists in going to the different neighbourhoods in order to involve the own subjects, thus standing many of the times “beyond of the scene” for the publics of that specific neighbourhoods. This involves that each Romani Women Students' Meeting could be different, depending on its chairing committee, the local team in charge of co-organising the event. Different synergies and allies are created around the Meeting: Romani women contact stakeholders from the neighbourhood, DKM members mobilise its social networks, and Romani women from diverse areas from Catalonia wait with expectations the day of the Meeting to come. As an outcome of the Meeting there is an initially unintended activation of the associational life, which is evidenced in two ways. On the one hand and in a more formal extent, the organising of the Romani women from the neighbourhood manifested in the constitution of a formal association. On the other hand and in a more informal way, the emergence of community leaders, Romani women that were reference persons in the neighbourhoods and after the Meeting, they develop a leadership position on behalf of the Roma collective rights.

## **CHAPTER 10. REACHING THE EUROPEAN SPHERE**

There is wide consensus among scholars on political sociology and governance that progressive associations –in their different shapes– contribute to advance the ideals of democratic governance. As Fung and Cohen (2004) has identified and discussed, this happens in at least six ways, by the value of associative life, by promoting civic virtues and teaching political skills, offering resistance to power and checking government, and opening up opportunities for citizens and groups to engage directly in governance (Cohen & Fung, 2004). Thus, there is no discussion on the potentials of civic organizations to advance the democratic governance. Bringing this debate to the European field, efforts have been made in order to explore initiatives in this regard, for instance, highlighting the potential of the grassroots association and vulnerable communities (Radu & Radisic, 2012). However, the case studied in this dissertation sheds more light on how a social group that is highly stigmatized and extremely disenfranchised as Romani women, when successfully organised, can contribute from the local level to shape a wider regional, state and international mobilization. Drawing from this, in this chapter I explore how DKM is having an impact “beyond the local level”, at the European sphere, specifically, contributing to scale up and foster the grassroots Romani women’s mobilization. This is done by analysing three of its key areas of activity: the coordination of EU-funded projects grassroots Romani women representation in EU bodies and the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women celebrated in 2010.

Findings have been analysed in the light of the strategies used at the time of the implementation and development of each action (projects and Romani Women Congress), and the impact achieved. I consider the impact taking into account if they have contributed to widen the network of Romani women’s associations in Europe to which DKM collaborates, the DKM public recognition at the EU level, and overall the presence of the DKM discourse of the need to include “grassroots Romani women” at the European public sphere.

Evidences presented in this chapter comes from the communicative fieldwork and also from documentary information reviewed from minutes of assemblies, agenda, project's reports, minutes from international meetings, and other archival data.

### **10.1. First steps at the EU level: projects as a tool to make grassroots Romani women voices to be heard**

DKM was founded as a local association focused on working for the overcoming of the triple discrimination faced by Romani women and during its initial years, it worked funded by public local and regional organisms (Barcelona city Council, Barcelona Provincial Council or Catalan Government). However, Romani and non-Romani women members of the association quickly realised of the importance of working with an eye in Europe in order to bring the voices of those women that they represented to an upper level of debate and decision-making, thus finding new allies, bringing the own way of working of the association and in turn learning from others.<sup>42</sup> One specific way of doing this was through knitting collaborations with other associations through developing EU-funded projects related to those topics of concern for DKM: adult education of Romani women, access to labour market, discrimination.

“We always thought that we needed to learn and know what was going on in *the real world*... so yes, we were fine just with funding from local projects... And actually we apply for this funding because it is also important, working with the City Council, with the Provincial Council.. we have to work locally... But we needed to see, globally, what was going on, we wanted to reach further (...) And that was in 2004.” (Victoria, non-Roma woman member of DKM)

Since its foundation in 1999, DKM started to open a road to freedom not only within the local level but also at a regional level. Its members researched on what was the situation of other Romani women's associations in Spain, and they realised that Romani women

---

<sup>42</sup> This information has been extracted from personal interviews of different Roma and non-Roma members of the association.

were mainly organised under mainstream Romani associations, excepting from the case of the Romani Women Association *Romí* (Granada).

A tool to carry out the association's projects and activities was to achieve funding that allows it to implement them. In less than five years and pushed by the recognition that DKM acquired within the Romani movement for filling a gap much needed for Romani women themselves, DKM opened up its projection and started to look at Europe as the sphere which should guide its approach. Bringing the voices to the other Romani women to Europe was something still pending. Making it a reality contributed to the articulation and organization of the movement, something that interviewees were not always aware of.

This may help to explain how attaining EU-funding has been conceived by DKM since the very beginning, as a tool to reach a transformative end, namely the broader goals of the associations and through them pushing forward the Romani Women's Right Movement.<sup>43</sup> In this vein, it is important to highlight the way the DKM involvement in EU-funded projects started, that is being partners of projects led by FACEPA (the Federation of Cultural and Educational Associations of Adult people). Understanding education as a means for emancipation, which makes possible the overcoming of social inequalities and power relations, FACEPA was coordinating the project called "Bill project. European Chart of Participant's Right in Adult Education" (1997-1998)<sup>44</sup>, in which the rights of adult people in education were vindicated and the way this Federation understands education was clearly established in the "Participants' Bill of Rights".

Having acquired the experience of participating in EU lifelong learning projects as an affiliate of FACEPA, DKM members considered in 2004 that they could go on a try and apply for funding as the leading institution. The first EU-funded project led by DKM was *EducaROM. Inclusive teaching material for adults: the Roma* (2005-2007), funded under the the Socrates-Grundtvig programme of the EU. Due to DKM's own working

---

<sup>43</sup> All this information is the result of contrasting the testimonies of my informants and historical documentation of the association which has been reviewed for the dissertation. It has been validated by DKM members through the communicative focused group.

<sup>44</sup> Bill project. European Chart of Participant's Right in Adult Education. (1997-1998). Socrates Programme, European Commission.

approach, the way of implementing EducaROM project was very different from how other associations that worked with the Romani women used to develop the projects. In this project, DKM implemented methodological strategies which went in line with the communicative approach (Gómez, Sordé, Racionero, 2010), as a way of guaranteeing that the voices of the Other Romani women were represented since the very design of the project till its very end. This was not more than transferring its own way of doing and its working approach to the field of the management of an EU-funded project.

*Breaking down with the hierarchy among the “technical staff” and the Romani women*

Indeed, breaking down the hierarchy among the “technical staff” of the association (those members or employee of DKM who had the “know-how” of how to apply to EU-funding, for instance) and the other Romani women, either members or participants of the association and for which the project was oriented to, was one of the key strategies that DKM set up since the very beginning it started to coordinate EU-funded project. This would involve in the upcoming years a totally different way of doing for the majority of the organizations with which DKM collaborated. This way of doing is aimed at achieving at any stage of the development of the project the active participation of Romani women themselves, thus ensuring that no one will speak on their behalf. It supposes breaking down with what Habermas (1984) calls at the research level, breaking down with the methodological gap between researchers and the *researched*, establishing an egalitarian dialogue in order to reach communicative action.

I have mentioned in the literature review how aid and funding meant to address Roma inequalities have not always been implemented counting with the participation of Romani people themselves (Vargas & Gómez, 1998). This situation has been defined by some scholars as the “helper industry” or the “NGOization of the Romani movement” (Nirenberg, 2009; Trehan, 2009; Barany 2009). This is not only a debate among scholars but also a concern within the European Commission, which is much interested in finding the clue for making the EU Framework for the Roma Inclusion more effective (European Commission, 2009).

By means of implementing specific methodological strategies at each phase of the projects, and conceiving them as a way of networking with other associations, DKM has looked for the way of strengthening the Romani women's Rights movement. This is being done by establishing new collaborations with associations that work at the grassroots and with a similar approach. This way, EU-funded projects can be considered as both a mean and as an end to up-scale the Romani women's issue (e.g.: violation of basic rights, the need to ensure their access to higher education, to ensure that effective ways to validate their non-formal and informal competencies is a way to access to employment, end up with school segregation, end up with discrimination in health, among many other issues) to the European political agenda, listening directly to the voices of the grassroots women.

This way of working since 2005 in EducaROM, and later on in many other EU-funded projects such as Rom-up, Rom-ACT, EDUROM, is also being transferred to other institutions: the voices of Romani women themselves have to be centrally considered, not just represented. Some of these strategies are the creation of Advisory Councils within the projects, which are integrated by the different stakeholders, including people of respect from the same Roma community. It is a space where grassroots Roma give their view and share their thoughts regarding the results of any research which involves them.

Elena, a non-Romani woman who was employed in the association for 14 years explained me how the way of working of DKM in the EducaROM project and in other projects was very different from how other associations were used to work. She remembers that some of the partners' institutions of the EducaROM project did not expect that grassroots Romani women who could barely read and write participate in the international working meetings of the project. According to these partners, technical decisions and issues that were tackled in these meeting could not be of interest for the Romani women neither understandable for them, because they could barely read and write, or in many cases were not literate.

Thus, the common position at the time of managing EU-funding by the most of those institutions working with Romani women (but "on" them) was that the participation of Romani women in the project implementation should be limited to social events, but not



to those that could involve any important decision –related to management, or any scientific criteria. DKM totally disagree with this position and promoted since the very beginning that Romani women were present in all the decisions, those more related to the technical, political and content wise of the project, and those specifically related to attaining its general goals:

“When developing the Educarom partners from Romania, a Romani association, were very surprised when they saw our way of working, because they were not used to that... All of them, the one who attended the meeting were academic women... staff... And they came, and representing us, among other women there was Tia Juana, a Romani women who was illiterate” (Elena, non-Roma woman).

#### *A positive return for the Roma community*

Another strategy is to ensure that projects are always performed in a way that guarantees a positive return for the Roma community, and specifically to the Romani women themselves. For instance, in the case of Rom-Act (2013-2014) project led by DKM, one of the tangible results of the project was the accreditations of the prior learning experience of 50 Romani women from 5 different EU-countries. Let’s consider the case of Lourdes, a Romani woman from Spain who participated in the project:

“I am Lourdes, I am 34, I am married and I have two children and I come here to validate my experience. What is the accreditation? It is like an additional support that brings out your experience, the experience you have achieved, what you have done. And that people do not know about, well with this you have another certificate in your curriculum, Well, so that in the future, you have something else, something more, more experience and be able to find a job faster” (Lourdes, Roma woman, Rom-Act project, 2013-2014).

Another example is the case of the project *Rom-Up. The inclusion of Roma through quality successful educational experiences* (2012-2013), which as explained in chapter

6, some of the *successful educational experiences* which it identified were selected by the Catalan government in order to be implemented in some schools where there are high rates of Roma students. Motivated by this, as told by Belen, in the case of *IES Mediterrani* in Tarragona compulsory education was initiated in the course 2014-2015 (explained in Chapter 9).

### *Highly committed volunteering*

At the time of writing the present investigation, DKM has two employees, therefore, some daily work that must be performed is conducted by volunteers. One of the commitments of participating in EU-funded projects consists in the obligation to be able to travel in order to attend to international meetings, representing the association. Thus, this is one of the responsibilities many times assumed by either one of the employee of a member accompanied by participants of the association who attend voluntarily. For DKM members, this is another trait that calls the attention of many of the associations' representatives that work at the EU-level: the fact that DKM counts with members who have their own job outside the association and who attend without being paid. And another matter, the fact that to those international meetings, not only attends women with academic credentials but also grassroots Roman women. Given that usually these meetings are in English, with the support of other member of the association who act as translator, these women can fully participate in these types of meetings, and indeed in those debates that take place at the EU-level which directly concern the Romani women themselves:

“There are two things about Drom Kotar that really shocks when you attend to an international meeting. One is the issue of volunteers: “No, I don't work in Drom Kotar”. Many women who attend these meetings are not part of the staff of the association; they just go in representation of the association. The other is the fact that these women are Roma... and it use to happen a lot that Roman women in EU-funded projects don't participate of the managerial activities such as working meetings, when you have to arrange the calendar, the budget... When these issues are discussed, technical staff is the one who decide, they consider that Romani women

should go to sightsee the city... but this is not our way of doing” (Elena, non-Roma women).

Once the EU-funded project EducaROM ended, DKM was **recognized and awarded with the Gold Award as the best Grundtvig project of the 2009 year within the categories of formal, non-formal and informal education**. As some of my interviewees have explained, this award was important in terms of what it involved for the public recognition of the association at the European level, thus opening up multiple opportunities for dreaming with organising the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani women. This event would take place the next year, in October 2010 and would set the basis for creating a Romani women network at the European level.

#### *Grassroots Roma women speaking up*

The improvement of the situation of Romani women is a concern for the European public authorities. In this sense, European institutions want to know the methodologies, actions and strategies used by those organisations working at the local level oriented to improving the lives of Romani women. In turn, local organisations and associations such as the case of DKM are aware that these collaborations with European political agents are essential in order to bring the claims and demands of grassroots Romani women to these spheres of debate and decision-making.

DKM is an example of an association which with the pass of the time has gained public recognition at the European level as an association successful in involving locals. This has led it to be often invited by European institutions to participate in public events where debate underpins about methodologies and actions to work with target groups. This is also contributing to draw conclusions about good practices and make them extensible to other organisations working across Europe.

Consider an example. This issue of how to bring a debate which is taking place at the European level to the very grassroots level can be exemplified for instance with two important topics: the recognition and accreditation of prior learning and experience, and

the concern about how to prevent and end with the trafficking of human-being. These two issues are topics which DKM is approaching at the European level.

In the case of the accreditation and recognition of prior learning and experience, as a claim that Romani women made in 2010 in the International Congress and in line with the Eurydice working approach<sup>45</sup>. The association is working this aspect through an EU-funded project, the Rom-Act project already mentioned. Specifically, the way through which is doing it is by discussing the specific aspects of the accreditation at the very neighbourhoods, promoting consultancy meeting with the Romani women in order to have a non-biased knowledge of their reality and therefore being able to identify why is difficult for them accessing to the EU frameworks for recognition and accreditation of the prior learning. In this sense, throughout the development of the Rom-Act project positive experiences were shared by women and organisations from different partners institutions from the project. An example is the NGO *Slovo 21* from Prague (partner of the project), which between 2013 and 2014 supported 11 Romani women in their process of accreditation (10 of them succeed). Let's see what Jolana from Prague said about completing the accreditation process through participating in Rom-Act:

“I did tourism, course to be a guide. I would like to be a Prague guide. Well, and I was quite difficult, school, and I am glad that I could even attend this school because it was my dream to do this. Well, I wanted to tell advantage of being from Hungary and I can speak Hungarian, so I could have a better paid job” (Jolana, Roma woman, ROM-Act project, 2013-2014).

Consider other examples of how DKM is bringing the voices of Romani women to European spaces of debate, in this case for instance, about topics related to gender. DKM is one of the few Romani women association member of the European Women's Lobby as well as the EU Civil Society Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings. In the case of the prevention and end of human-trafficking, by participating in the EU Civil Society Platform against Human being trafficking<sup>46</sup>, DKM brings there its own

---

<sup>45</sup> The Eurydice is a wide European network based on the elaboration of studies aimed to identify common issues on European educational systems. [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php)

<sup>46</sup> EU Civil Society Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings: <http://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/> (accessed on August 12, 2015).

way of working, especially at the time of doing prevention, answering through which means it would be possible to identify vulnerable situations and risks that might be shared in a preventive way. By the community work that DKM does through deploying its large networks first at a Catalan level (Shine Association, Romani Women's Association of Badia, Savore, and many other non-formalised groups of women, the groups of women who each year participate in the Romí Training), but also at a Spanish level (through Kamira Federation), it can bring it its activities and thus, operate in a preventive way.

Besides this, example of the public recognition of the association, DKM is invited to present the activities it develops for the educational and labour inclusion of the Romani women. In October 2015 DKM has been invited to participate in a *Public Hearing* “aimed at raising awareness about the particular challenges Roma women are facing across Europe when it comes to accessing education or employment, and making their voices heard in the political arena.”<sup>47</sup>. This public hearing was organised by Euradiconia, the Economic and Social Committee of the European Commission and the European Roma Information Office, and DKM will participate in the roundtable: “Empowering Roma women: Positive practices”. This organization of this Public Hearing and the participation of the DKM in it show cases the impact of the DKM way of working.

In a nutshell, all these are evidences of how the association brings the voices of the grassroots Romani women to new spaces of debate and decision making, raising their awareness and claiming for their rights.

## **10.2. How dreams come true: the 1<sup>st</sup> International Romani women Congress. The Other Women**

The celebration of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women (October 8-10, 2010) coordinated by DKM was unique in the sense that it vindicated a social and

---

<sup>47</sup> Roma Inclusion: Exploring the gender dimension (October 21, 2015). Organized by Euradiconia, the Economic and Social Committee of the European Commission and the European Roma Information Office. <http://www.eu-events.eu/list-of-all-events/1669-roma-inclusion-exploring-the-gender-dimension.html>

political space at the EU level for the grassroots Romani women who had never before gathered in an international Congress in order to debate about issues that were of their concern. A political space aimed for the *other Romani women* such as the one created in Barcelona during those three days had never existed before.

This congress was different to others previously organized because was constituted by “the other women”, those Romani women who have been traditionally excluded from these spaces of decision making, debate and collective construction of knowledge. In Barcelona for the majority of them they have the opportunity of rise up their voices and express their opinion regarding education, employment and feminism. They shared their ideas shedding light on ways of improving by their own their lives and the ones of their communities. Gathering some of these women’s claims,<sup>48</sup> one of them said:

“Keeping the spirit that has brought us together here in Barcelona and advancing towards the creation of a global network of Romani women, because all Roma become main actors of their own lives and of the live of their people.”

The congress had indeed a very transformative nature; it was a space of dialogue and debate in which grassroots Romani women participated but also few Romani women internationally known for their political activism such as Nicoleta Bitu, or other non-Romani women scholars. In all, women of different ages, grandmothers and granddaughters, constructed together new knowledge based on their own personal biographies but drawing from what have been explained in the common sessions, from the recommendations of what needed to be done in order for them to succeed in education and access to employment. In this sense, another of the claims done by a participant was:

“Compromising ourselves to continue fighting and helping the other women wherever we are, making our voices to be hear, like we have done here, and making them the main actors of this transformation that, thank you to all the Roma women is possible”.

---

<sup>48</sup> All the narratives related to the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women: The Other Women, have been extracted from minutes of the Congress obtained from archival data from the association.

As already explained, the congress was structured in three main topics: education, labour market and feminism, dedicating one day for each topic. Firstly, it was opened on Friday October 8, starting the Congress Miss Ana Contreras, DKM president. One person who was in the opening table through virtual channel was Miss Androulla Vassiliou, the then European Commissioner of Education, Culture, Multilingualism, and Youth. The first day was focused on education, and the main conference title was “I have a dream”. In it different Romani women participated, who explained their dream to all the participants:

“I come from Bilbao, I am a very simple Romani women. My dream would be to see your Romani youth one day in the universities.... Seeing my children, my granddaughters having educational trainings, trainings that I have not been able to had. We don't cease of being Roma for being studying, we are Roma and the good ones, but studying, because our traditions.... This is what we keep here inside, and this is not going to leave is even though we study. Another dream is the one I have now, when I see “too many *gitanicas*”. Romani women, mothers, do not clean, go to study”.

- "The dream of a mother of attending here with her two daughters after being one year working has come true (...) now my dream is to organise demonstrations against racisms around Europe... A demonstration of all Romani women against the racism that we suffer"

- "I'm a Romani women who is 70 years old now (...) I wanted to read and write because I did not attend to school, but when I was a little bit older I went to improve myself... I am 70 now but I want to improve even more”.

The second day, Saturday 9<sup>th</sup>, was focused on two topics, education and employment. During the morning the topic was education and during the afternoon the topic was how to promote the inclusion of the Romani women to the labour market. For both sessions, the same structure was followed: first, it was explained what research said about educational success or labour inclusion of the Roma people. Then, a roundtable about successful actions for both areas took place. After that, Romani women separated in

several groups in which they discussed about what have been already presented: the challenges and how to face them. The idea of creating these working groups were to create a comfortable environment where all Romani women would feel encouraged to join the debate, bringing up examples of their own communities and their personal stories. After working in these groups, a moderator gathered together the conclusions of each group, which were read in the joint session. For instance, Romani women from Greece explained the following in the working group of education:

“In their association since last summer they prepare children to go to school in September. The most important is that teachers are good pedagogues. You don’t have to convince children to go to school, it’s the parents who need to be convinced. They also do training for families and within the school they help each other with literacy issues. It’s very important to visit the homes of these families and to get them to be enthusiastic about education. That Roma boys and girls are not separated from the rest of the population”.

The afternoon session was focused on employment and the main conference was named “what does the international community know about practices that contribute to the labour market inclusion of the Roma people?” After the main conference, several experiences of good practices in achieving the labour inclusion of Romani women were presented. A Roma woman from Greece also claimed:

“In their room, each week they look in the papers for jobs that the girls can do. They are a bit scared sometimes because due to topics of racism they might be rejected in the jobs. But it is very important that they try to enter the labour market, because something is created for the whole community”.

During the last day the Congress focused on the “Romani feminism of 21<sup>st</sup> century”. Nicoleta Bitu and Montse Sánchez-Aroca introduced Romani feminism. A feminism that promotes solidarity among all the Romani women and which includes the voices of all of them looking for the equality of differences. After the conference, there was a roundtable of experiences called “Challenges for today, opportunities for tomorrow”. In this table participated four Romani women who explained their different experiences



working from a dialogic feminism, how they are working to overcome gender violence, to concile their familiar life with their professional training, how they conceived themselves as motors of change of their own families and of their own people.

At the end of the session on Romani feminism, it came to the closure of the Congress. This consisted in the reading of two documents that collected the main issues that have been debated throughout the three days during all the sessions: the Congress' conclusions and the "Romani Declaration of Barcelona"<sup>49</sup>. The conclusions were presented by three Romani women, a young student from Navarra, Spain; a middle-age women form Portugal, and an adult women from Seville, Spain. One of the conclusions was regarding education, issue on which all women agreed on also mothers and grandmothers can study. A woman said, *"my dream is that in the next congress I come with a folder and I will be able to read to you what I will have written down"*.

Another participant read the Romani Declaration of Barcelona, a declaration in which all women committed to work together and keep their struggle for the improvement of their future and the future of their people. Both documents, the Conclusions and the Declaration were sent to the European Commissioner of Education, who asked the participants and DKM as organiser to proceed in that way.

During the three days, 30 Roma and non-Roma volunteers supported DKM in the organization of the Congress developing any type of tasks needed to be fulfilled. The role of the volunteers is crucial once again here, they do not only came to bring their support to the organization, but they really felt part of the association and as such, also responsible for the well-functioning of everything, the content and the entire organizational process of a conference where 303 Roma women from different European countries attended.

*"As a Romani wedding"*

---

<sup>49</sup> You can see these documents at DKM website: <http://dromkotar.org/wp/i-congres-internacional-de-dones-gitanes/>.

As DKM president used to say, the Congress was the association big wedding meaning that all the efforts and energies to make it a real dream should be deployed. Thus, this congress contributed to set up the ground for rising up a movement of grassroots Romani women at an international level. But for it to be possible, DKM members had to face many barriers and lots of efforts were put for the organization of this event. As Georgina explains, many people thought till the last moment that the Congress would not take place:

“Till the last moment there were people who thought that the Congress will not take place. Anyone trusted. And it was incredible. Romani women from so many countries, there, grassroots women who had never participated in a space such as that one... they were there, with the earphones. What are the policy makers in this case, [she accompanied them during the Congress] they were amazed. No one disputes never ever the importance of this congress.” (Georgina, non-Roma woman member of DKM).

But in order to achieve the needed funding to organize the Congress, members of DKM launched 15 months before October 2015 a campaign aimed at networking with public and private contacts that would support the project. They were aware that transparency and commitment with the “Other Romani women”, evidenced in all previous years of the association’s work was what would endorse the project:

The Congress has a very high cost, but we did millions of meetings with councillors, departments, with the Bank, with private entities, with the Ministry in Madrid... we touch all the doors (Esther, Romani women member of DKM).

Strategic development, organizing at different levels, that is, each of the DKM’s members tackling their own networks of contacts, so, there was a huge implication of all DKM’s collaborators, and they achieved the funding needed. Different from the economic concern, another challenge faced by DKM members at the time of organising the event was how to reach out grassroots Roma communities throughout Europe. The congress organizing was fully committed and dedicated to avoid the only participation of representatives of Romani women associations, or Romani women with academic

credentials as these were the profiles more easily to find, but to ensure that the voices of those groups who traditionally are not heard were at the core of all what they did.

For overcoming this challenge strategic capacity and the diversity of profiles within DKM members was a core resource, as different members have some contacts at different European countries. Besides this, the participation of DKM in IRWN and also in the Congresses organised by the Council of Europe were some opportunities to try to reach some other Romani women that worked with a similar approach and wanted to join efforts to work together in the preparation of the Congress of the “other women”. These were platforms that DKM members used to strategize and meet new contacts.

In the following quotation Esther, a Romani women member of DKM explains how once in an occasion that they attended to an international meeting to Athens, they used this opportunity to make new contacts. Besides this, she emphasise the importance for DKM of having within members such as Julia, a women with an international trajectory who can facilitate the networking to the association:

“And the part of contacts: we took advantage of the fact that we were going to a meeting of the IRWN in Athens or I don’t know where...we were going with the mentality of “contacts for finding women for the congress”...We used those meetings, we divided ourselves...And after that, people like Julia who already has a history of having contacts...Anyway, doing that sort of things and running really a lot we managed to organise the congress. We were offered the Caixa Forum” (Esther, Romani woman member of DKM)

The Congress was a meaning-making experience for all those grassroots Romani women that participated in the debates and roundtables. Angeles, a Romani woman aged 35 who participated in the Congress with some of her Roma cousins and friend, explained me shine in her eyes:

“(...) Sometimes we remember about the Congress. It was amazing. Something that really excites you ... That Congress, my sister-in-law and I many times used to talk about it ... it was threatening, the atmosphere... the

people participating there... very different people... elderly Romani women (...)" (Angeles, Romani woman, participant of DKM)

Angeles emphasized in her narrative the emotion that she and her sister in law could feel in the atmosphere of the Congress, but also the fact of seeing how there were people that have already done "big things" such as the Romani Romanian women who created a working cooperative (one of the working experience presented in the Congress). Thus, Romani grassroots women debated and discussed about their worries looking for how to turn difficulties into possibilities, and possibilities for real change. All based not on their particular ideologies but drawing from the experiences presented in the roundtable. Those were actions that have proven effective either in contributing to the educational success of Romani women and girls, or for their labour inclusion. The commitment of advancing all together was sealed in the Roma Declaration of Barcelona, agreed by all the participants of the Congress:

"Doing it together, in solidarity with all the Roma women, a global solidarity that gives us strength and emotion to keep on fighting and that gives us hope and illusion, because we know that all this is possible" (Roma Declaration of Barcelona, 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress)

The impact of the Congress was for own participants who attended from different countries, and also to the own association. Esther describes the impact of the congress on DKM in a very illustrative way:

"It meant a turning point for Drom. I think that after the Congress we kind of deploy in Europe. We began to receive many applications asking us to be partners in projects... The Congress was such a success, that a simple word of mouth... everyone spoke in a good way about it, about what the women themselves have experienced during the Congress... that made us to be respected by other associations, to reach somehow a prestige: "Women from Drom Kotar, they work very well. That was translated in the fact that everyone wanted to collaborate with us." (Esther, Romani woman member of DKM).

The Congress was widely disseminated in local, national and other European TV channels and newspapers. This gave a lot of national and international projection to what was till that moment an almost regional association, working at the Catalan level. And that was evidenced, what the women asked in the congress was achieved: leading two European projects (ROM-ACT and ROM-UP), and being partners of five projects (EDU-ROM, BARABAL, MS4ROW, DAPHNE, OED).

Another evidence of the impact that the Congress caused on the Romani women that attended was the emails received the week after thanking their warm hosting and mostly what shifting point represented in their lives as Roma ni women to have had the opportunity to be there. For instance, I put in what follows some of them:

“(...) Thank you for you give me the opportunity to attend the I International Congress of Roma Women. I wait that day when will be no fear of any women to say Roma Women. Opre Roma III (...)” (Personal communication, Daniela from Romania wrote on October 25, 2010)

“It is with great pleasure and honour that I become united with you”. (Maria from France wrote on October 23, 2010)

In short, this International Congress made DKM widen its network of contacts with Romani women associations at the European level, what would enable the association to bring the voices of the grassroots Romani women even further

.

#### *Sowing the seed for Romnia and October 8 Campaign*

A claim was raised in the Congress: make the Romani women’s mobilization more inclusive, gathering the voices of the Other women, not just focusing the academic Romani women. This claim

At the level of the Romani Women’s Rights Movement, claimed by Drom Kotar and many other Romani women who have been always working from the grassroots level, including the well-recognised Romani women activist and scholar Nicoleta Bitu. She

attended the International Congress of Romani Women in Barcelona and put forward a proposal, drawing on the demands of Congress' attendees, in order to promote the celebration of October 8<sup>th</sup> as the *international Roma women's day*. Considering this proposal, a commission was created after the event by women who joined the conference aimed at preparing a text for an international petition which made Bitu's initial proposal a reality. This petition was translated to 8 different languages and was available on-line without any financial support. This petition is still on-line on the website<sup>50</sup> and has collected a significant number of signatures. An important issue to be underlined on this regard is that this demand was a common interest from Roma women and did not want to replace the international Roma day April 8<sup>th</sup>, it rather was intended to complement it.

From this, after the Congress it emerged the need of creating a European Romani Women's Association that work from the grassroots level. DKM could constitute an example for this association, which was created in 2011 called "Romnia: Romani women united". The mission of Romnia was to respond to the needs of Romani women's voices to be heard at a grassroots, national and international level. As states in the declaration of Romnia (directly quoted from the official declaration<sup>51</sup>):

"To continue with this spirit that has been together with us in Barcelona and to do take further steps towards the creation of a global network of Roma women, so that all the Roma can become the main actors in their own lives and the lives of their people". (Drom Kotar Mestipen, 2010)

---

<sup>50</sup> For more information: [http://dromkotar.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/DECLARACIO\\_ANG.pdf](http://dromkotar.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/DECLARACIO_ANG.pdf); <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/8octubre>

<sup>51</sup> For more information: [http://dromkotar.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/DECLARACIO\\_ANG.pdf](http://dromkotar.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/DECLARACIO_ANG.pdf)

It is a broad platform uniting Romani women and pro-women organizations and activists.

**Our mission:** Empower Romani women through networking, advocacy, research and documentation

**Our objectives:**

- Networking: to bring all Romani women from various backgrounds together; to connect, work on and mainstream Romani women issues into the agenda of the feminist movement all over the world
- Advocacy: to include Romani women issues into the mainstream discourse, the Roma agenda and the agenda of the feminist movement all over the world
- Research and Documentation: to fill the existing gap of data regarding Romani women and the problems Romani women face; to deconstruct myths; to act as a documentation centre: collecting stories, oral stories and history from and of Romani women from all over Europe
- Empowerment and Leadership: to give Romani women a voice and increase Romani women's visibility; to promote Romani women's leadership, to mobilize and empower Romani women.

**Our principles:**

- Inclusive: worldwide, multi-generational and the other voices
- Independent: autonomous
- Applying a feminist approach

ROMNIA also accepts membership from ethnic Traveller minorities such as Yenish and Irish/Scottish/Welsh/English Travellers as well as from Rudar, and Beash/Boyash minorities.

**Founding members (alphabetical order):**

Center Amalipe ( Bulgaria), Drom Kotar Mestipen Association (Spain), European Roma Rights Centre (Hungary), European Women's Lobby (Brussels), Federation of Romani and Traveller Women, Hungarian Women's Lobby(Hungary), National Roma Centrum (Macedonia), Roma Organization (Hungary), Romani CRISS (Romania).

The mission and objectives of ROMNIA and its founding members are an evidence of the inclusionary approach with which this platform was conceived. However, after some meetings with the leaders of the founding members of Romnia from Spain, Hungary, Brussels, and Romania this organisation has not met its expectations of constituting as a “broad platform uniting Romani women and pro-women organisations”. According to DKM members, the barriers for this to happen till this moment is the lack of clear leadership (Pilar and Maria, members of DKM have been the representatives of DKM in the international meetings with Romnia).

Nonetheless, informal networking among the different associations that are involved in Romnia has been already created and is very strong: some of these associations share a similar approach at the national level. By now, what can be appreciated is that these established collaborations among Romani women associations are indeed setting the ground for articulating a stronger network of associations that are taking the lead in fighting for the rights and claims of grassroots Romani women at European level.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have explored the strategies implemented by DKM in order to make the grassroots Romani women’s voices heard at the European level and thus inform the European Romani women’s mobilisation. This has been done by looking at three actions developed by the association, strategies used when coordinating EU-funded projects, being representatives of grassroots Romani women and the organisation of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women (2010).

In relation of the EU presence and recognition of the organization, it all started with the incipient participation in funded projects. Specific methodological strategies used by the association in terms of involving Romani women in their development, making them active agents (e.g. their participation in working meetings along with staff or creation of advisory committees) and protagonists of these activities have been identified as key features. Projects are conceived by the association as a mean and as an end: to knit new networks with associations that work in a similar way, and also to develop activities that



contribute to improve the living conditions of the Romani women. For instance, EducaRom (2005-2007), in the elaboration of educational material about Roma culture for adult education, Rom-up (2012-2013), in the identification of educational experiences that are effective for the school success of the Roma in order to make them transferable to different countries, or Rom-Act (2013-2014) to bring closer the formal systems of accreditations of the prior experience to Romani women as a way to promote their labour market inclusion. This show up the presence of the principle of cultural intelligence as well as an idea that is always present: the social impact of those activities that are developed in the framework of the association. If EU-funded projects led by DKM have been recognised by European institutions is due to its social impact on contributing to improve the lives of Romani women and their communities. In line with this, concrete examples have been provided in this chapter.

By empowering Romani women DKM has been achieving public recognition and prestige also at the European level, asking to bring the voices of the grassroots Romani women and its specific working approach to more spaces of debate where gender and Roma issues are approached. In this chapter, it has been highlighted the importance of being invited to participate in the EU Civil Society Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Public Hearings of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Commission, to mention some.

Finally, the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women (2010) was a turning point for the Association in terms of its public recognition at the European level. It has been explained that the strategic capacity of the association has been one of the core elements at the time of making possible the organisation of the Congress, in targeting the “other women”, grassroots Romani women from different European countries. The impact that this Congress had on women who attended to it and on the association itself have been also discussed as well as the impact it had in the articulation of the larger Romani women movement at the European scale, through ROMNIA, and launching the October 8 Campaign.

## **CHAPTER 11. OPENING A NEW HORIZON OF OPPORTUNITIES: ROMANI WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

From the fieldwork conducted, this chapter draws mainly from the communicative daily life stories with Romani women who have participated in the activities of DKM: the intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meetings, Official vocational training course in the specialty of schools canteens (hereinafter, "Romí Training")<sup>52</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani women, and EU-funded projects led by DKM. In it, I analyse how engaging in these activities have supposed opening up a new horizon of opportunities for the Romani women. In order to do this I analyse the changes they have experienced in relation of two arenas, education and employment.

Communicative daily life stories have been coded at the light of the analytical level 2: *Impact of the Romani women's collective agency on the own women's*. I have used the following categories: educational and employment opportunities; health (access to health care, self-esteem, happiness, satisfaction with life); expectations; presence of cultural values; (dis)empowerment related to the own capacities; involvement in spaces of social participation, prejudices/stereotypes/racism; other elements.

### **11.1. Embracing new educational challenges**

Romani women face discrimination and racism, experiencing segregation in the educational system and due to not having academic credentials they are denied from their social rights, what lead them falling into an unbeatable dependency trap. Thus, Romani women are among the most vulnerable social groups in Europe. Nonetheless, there are Romani women who are contesting these tough realities finding a path in order to succeed in education. One way is by participating in those activities that enable them to exert their transformative human agency and therefore contribute from their own lifeworlds to reverse disparities.

---

<sup>52</sup> Throughout the dissertation I will refer to the official vocational training course in the specialty of schools canteens as "Romí Training", which is how the course is called in the Romani Association of Women DKM.

For Romani women who have participated in intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meetings, getting involved in that activity have meant the discovering that through egalitarian dialogue with other Romani women those "fixed walls" once created by social structures –e.g. educational institutions– and resistances regarding the impossibility that they can succeed in education can be indeed overcome. By articulating new discourses and adopting role models in which they can be mirrored such as the ones already explained in Chapter 1, Romani women generate new educational expectations that have not even envisioned till that moment. In turn, this move them to take specific actions in order to improve their lives, and the ones of their families and communities (to be discussed in Chapter 12).

### *Testimonies of moving walls away*

Throughout my fieldwork with Romani women, a persistent pattern was found among their perception that education is not the most powerful strategy to promote social inclusion but in many cases it is considered to be the only one way out of poverty and social exclusion. This is a shared perception that among the study participants is connected to the process of personal empowering through which many of the main characters of this dissertation have ended up engaging in new educational projects in their lives.

This is, for instance, the case of Assumpta, Tatiana or Soledad, Romani women who participated in different editions of the intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting. Their stories have been introduced through the preceding chapters. All of them are women who have family responsibilities and who experienced barriers in accessing to labour market and also in finishing their school due to an ethnic-related component (educational segregation, racism at the time of seeking for a job, lack of expectations from teachers). However, their participation and involvement in the Romani Women's mobilization have been a turning point in their life.

Assumpta, who collaborated in the organization of the Romani Students' Meeting of Figueras in 2014, shared that the Meeting gave her the energy she needed to do that what she had wanted to do since the born of her daughter, who has a disability: a

vocational training course in special education. She asked herself, why I can't do it? She started and she finished it. Not only this, as now she is doing another vocational training course in social integration:

“The Romani students’ meeting has had a lot of impact on us. After it, because I have a daughter with a disability, I said, yes, why not? Why I don’t study special education? So I did it. I have done a vocational training course in special education and now I’m doing another one on social integration. And I’m doing the internship in the same school where we organized the Romani Women Students’ Meeting! But I’m not working yet...” (Assumpta, Romani woman)

Besides her, she also explains that the other five women who were members of the chairing committee of the meeting together with her, decided to organize in order to obtain the secondary education graduate qualification. So all of them have currently started new educational projects. Assumpta emphasizes that among these women there were women of very different ages, her own aunt aged 42, and also a young girl aged 14 who dropped out:

“Other Roma women too, as a result of the Meetings began to take part in several activities. Five women that organised the Meeting started to study to take the Graduation level, and now they are doing, my aunt amongst them, she was one of the most active one. She is 42 years old; there are some younger girls...” (Assumpta, Roma woman)

The case of Tatiana is somehow similar; her story was briefly introduced in Chapter 1. While she was a student in secondary education at the age of 16 she suffered from school segregation, so instead of going to the school “to grow tomatoes” –as she says– she dropped out as a way of going to the street market to help her mother and take care of her younger siblings:

“We had to grow tomatoes every day at my School, we also had to paint, we had no progress... and that discourages you, everybody? No, it affected only some of them. So then I decided that to be like that, I preferred to help my

parents. I was 16 at the time. And then they blame the primary school, they blame each other (...)" (Tatiana, Roma woman)

But attending the Romani Women Students' Meeting in Bon Pastor moved her to take a decision regarding her professional future, what she knew that could have further implications, it was about removing the barriers and going ahead. Listening the role models had a deep impact on her: the next Monday after the celebration of the Trobada she was knocking DKM's door as she wanted to know more information about how she could come back to school. Tatiana has participated in the official process for validating her competencies involved in the Rom-Act project (2013-2014). Besides this and another evidence of the impact that the Trobada and getting involved in DKM have had on Tatiana's life, she is participating in the course for preparing the access to the university exam for people over 25 years old, as she wants to study social work:

"At the time, when I attended the Bon Pastor Meeting in 2012 (...) she made me realise that the world is like we see it and we put the barriers... nobody else. Society and the different situations can put barriers for you, but you can remove them if you want to. If you want, you can put those barriers down. It was like a confirmation: "go this way"! (...) Then, when the Meeting was over I ran looking for Ana: Ana, Ana, Ana!!! We have to meet. I want to do things. Then I started to take the exam to enrol the university for people over 25 years old". (Tatiana, Roma woman).

Finally, Soledad's story has in common with the story of Assumpta and Tatiana the recovering of her own self-esteem once she engaged in DKM and get involved in the Romani women's mobilization. She is a Romani woman who while doing her middle-level training program in social integration met Pilar, a member of DKM who was her teacher in her programme. Soledad decided to do an internship in DKM, as she was interested in working in an organization concerned with educational issues of the Romani women. She also suffered from segregation:

"I studied the primary level, and then I carried on with the secondary compulsory school (ESO). When I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> year, I didn't get good marks, not because I was a rebel, not at all, but... I did not get the attention I

required, (...). When I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the ESO I failed every subject and there was a special classroom in my school as it was where you could study the fourth year with no books, no nothing, with the purpose that afterwards they owe the ESO to you. I had no books (...)" (Soledad, Roma woman).

Soledad finished the internship in DKM, and also her middle-level training programme in social integration. Although she is not working in the field of social work as she would like, she is pursuing this dream while working as shop assistant. According to her, DKM does a very important work empowering women:

"What Drom does... Is like when you are a child, you say: don't do it for me, teach me how to do it! So Drom Kotar teaches you how to do it, it gives you the training in order that you can do it for yourself..." (Soledad, Romani woman)

What is important to highlight from Soledad's story is that in her case, her story is marked by early educational segregation which influenced negatively her expectations and thus her later school achievement. However, meeting Pilar (a DKM member) during a middle-level training programme that she was doing, was also revealing for her. Pilar helped her to gain confidence and trust in her educational potential, and even beyond that in realizing how positive was that a Romani girl like her was studying at that educational stage –not usual within the Spanish educational system. This would be a triggering experience for Pilar in the sense that it was what made her recover her own agency. Once in DKM Soledad felt empowered not only as women but also as Romani women capable of going ahead with her studies and her professional career. She said that never before she had felt that she was struggling for the rights of the Romani women of accessing and receiving a quality education like before engaging in DKM. By knowing the social reality of other Romani women and how their rights were being constantly infringed Pilar also realized that in her case, when she was a student in primary education, not having had books like her other classmates was another consequence of segregation. This is just one of the reasons that move Soledad to deeply support the intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting every time that they are celebrated.

As said, for many Romani women engaging in DKM activities involves both breaking down tough self-conceptions that they have internalized about themselves (e.g. when they do not imagine themselves as university students –due to they have had *stolen* this dream) and in turn, *stolen* them this reality), and existent social stereotypes, that is, the idea that Romani women do not want to study: what occurs is that higher educational institutions are constructed as mainly *gadje spaces*, where Romani students seen many times forced to negotiate their cultural identity.

For instance, this is clearer in the case of Romani women. Several of my interviewees have explained their fears regarding the education of their daughters in observing that educational institution remain so often passive in front of cases of bullying, violence or boys' misconduct with girls. They do not want their daughters to experience this and they know that this risk exists under current educational institutions. In this sense, the Roma community seems to be protected to face these types of risks due to stronger community bonds. However, sometimes, school segregation leading to low levels of quality education, racism within the educational system occurs at stages that many Roma students drop out school or fail.

Based in my fieldwork, many of the women who participate in the activities of DKM experience a process of empowerment that lead them to recover those dreams that once were left behind. The case of Eva, a young Romani women from Badalona is very illustrative in this regards.

Eva met DKM through a friend of her, Sara, in 2010. In that moment, Eva was doing a middle-level training programme in administration, and Sara invited her to participate in an English course that Maria, the “Romani American women” member of DKM wanted to organise with Romani girls. Sara and Maria mobilized Romani girls from Bon Pastor and Badalona who would like to study English, a course that Maria would teach for free once a week. Eva was very happy of participating in the English classes, and between 10 and 15 Romani women aged 9 and 20 years old also participated. This was how Eva got involved in the activities promoted by DKM.

Later on, Eva was invited to participate as a positive role model in the intergenerational

Romani Women Students' Meeting celebrated in 2012 in the Bon Pastor neighbourhood. She has had an outstanding educational trajectory that worth to be shared with the other Romani girls and women: she was doing her middle-level training programme and had started a Romano language course together with Sara. Since then on, she has been participating in the activities of DKM, mainly in the *Trobadas* as participant. Eva finished her middle-level training programme, and after that she started to work.

Eva has now her own business; she is the owner of a bar. But she wants to continue studying so she is attending to the courses to prepare the exams to access university to people over 25 years old. When asked what moved her to continue studying, she does not hesitate in answering that is “knowing Sara, knowing DKM.... That is what motivates you to come back to study again”:

“What empowered me to prepare the exams to go to University? The spark was having met Ana Belen, to know the DROM encourages you to resume your studies again. Nowadays there is more non-Roma than Roma people, nothing wrong with it, you see. But going to class where everyone are Roma students, attend the Meetings with Roma people, the fact of seeing many cases attracts your attention, honestly it attracts your attention. Listen to the people.”

Eva is surrounded by positive interactions, as she explains, her family considers that she is “a fighter”, but DKM has played in her biography a triggering factor in her educational expectations.

A similar case is the one of Sulamita, already introduced in Chapter 1 and mentioned in Chapter 2. She is no longer involved in the daily activities of DKM, and she has had a baby who is 3 years old now. Sulamita explains how when she was working in DKM, as a high school student she felt that it was hard for her to graduate, she felt so disengaged. Years went and being a mother, she knew that she wanted to study again, it was the only way to have a better future, not only for her but also for her child. What Sulamita realised was that the difficulties that she had had to face when being a student were not because she was “lazy”, but there were because structural reasons. She observed that



she was not the only Romani woman that was in that situation, many other Romani women were trapped as her as a consequence of that triple discrimination. According to Sulamita, DKM gave her that “look from the top” to the entire situation of Romani women. Nowadays Sulamita has re-taken her studies, she is doing an upper educational programme in Early Childhood Education teaching, which she had left three years ago. She is totally convinced that she wants to continue on to the university:

“Perhaps my main concern was that High School was difficult for me, I felt lazy about it and I was discouraged, but also I learnt that may be not always it is a matter of being discouraged, but also there are money problems, certain family difficulties, it was not my case... but of course... there is always a more closed approach. But the fact of seeing other Roma women identified with us..., looking at it from above...I learnt a lot from all that...(..) And now my aim is that of studying. I resumed my studies as children educator after three years... another goal I have now is to start children teaching career see if I can afford it and if I am still willing to go ahead” (Sulamita, Romani women)

### *Opportunities within spaces of informal learning*

For many of my study participants, the intergenerational Romani Women Students’ Meeting has been an initial motivation to be engaged in other activities organized by the association. Romani women are invited to continue participating on other activities. This is driven by a concrete goal, which is the improvement of their living conditions, so once that grassroots Romani women realize that it is actually something achievable; they feel much motivated to move further in their educational participation.

A good example of a space of informal learning is the *Romí youth space*: this space emerged as a space of dialogue with Romani girls and teenagers aimed at debating those issues of concern that many times are approached in the Romani Women Students’ Meetings by the younger (e.g.: social relationships with non-Roma population and with Romani boys, gender violence, among others). Among the public, Romani girls and

teenagers that Romani women from DKM contacted through schools from those neighbourhoods from Barcelona where there are high rates of Roma population. In the frame of the Romí youth space, Sara, a Romani women who in 2011 was working in DKM (her story will be explained later on) together with Maria and other DKM members thought that it could be a good idea promoting an English course. Besides studying English, this could be also a good space to talk with the Romani girls about their educational expectations and also other issues that could worry them. Maria offered to be the teacher (she is American): she could teach English once a week to these young Romani women that wanted to participate. Eva participated, and she also was like a “magnet” in her community to many other young women to attend to the initiative under her responsibility. Eva explains how this was a very good initiative in terms of promoting the participation of Romani girls from the neighbourhood, and how Romani girls themselves, because they were very interested, recruited other friends to join the classes:

“We have to go on doing more school years, it cheers you up, even that class with Maria, the youngest girl that Miriam was, my cousin, the girl was 10 years old more or less, she brought other girls with her that were Roma, so they were more girls. I tell you what, her friend, her cousin, they were my cousins too but they, at their school, there were more Roma girls and they kept bringing more all the time. When that got interrupted, it was kind of pity, but can you do? I told them “come on, we are going to English lessons, we enjoy ourselves, come with us” and they did so and the group kept growing, the only thing is that it did not last for long” (Eva, Romani woman).

The effect of participating in these types of spaces is very positive, for girls themselves and also for those other Romani girls and women from the local community, as they become role models to them opening up new horizons not considered as attainable before listening to them:

“I felt when I started the youth and the eldest. And the mothers as they see they study they make sacrifices to support Roma women, mothers study and will give it further importance” (Eva, Romani woman).

I contacted two of the Romani teenagers that participated in the English course promoted by DKM, Jasmine and Antonia. For them are 17 years old now. They explain how at that time, meeting a Romani women whose mother tongue was English was a totally new experience:

“(…) we wished to do it as we saw she was Roma and we saw she was English... So then, she could speak English... so... a Roma woman who could speak in English? ... And we did like it... we never saw such a thing.... We loved it! I have not met any Roma woman from abroad... I only knew her!” (Jasmine, Roma girl).

For Romani girls and teenagers, participating in the English course, was not only positive in so far they could learn English, but also they widened their interactions with other Romani adults women such as Maria. Maria did a degree in education and dance in the University of Wisconsin, and for Romani girls from the neighbourhood of Bon Pastor, many of whom have never gone out from there, having her as a teacher was a ground-breaking experience. Maria explains how the expectations of these girls raised due to the egalitarian relationship established, in which all of them included herself learn from each other:

“They had a great impact on me and the love and affection I felt for them, they also returned that love and affection to me (...) In one occasion I went to Wisconsin (US) I brought them several files and when I handed them over, “Wow, I am going to Wisconsin, I am going to the US” (...) but when saying that, thinking over, they are young, it was something I felt very proud of. Because they realised they could do it as well.” (Maria, Roma woman member of DKM)

Jasmine and Antonia explains how that experience and the interactions with Maria motivated them to do not abandon school, to work hard in order to succeed:

“Being Roma, but she was English Roma woman, it was shocking, I liked it, it was great, a Roma woman who could speak in English! We had not seen any such a thing in our lives...” (Antonia, Roma girl)

As another activity within the framework of the English course, Maria and Sara organized a cultural visit to a museum from Barcelona (Cosmocaixa). For all the girls who attended the visit, it supposed the first time they visited a public place out from their neighbourhood, and it was an excellent opportunity also to talk about future educational expectations, their concerns, and also about the place that the Romani culture should have in society:

“And in another occasion when I realised the discourse between them was in an outing to Cosmocaixa. We arranged it, we asked their parents for permission to go, we informed them who they were going with, that we were going in the underground. They’ve never been there before. A girl says to another: why can’t we have our own Museum? Why cannot we display our Roma culture? So I said to Sara, listen, when you can talk to them and you say yes, they can have it, they can do it.” (Maria, Roma woman member of DKM).

Barriers faced by these youth have been different throughout time. The course finished, Jasmine and Antonia ended up the compulsory secondary education and started a middle-level training programme but unfortunately due to family responsibilities they abandoned it. In the stories of these two adolescents it is well observed how although their difficult situation they helped each other in their daily school routines in order to end up school. In this case, Jasmine explained me:

“Let’s see, we have always been fond of studying ... in my case it has always been a bit difficult, but I always have had enough thrill to carry on... since when we arrived home we immediately started to do the home work, even at 12 at night. And we didn’t go to bed until we had finished. We studied the day long...” (Jasmine, Roma girl)

As observed, the personal stories of these two teenagers have exclusionary elements

derived from a family situation of vulnerability. They also explained that they had to assume some of the family responsibilities and currently are helping their mother at the market while studying to obtain the driving license:

“I matriculated to the mid degree as I thought I was going to pass it... I was walking on my own, I learnt the path... in the end, as I repeated, I didn't want to do anything (...)” (Antonia, Roma girl).

“We don't want now to do other things because we are helping my mother. We have a complex situation at home (...) we go to the market street daily. We take turns, one day one of us, the next day goes the other. Another day I got to the driving school, the following day the other one attends the driving lessons. And every Tuesday afternoon we go to the open air leisure centre.” (Jasmine, Romani girl).

Both of them want to go back to their studies the next year when their family situation improves, and they will participate in the following edition of the Romani Women Students' Meeting that will be celebrated by DKM in 2015. What is worth to emphasize of this case is how even within a precarious situation, elements of solidarity between Romani women emerges constantly and on a daily basis as tools to better face situations of vulnerability.

## **11.2. Finding a job**

Activities of DKM involve for many of their participants enhancing their employment opportunities. This has been the case of the Romani women who have undertaken the Romí Training in their different editions since 2005, when the first edition of the course was celebrated in the neighbourhood of Verneda, in Barcelona. Reviewing archival data provided by the own association I found that a total of 71 Romani women has obtained the official qualification of the *trainers course on schools canteens* between 2006 and 2013, in the editions of la Mina (2006), Gornal (2007), Sant Roc (2009), Reus (2010), Roquetes (2012) and Bon Pastor (2013). There is not available data for the initial

edition of the course (Verneda, 2005), and in the last edition celebrated in Terrassa in 2015, 9 women were qualified with the diploma. This course was totally free of any charge for the women, and they were not receiving any type of payment or was not subjected to keep their welfare coverage. All the women who decided to enrol to the course was totally out of their desire to get useful training, to gain an official diploma with the ultimate purpose to find a job.

Among Romani women who has participated in the fieldwork, focusing specifically on the case of those Romani women who has completed the Romani training, many of them after obtaining the official diploma and doing the internships in a school in their neighbourhoods, where there are Romani students, when companies or school authorities observe how they become positive role models for the students, they exert with more authority the same task with Romani students than non-Roma workers. So they add a value in the school that non-Roma school monitors cannot provide: their cultural background.

### *Organising a Romí Training*

There are some elements of this course that facilitate the participation of the Romani women. These in turn are inherently related to the own working approach of DKM, its way on thinking how to do in order to promote that grassroots Romani women attend and obtain the official diploma.

As members of DKM such as Pilar, Carmen or Victoria argue, if the problem for Romani women to participate in training programmes is that they have difficulties in reconciling their family responsibilities with needed dedication in a fixed schedule, what should be done is not only offering a good quality training, but also a service of babysitting. So this is what DKM do: it assumes that the Romí Training has to have foreseen a babysitting service. This will allow those women who have children to be able to get the training while someone can take care of their offspring. In the following quote, Angeles explains how important was in her case the service:

“Reasonable facilities were provided. My son was 4 or 5 years and he was

well looked after there. Otherwise I could not have done it. And of course, my husband, because we had the street markets in the Barcelona area---that is why I could do it, otherwise who would have looked after Antonio? And they provided for me greatly, is true. Because if you have no one to look after your children, what can do you then?” (Angeles, Romani woman).

This service is a *sine qua non* condition of the course, as the majority of the women who do it are mother with family responsibilities. In this line, Lourdes, who in the Romí Training in 2014 narrates how Romani women have to deal with many barriers at the time of studying that non-Romani women fortunately do not have:

“(…) Our situation is very different (concerning Roma women) to yours (non-Roma women). Actually, you do great effort, you get to it and you do it, but if we would see things like that, the effort capacity of Roma women is really incredible. Look, in the so called, they don’t see in the same way as you do, they don’t support you because they say: “no, there is no point in doing so. …It is not because they are bad people, but for their culture, their socialisation. Besides you have a lot on top of you. (…)” (Lourdes, Roma woman)

Another important issue that is foreseen at the time of the course is in relation to the schedule. Members of DKM and the own participants explained that one of the barriers in order to access formal training was that these programmes are implemented in a schedule that do not work for them: they are often at evening hours, or when many of Romani women go to the *culto* (Evangelist Church). In DKM, since the first edition celebrated in la Verneda (2005) one of the agreed norms was that schedule has to be decided by the own women. Women themselves discuss which is the best option in an initial assembly according their needs, thus, considering if they have children that attend to primary education, if they are a group of women who attend regularly to the Evangelical Church, etc.. This explains why the editions of the training since 2006 have been developed on different schedules, some years during morning hours and other years during evening hours, because women are the ones who decide.

Another of the differential traits of this training from other types of training offered to

minority women is that it offers an official diploma –recognised by the Catalan government–. Many of the training oriented to disadvantaged communities are activities that do not prepare the targeted group to be better prepared at the time of looking for a job. Offered training departs from lower expectations on what the person is able to do, offer a type of training which being not officially recognized by any formal institution, do not provide new skills or competencies to the person. The fact that the *trainers course on schools canteens* is officially recognized is what moves many Romani women to do it: pursuing their aim of someday working in a school on a schedule that works perfectly for them to conciliate their family responsibilities while at the main time earn some money.

The experiences of Cecilia or Leticia are very illustrative in this regard, both of them although have done several non-recognised training programmes in the past, they agree that they have not capitalised in more employment opportunities:

“I had done some class course before (...) about florists. Then I took another brief course ... about countries and so, oh yes, Geography... I managed to learn a few things about many topics (...) and I saw plenty of differences between these courses, these classes. I thought I was somebody here...I don't know how to say it ... I thought I had a future here... And I said to myself, now yes, come on...” (Cecilia, Romani woman)

“I did a course on Hotel Waitress, I was good with the practical side of it, but there are 6 hours where you have to clean, there is a lady-supervisor (...) Everyone can clean, so I say, but you don't stop in those 6 hours. Then, by the time you arrive home, you still carry on with the house work.” (Leticia, Romani women).

An important requirement to get the official diploma, besides attending a specific number of hours to the theoretical classes, is to elaborate a final report reflecting about the experience of doing their internship in the school setting. Romani women who do the training have poor literacy skills and the majority of them have never used IT technologies neither have elaborated such kind of reports. In order that this report do not become a hindrance to get the diploma, DKM volunteers help participant women to



elaborate their final reports. For instance, Patricia explained how she did not know how to use the computer and Elisa, a DKM volunteer helped her to type what she has done on paper into the computer. Something similar is explained by Leticia, who was helped by Miriam (DKM volunteer) at the time of ending up the report:

“Then, something else came up that has been good for the memory: should you need someone to help you out with your memory we shall look for somebody to help you. They looked for Nuria that is for me like my little sister, she helped me with my memory, she spends plenty of time at home.”  
(Leticia, Romani woman)

DKM counts with volunteers who can give a hand a time of supporting women who are doing the Romí Training. Every year, when women need support for elaborating their reports, someone from DKM contact volunteers to support the women in this process. If volunteers are offered, volunteers and women find a place to meet up to work together. It can be a public library, the headquarters of DKM, what works better for women.

In all, these are some of the elements that make the way of working of the Romí Training offered by DKM to differentiate from other type of trainings.

#### *What happens after getting the diploma?*

The large majority of Romani women who do the training succeeds in getting the diploma, what have a twofold consequence, broadening their employment opportunities and empowering them to continue studying. The latter is derived from them observing that they can achieve a new challenge. This in turn make them gaining confidence in their own capacities. Both stories of Lourdes and Leticia are good examples of this: once they completed the Romí Training they thought that they wanted to move to the next educational challenge:

“This year I am all for English. This year... I told Esther (member of DKM): Ana please let me know when there is an English course, please call me, I will go straight away!”(Leticia, Roma woman)

“If I pass the graduation level, I would go for nursing assistant course. I want to be an assistant. I want to achieve the graduation degree, in a year like this, I get very motivated (...) besides I think the money is not bad. (...) I am calling Ana for information and definitely I will make an effort to get the degree” (Lourdes, Roma woman)

In relation to employment opportunities both of them are currently working as school canteen monitors.

In the case of Lourdes, a Romani women mother of two who coursed the Romí Training, what worth to emphasize is her motivation to course an educational training that she has always envisioned although sometimes having to face some resistances from her family members. Because of the diploma, Lourdes has found her current job in the school of her neighbourhood and the one she attended as a child. Lourdes remembers that she used to be a very good student while she was in the school, and that her teachers said to her that she was very intelligent. However, the situation at home was not easy: she had to help her mother to take care of her siblings and do the housekeeping. In her case, teachers insisted in the good educational abilities of Lourdes, so they convinced her mother to allow her to continue studying, deciding that the best she could do was a course in hairdressing. Like many other Romani women from her age, Lourdes finally dropped out.l.

Lourdes explains that she loved studying. For her, having the opportunity of accessing to the Romí training from the hand of DKM has made entering again to that world of knowledge that once was stolen to her:

“When I want something, I straight go for it, because when I see that I can’t, I get frustrated, I get angry and I feel like destroying myself. It takes me a while to start, but once I get moving nothing stops me. Yes, I am decided to go for the graduation level exam” (Lourdes, Romani woman).

Lourdes has fulfilled her dream: she is now working and in the same school where she serve as intern and her school as a child. Being a positive role model for other Romani

girls, she is also very happy because she feels that the coordinator of the canteen, a *gadje*, trusts on her:

“When I started to do my internship, I thought to myself: this young coordinator and with me being a Roma woman, you will see now... But not, no, very well but everybody ...the coordinator was new, very well, very flexible, is that right? What do you need? I am going to move you through several classes, he explained everything... I guess he thought: she is a Roma woman and she will be a bit shy... he put me many times with difficult children as he realised I was in control. Apart that he knew, he showed me things... I am hired since January until June” (Lourdes, Romani woman).

As observed, the impact that the Romí Training have had in the life of Lourdes has not only been in terms of increasing her employment opportunities, her educational expectations has also increased and therefore her self-esteem. Lourdes wants to embrace bigger educational challenges; she is totally convinced that she wants to continue studying: she had decided that she will finish the compulsory secondary education and she will do a training programme in nursery. She insists that she has already asked Feli, a member of DKM, about the possibilities to do this:

“(...) I know and I can. But of course is not only to can and be eager to is the situation and of course she would do it. And I called Feli several times, asking her things. If I pass the graduation exam, I would do it. To help others is something clear for me (...) I want to pass the graduation exam in a year, this motivates me. Besides I think that wages are good (...) I have in mind to pass the graduation exam and I do want to pass it” (Lourdes, Romani woman).

Additionally, Angeles (president of Shine Association), who did the Romí Training in 2010 is also working as monitor in the school of her neighbourhood in Reus. When she finished the training she was offered working there. After five years of working as monitor in the school canteen Angeles is now the coordinator of the canteen. She explains:

“(...) Thanks to this course I am working, otherwise it would be impossible. I would be with the children...hadn't it been for the course I would not be working. I never thought I would be working there, and thanks to this course, you see, here I am (...)” (Angeles, Romani woman)

In all, among all the Romani women who have participated in my fieldwork, seven of them took the Romí Training and four of them explained me that have got a job. However, all of them consider that having obtained this official diploma is a positive opportunity for their occupational future: they consider that it will benefit them for their labour market inclusion, or as already mentioned, obtaining the title has been a positive experience in terms of widening opportunities, rising up other expectations. For instance, in the case of Valentina, she explained that although she completed the Romí Training in 2008, she did not go to pick up the diploma.<sup>53</sup> However, self-confidence that involved for her having carried out the training moved her to look for better employment opportunities, what led her to her current job position as school promotor in her neighbourhood, in Gornal-Bellvitge. Another interviewee, Coral, who participated in the Romí training edition of Reus, explains that although she has not get a job related to the field of the training yet, she is happy because before the training she has never done any type of official educational training like the trainers course on schools canteens:

“at least you have a training (...) Before that I....Do you remember? I always have wanted to get the degree of monitor...Always...” (Coral, Romani woman)

In short, once Romani women participate in the Romí Training opportunities widen in different ways, in equipping them with new skills and competences and even more important, in empowering them to continue studying.

### *Making it real through solidarity networks*

---

<sup>53</sup> I did not had the opportunity to conduct a daily life communicative story with Valentina. I reached to her through a member of DKM. This narrative is derived from an informal telephone interview. Valentina is a Romani women from the neighborhood of Gornal-Bellvitge (Barcelona).

For many grassroots Romani women participants in the activities of DKM obtaining an official training diploma was possible due to the strong networks of solidarity created among themselves and the support received by DKM.

For instance, Lourdes, explained me how happy and satisfied felt when ending up the training programme. Obtaining the diploma meant for her making true one of her dreams: envisioning a new educational challenge and thus coming back to education. But what I want to highlight in relation to solidarity is that Lourdes insisted that if she was able to finish the course was because of the help that she got from Esther, a Romani women member of DKM who took care of her closely:

"Let me tell you something. I've always loved to be a school canteen monitor but for me there has never been a motivation, let's say, going to a course and if there is some day that you can't attend because of family responsibilities and you have to say "I have this schedule"... You know what I mean? But here (referring to the experience of DKM), if you need something Maria comes and helps us because she knows us, because she is a Roma... so that really motivates you, a lot.... And of course at the emotional level it has been a big support counting with the support of Maria, you say: she is a Roma as me, so go ahead!" (Lourdes, Romani woman)

Thus, networks of solidarity are constantly created among Romani and non-Romani women members and participants of the association, and they become a central element to encourage both the participation and the continuation of Romani women. This is also explained by Leticia, who being a mother of 3 children appreciates the fact of “counting with them” –referring to the members of DKM. Leticia’s words reflect in a very illustrative sense how solidarity networks pushes grassroots Romani women to participate and be persistent in their efforts. According to her, DKM is somehow different as their members “are there” remaining them that they have to attend to the classes, but not criticizing them and seeing them as *passive* and *not interested* as non-Roma structures normally conceives them. DKM understands that Romani women want

to take care of their families and many of the time have responsibilities, homework, an extended family:

“What happens is that women we say that we go but finally we don’t go... they have to insist us a lot... So maybe is because of that that Drom have more qualities in that sense, because they insist a lot and they keep an eye on you, they focus particular attention, and in the other place (referring to other associations) this doesn’t happen. In the other places they are not like: look, if I have to go with you, I go. Because Esther has done that: “Well, ok..! No, well, no, you come with me! And if you come, I go! And you see that she insists you. She is very attentive on us, and that is very important because sometimes we need that impulse, we need someone who stay there... Because maybe I commit to go but then... I don’t know, my mum attends to my home, other people, the family... I have to do the housework, the children... You know? But if you see that there is someone that knocks on your door and says: eh! We have a meeting! Don’t get sleep!” (Leticia, Romani women)

Another of the interviewee, Blanca, explains how solidarity was a key element for her to do not drop out the course when her mother fall badly ill. What she highlighted was that she felt very supported not only by the other women who were doing the training, but also by the president of DKM who call her very regularly to ask her about her mother, and encouraged her to do not drop:

“To be perfectly honest, it cost me a lot because I had so many problems... my mother was taken ill (...) but I said no, that I wasn’t giving it up, I do not surrender any more, and I said it on my own, no more giving up. What actually made me move forward was the thought that when my girls were older; I could look for a job instead of selling socks in the street markets... Why should I earn €3 only? Esther from the Drom helped us a lot too... She mentioned about other classes, she called as later...” (Blanca, Roma woman)

Once solidarity networks are created among Romani women while they are developing the activities, for instance, while they are helping each other going together, helping at the time of elaborating the reports, bonds of friendship are also created. What can be observed is that these solidarity networks that are created and reinforced in spaces where dialogic interactions occurred, once the specific activity finished, persisted after time and goes beyond the 'educational field'. For instance, some of them explained how bonds of friendships created among Romani served for many women to better deal with situations of violence that they experienced within their families. In these cases, engaging in new spaces of social participation became a way out to a situation that could be difficult to face individually:

“Look there was a Little Romani woman that came for that (to disconnect), her husband hit her terribly (...) And she came only for that, to disconnect and to say, damn, I leave my husband, always fights....But she was not able to leave him because it was a very strong family. She cannot leave him...because she can have her children removed from her (...). And we meet very often, she knows that if she wants to, she has us. We have created a strong bond...That maybe we don't see each other very much but we do have contact” (Leticia, Romani woman)

#### *From working in Drom Kotar to working in another Romani Association*

Being employed in the DKM has come up as another way to create more employment opportunities for Romani women. Some of the Romani women who have in the past either worked in DKM for a certain time or other women who have done their internships while finishing their middle-level training programmes (e.g. the cases of Sulamita, Sara, Carmen, Soledad) years ago explained how having worked in DKM they acquired important skills and competences. They consider them as key to have got new job opportunities in their future.

Sulamita explained how in her case, in DKM she became a Romani activist, and how her life would have been completely different if she had not worked there. She is now

working for a Catalan Romani Foundation focused on providing educational support to Roma children:

“I think that my life would have been different hadn’t I been there (in the DROM)”... It would have been different because I would have been dedicated to the street markets or perhaps I would have carried on studying but differently (...) And I believe that hadn’t I carried on working with regard to what is the associative network” (Sulamita, Romani woman)

Similarly, Carmen also recognises that she has her current job position thanks to her initial professional experience as worker in DKM

“(…) Thanks to work in the DROM I had access to further type of things both directly and indirectly. As a matter of fact, the task of the Generalitat came up because I work at the DROM, otherwise who would have hired me? But I have been lucky to attend international meetings and mix with other organisations” (Carmen, Roma woman member of DKM).

The story of Sara is very similar to the one of Sulamita and Carmen. Sara engaged in DKM when she was 18 years old. She was contracted by DKM as part-time staff with a contract funded by the Catalan Government<sup>54</sup> won by competitive call by DKM. As explained by founder members of the association, these types of public contracts have allowed DKM, as a grassroots based association with a limited capacity, to hire part-time staff to be in charge of the administrative tasks of the association. As narrated, in 2010 Sara had just ended up her upper-level training programme in administration and business. She finished the compulsory secondary school at the age of 16, did a middle-level training programme in administration, and started working in a lawyers’ office. She explains how while she was in school she did not wanted to continue the bachelor's degree neither the university, and against what is often believed, it was her family and specially her father and her grandfather the ones who motivated her to continue on to the middle and upper-level training programmes.

---

<sup>54</sup> Contracts funded by Servei Català d’Ocupació, which have during of 12 months.



After finishing the programme in administration and business (2010), Sara got her part-time job in DKM, which lasted 12 months. What Sara would not know at that moment was that her initial experience in DKM would be the beginning of her trajectory within the social sector working with Roma population.

Sara ended up working in DKM in 2011 after her contract was rescinded and the association lacked funding to continue maintaining her as in-paid staff. She explains that after her pass from DKM, she decided to continue studying, and thus she opted for doing an upper-level training programme in social integration. After this training, she got a position in a well-recognized Roma association where she is still working:

“I finished the DROM and focused on my studies, started to do social integration, I spoke there with the girls, because in the institute where the course took place, I talked to the girls when I worked for the DROM. The girl found a position for me; I passed the higher grade level in social integration. From then onwards, DROM really gave me the opportunity. Before completing the course I was working there where I still continue in the Roma Association, and I have a fixed contract now. I am learning a lot, you learn something every day.” (Sara, Romani woman)

Different elements should be emphasized from the communicative life story of Sara, but the most relevant to be mentioned here is how Sara arrived to DKM. As a teenager, she got involved in the association at a moment where DKM was experiencing a deep change –the celebration of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress- in her organizational structure: a jump from a more local organization to a European sphere, which she had the chance to experience. Without a clear idea of what to do with her educational future at that moment but very supported by her family, and later by DKM members, although not being able to continue working in the association the professional experience she acquired there, motivated her to embrace a new educational project which opened her a job opportunity within the social sector and related with the Roma community. Talking with Sara she reflects about how without realizing, now she is the positive role model for many Romani youth: “for youth, children and also for Romani women”. Many of these girls she says, are the ones that share the market tender together with her own parents during the weekend, who in seeing that Sara is there and had studied and get a

job, she has not lost her traditions, that is, staying with her family, taking care of her elders, her love for her grandfather. All these girls see that she still continues being the same: “They see that I have the same life than they have... That I live according the Roma culture”. Sara is committed in her activism with struggling for overcoming the inequalities that its people still suffering.

### **Summary**

In this chapter it has been analysed how grassroots Romani women (low-SES and the majority of them with no academic credentials) once engaged in the Romani women’s association’ activities experience a personal transformation in their lives. Specifically, communicative analysis carried out points out that activities implemented by DKM such as the intergenerational Romani Women Students’ Meeting or the Romí Training generate in those participant women the rise of their educational expectations, feeling encouraged to embrace new educational projects. This occurs in different ways. On the one hand, women participating in spaces such as the intergenerational Romani Women Students’ Meeting who see other Romani women with outstanding educational and professional trajectories, adopt new positive role models. On the other hand, for those women who participate in the Romí Training, once they experience that succeed, they gain self-confidence and self-esteem. This has a twofold consequence: one, that many of them continue doing other professional training; second, that their opportunities for accessing to formal employment are broadened and indeed some of them get jobs within schools centres. The constant presence of solidarity within interpersonal relations among Romani women, a component recognised to be essential by the own participants to complete their trainings and observed to be enhanced within DKM. In both cases, the outstanding personal effort done by Romani women when they engage in the mentioned activities as these require time-dedication and the arrangement of family responsibilities should be also acknowledged here, as it was persistently coming up in my analysis.

## **CHAPTER 12. ROMANI WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES**

As shown in previous chapters, Romani women involved in the association have experienced a process of broadening up their opportunities in terms of education, employment and access to new spaces of social participation. One of the specific objectives of this research is to explore the impact of the Romani women's collective agency in broadening the opportunities of their own families. According to how I have conceptualised my levels of analysis, this corresponds to the analytical level 3: *Impact of the Romani women's collective agency on their families*. Within it, an important issue should be remarked, which is the way how I conceptualized 'family' in my analysis. Throughout the present chapter and the entire dissertation when I refer to the Roma family I allude to the Roma extended family, a way of organizing life in which all people with who Roma themselves consider kin is included, and with who they feel identified with their homes, their culture, or their way of doing things. This way, care and relations is also extended beyond nuclear familiar towards a more extended and closed community.

As happened in Chapter 8, evidence presented in this chapter are derived from the own narratives of the DKM participants (defined as Group B in of my study), the same grassroots Romani women whose voices were listened in previous chapter. I have used for the analysis the following categories: educational opportunities for children and other family members; employment opportunities for family members and other community members; family and closed community health care; betterment (or not) of family relations: family cohesion; solidarity networks; violence; interactions among Romani women; role models; expectations; Romani women's traditions; prejudices/stereotypes/racism; other elements.

### **12.1. Negotiation within the family based on dialogue in relation to the gender roles and family responsibilities**

In the majority of the cases of Romani women who have participated in the fieldwork, they explain how after having participated in the activities, family members recognize new skills and abilities that they have: women as students, with new educational knowledge and skills, and capable of activate them in new social contexts. In turn, the fact that these women's families are proud of them and recognize their value beyond their care and family responsibilities, it reinforces the women's position within the family and also within their closed community. Thus, Romani women enhance their agency what in turn transforms the expectations they have in relation to their own future, and in relation to their family and closed community.

In this sense, Tatiana explained how at the very beginning that she got involved in DKM her mother used to complain because she "lost" her time volunteering in DKM, when she did not get any money back. Currently, in realizing about the important transformation her daughter has experienced, she is the one who congratulates her and supports her in order that she can attend to the events:

"At the beginning, my mother would tell me off. (...) Why are you going as volunteer worker to the Drom when you don't get paid? You know what I mean. But I feel rewarded for what I do. ...are you taking the girl with you? Are you going out? But just watch tv! I reply: I don't want it! But only recently she realised how good it is for me!" (Tatiana, Romani woman)

The same occurred to Lourdes, she explained how her parents and her younger sister did not expect that she could do the Romí Training and get the official diploma as she was pregnant and also has to take care of her other son. Her sister even critiqued her. Concerned, she says "is not that they are bad people, but they just did not expected from me...". But now, they are very proud of her because they have seen how she has obtained the diploma with lot of effort and she always goes ahead with that challenge that she poses to herself:

"On many occasions, my sister, when I arrive home after studying says: why do you study for? Where do you go with your two children, while you study... if it will do no good for you"? (...) But they always saw that... (to start the change)...if them (her family) know that I have been studying and

passed the exams, and that no one can access...They say that many times: because look, you, with that course, that many people would love to achieve, say they want to do it... they are proud about it, you know? But of course they don't realise it at the beginning. They think that they will not catch you... we are like that, let's be honest" (Lourdes, Romani woman)

Over time family members (parents, sons and daughters and husbands) feel very proud of Romani women when they observe that they reach their goals and they are more happy and satisfied with their achievements, what made them establish more ambitious aims. For instance, Blanca says: "They are happy.... They told me that this is good, I have something else! [Referring to the official qualification]. Sara's experience is in the same line, she explains how her family and her grandfather is very proud of herself:

"It is now my grandfather who wishes I pass the English exam, he was obsessed for me to finish a career. He brags about her granddaughter wherever he goes, he wants me to carry on, if it was for him, I would be studying for the rest of my life." (Blanca, Romani woman)

### *Renegotiating one's own role*

A common element identified among the different stories of the Romani women involved in DKM activities is that in order to carry out with these 'extra' activities, they have had to find time, thus negotiating with their relatives their gender roles at home. This is not at the expense of leaving up their responsibilities but adapting them to their new time-needs. For instance, Coral and Angeles explained me how while they were doing the Romí Training, their children were at the babysitting service, but sometimes they stayed with both respective fathers or with the grandmother of the children. For them, in order to make this possible agreement based on dialogue is always needed as their families have in turn other responsibilities or have some "markets days" in different cities. Not surprisingly, while interviewing Angeles, her youngest kid was taken care of by Angeles' father. She explained to me: "My father wanted that I continue studying, but I drop... They insists that Emilia (her oldest daughter) studies". As a Roma family, the way of organizing her house and the cafeteria is among the

family, her children stay with her and her husband but also with her parents. Since she started to work in the school in 2010, she explains that counting with the support of her family in order to take care of her two little children has been essential.

In a similar way, Tatiana has also needed the support of her family not only when she decided to start the course for preparing the exams for accessing university for people over 25, but also to attend to all those social participation activities in which she wanted to get involved. For her, counting with the support of her mother –who, as explained, at the beginning was reluctant of the fact that her daughter got involved in a voluntary association- and her husband, and negotiating with them established roles at home has been very important in order to conciliate all her responsibilities.

Although the majority of the women that have participated in my fieldwork have expressed that their husbands were happy of seeing them participating in activities which could benefit them, there are some exceptions. For instance, Lourdes explains how sometimes she found some resistances from the side of her husband at the time of him observing that she maintained the group of friend created during the Romí Training:

“My husband is kind of peculiar. Sometimes he leaves me...as I am unbearable, I tell him, I am not doing anything wrong! What is wrong in meeting my friends? Or in going out for lunch! That’s not a felony! Do I have to be with you all the time? Either you or my mother! It is hard... And I don’t want to fight...” (Lourdes, Romani woman)

But attitudes such as the ones of Lourdes’ husband are being challenged every time more within the Roma culture. Cecilia, Romani women of 50 years old and with no education, explains how her husband has been the one that has mostly encouraged her to do the Romí Training. He wants her to continue doing other educational training if she wants to. Even more, he has been the one that has helped her to end up the training report:

“When my husband arrived he said...I arrived home, I got to it, if I had lunch ready, then we had lunch together and perhaps we got at it (...) my

child called me “the teacher”, look here is the teacher... I took no notice. Even my nephews said to me: auntie, are you becoming a supervisor? Then I do want to go to your school. And I felt so proud of it. Yes... I felt good with myself. I loved it. (...) as my husband stayed out of it, he stays out of everything all the time... I do nothing wrong either... It is what he says, to have her at home? She can do what she likes too (...)” (Cecilia, Roma woman)

Similarly, Aurora explains how since she got involved in DKM, she had never travelled alone, and now in the framework of a travel with another member of DKM to a meeting of a project in which the association is involved, elder women from the association has asked her parents for permission for her to attend to the meeting:

“I had never had gone out on my own before, I did not go anywhere (...) It was a project and to go to Romania. I thought it was very difficult as my parents were not too keen on it and I didn’t feel safe leaving Spain either. I mentioned it to my father deep down thinking he was not going to be in agreement (...) my mother also encouraged me. Then I mentioned it to the Association and some of the senior women decided to call my father to support me (...) (Aurora, Romani woman member of DKM).

Aurora explained me later on, how after that trip to Romania she has gained more autonomy to go to other places.

Carmen also explains how when the intergenerational Romani Women Students’ Meetings are celebrated, in order for the Romani women to be able to attend, in many occasions their husbands are the ones who take care of the children:

“Being [the Trobada] in Sant Cosme, I myself with all my prejudices was staggered when I saw that there was a very Young man, a Roma dad changing the diapers to two babies which I think was a twin. I was in the childcare while his baby was there. And then people come to me to tell me that Romani people are sexist....well that depends...” (Carmen, Romani woman member of DKM)

To sum, what should be emphasized is that once Romani women are empowered, unlike what could be expected to happen, changes that occur within the family in terms of negotiation of gender roles do not go against family cohesion. Contrary to this, family cohesion is many of the times reinforced as these changes take place based on a process of dialogue among family members, considering what works better to all family relatives.

## **12.2. Expectations on children and family members**

The involvement of Romani women in activities of DKM have been observed to have an impact on further opportunities for these women's families. When Romani women access to the activities of DKM and engage in the Romani women's mobilisation, they do not only empower themselves but in turn they grow up a world of new expectations on their children and other family relatives. Linked to this, changes experienced in their cases are transferred to their own family members.

The case of Tatiana evidences how once she accessed to DKM, all those opportunities that had been created for her, made her realise that her family members, her daughter, her sister or her mother could also succeed in education, reach university in the case of her daughter or to enrol to adult education (her mother case). This made her think in what she could do in order to bring closer the resources she had to her own family, thus extending her own opportunities, for instance, to her own sister:

“My sister said she aspired to marry a man who would provide for her, until eventually I convinced her to take a course on commercial activity, customer's care, she was hired (...) Next it was an English course. We went to write us down where Alina to the adult school. She came along; so that, she took a journey from not wanting to do anything, to then undertake various activities (...)” (Tatiana, Romani woman member of DKM)

Milagros, Cristina's sister, was disengaged from the educational system when she was a teenager, and after some years of being neither working nor studying, now she explains



how her referent is her sister, who has helped her in those most difficult moments and has opened a path to do not fall alone. Milagros participates also in some of the specific activities of DKM, such as the FACEPA Women's Groups, something that she recognizes as never thought before she could do, when her sister mentioned the idea of getting involved in a civic association.

Tatiana has also encouraged her mother to engage in an adult school, as she has never attended school. She explains how at the very beginning she totally opposed, but slowly she is changed her mind. Tatiana attributes this change as her mother sees her motivated with DKM:

“I explained to my mother, when I went to the gathering talks in the adult school and I said to her “but mum, there are older women that carry magnifying lens because they can't see!” What prevents you from doing it? My mother has worked in restaurants and she was given the menus and no one knew she was illiterate. But since I am like this with the Drom and she sees me so encouraged, she feels a lot better and thrilled... Little by little she is changing because at the beginning she said NO, that it wasn't made for her.” (Tatiana, Romani woman member of DKM)

Many of the Romani women explains that now that they feel empowered they are more aware of the educational results of their children, as their expectations have raised. They are not satisfied if their children attend to school, but they want that their children receive an excellent education, that education that they did not have. Lourdes explains that she was concerned because the educational level of the school of her son was not very high so one of the measures that she considered was to look for another school, even a private one. All happen because of her, the aim is that her son succeed in education. Lourdes insists that she has this concern since very recently, coinciding in time with the moment when she finished the Romí Training and when she started working in the school (the same school to which her son attends):

“Listen, only a short while ago, I concluded that my son's school level is kind of low, here in our district is the best one though, but still is a bit low, and I said to myself that I wanted to move him to another school... and that

even to reach to the first year to take him to another school never mind if I had to pay, take them to another school with a higher level (...) but due to the living standard and for the rest of items, it is so clear to me that if they need anything to keep on studying, they will have count on me by their side, I will be the first to be there (...) I want to aspire, I would study, and as I want it for me, I instil it to my children. My husband does the same, but it is not the same” (Lourdes, Romani woman).

What Blanca explains reflects in a very good way the change of expectations she had had in accessing to the Romí Training in relation to the educational expectations she has for her three girls. She explained me that Aurora, the Romani young girl who is member of DKM and has a degree in law, helped her for a month to write the final report in order to obtain the official diploma of the Romí Training. All the conversations that Blanca and Aurora had while doing the report, and also the fact of observing that she could do the training and successfully obtaining the diploma has made trust that her children can have a future such as the one that Aurora has. Although speaking with resignation, Blanca explains that her ambition is that her children do not have to live like her, and that she will continue working hard in order to buy their children’s school books:

“While looking at Aurora...(…) I encourage the girls for them to study...I do everything in my power for them to study, to buy them books... so they have all they need... as I have gone through it and my parents have given me their support... so that, I...I love the school, the institute ... everyday life is very hard for Roma people... that at times you don’t earn anything ... disturbing time ... I tell you ... if before getting married I would have known this, when I was a young woman... I would have studied” [resignation] (Blanca, Romani woman)

All Romani women who have participated in my fieldwork recognizes that for them the most important thing is their children’s education. Their expectations towards their children’s education has been enormously transformed since they started to become involved in DKM activities. Thus, due to transformative interactions, Romani children can aspire to the best education, as a right, and that anyone can steal that right and that

dream. Their mums, sisters, aunts, or grandmothers want to make sure that this is the case for all of them.

### **12.3. Romani women leadership in their closed community: care and expectations**

The empowerment of Romani women has been shown to influence their leadership capacity. This not only occurs within their family but also within other social spaces where they participate. For instance, Romani women who have undertaken the Romani training and participate in educational spaces explicate how they feel empowered towards other members of the Roma closed community, such as Romani students or Romani families. These Romani women are recognised a strong leadership among Romani children within schools, becoming positive role models for them, and their presence in these spaces is recognised as a positive authority for them, what is in turn acknowledge by teachers and other non-Roma school figures. See what Assumpta explains:

“Just as I am in the school now, there have to be more Roma women inside the schools because otherwise...Sometimes I am with the kids, and if one behaves bad, he or she tells me, what have I done? Knowing that I can tell hi more her off...And the kid goes out with the head down...” (Assumpta, Romani woman).

In my data analysis, it comes across how Romani training makes possible for many Romani women entered schools, exerting direct influence to Roma students and generating trust among Roma families. But not only that, these women due to the own cultural Roma value take special care of the Romani students and promote their educational expectations.

Belen, who participates as a volunteer in the Mediterrani school also explains how she exerts a different authority among Romani students, and how Romani children found a referent on her:

“A girl with whom I started to do interactive groups in third year, now she is in her fifth year, she says to her teacher...one particular day we were at the Teachers’ lounge and she says: And who are you? I am so and so... You are Marta, oh! You know, Mercedes keeps saying that she wants to be like you! And the mother always gives the same reply; it is you who wants to be like Marta! And the girl while I am with the little ones comes and helps me out. I am, for whatever reason, her model, as we share the same culture...” (Belen, Romani woman)

What Leticia explains is also of relevance in relation to the trust that Romani families have on her, she has been an asset for the school for mediating when there is a conflict with Romani students, or also for generating better expectations on them:

“Lots of the time there were conflicts in the school so I used to talk with them... You understand?... You don’t treat the same a Romani student... maybe you are there so you try to talk to them (...) just because you know that they are Roma, and they are in the same school that the others...” (Leticia, Romani woman)

All these examples reflects that Romani women once involved in an effective activity related to the Romani women’s mobilisation do not stay at the margin, extending the networks of solidarity beyond their own families to those places where they stay during their daily lives, such as common spaces of work where they interact with other Romani people.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have examined the impact of the Romani women’s mobilisation on their own families. Data analysis allows me to identify three spheres related to the Romani women’s communities in which an impact can be observed due to the personal empowerment and the rise of educational and employment opportunities of the Romani women experienced because their involvement in DKM activities. First, more negotiation within the family, this based on dialogue in relation to the gender roles and

family responsibilities according to the women's needs but without breaking with their cultural values. Second, the transformation of the expectations they have about their children and other family members, what in some cases involves opening up new educational opportunities for them, for instance by promoting them to engage in training programmes, encouraging them to pursue more ambitious academic projects, among others. Finally, Romani women who get involved in educational spaces and other spaces of social participation (e.g.: Romí Training) within the Romani association studied enhance their leadership capacity, become positive role model also for other members of their closed community. This has a twofold impact, for themselves has explained in previous chapter, as it reinforces self-confidence and self-esteem, but also an impact on the own community, they become respected and admired agents for the Roma closed community, or, in educational centres, generating trust and promoting the betterment of coexistence.

## CONCLUSIONS

I embraced in this dissertation the challenge of **conducting a sociological study of the organising that fosters and enables the grassroots Romani women to exercise and enhance their human agency as a way of both eradicating discrimination and engaging in a process of individual and collective empowerment.** Multiple conversations, personal reflection and readings led me to define the sociological approach from which I wanted to embrace this research in order to capture both the sociological interest and the richness of the social impact of the case studied. Referring to how one of the authors cited in my research puts it, what I wanted to do throughout my thesis was ‘letting the subaltern to speak’ (Brooks, 2012), give voice to those “Other women” (De Botton, Puigvert, Sanchez-Aroca, 2005), under my own terminology used in this dissertation, those “grassroots Romani women” who are leading individual and collective processes of empowerment.

Dual theories in social science (Habermas, 1987; Beck, 1992; 1994; Giddens, 1984) and communicative methodology of research (Gómez, Racionero, Sordé, 2010) have enabled me to analyse and recover how Romani women are making multiple contributions from those spaces of mobilisation where they participate, and specially, from those created by the Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen.

That said, from the communicative analysis carried out through my research I validate my general hypothesis and the four sub-hypothesis initially defined.

In relation to the general hypothesis validated, this dissertation brings about new knowledge of a social reality that is currently taking place and which has not been previously studied: the social transformations that are leading Romani women at the grassroots level organised under the framework of a Romani women association and the strategies used by them challenging long-standing discrimination and disparities that they suffer, pointing at the centrality of solidarity networks created and reinforced within the association itself. The dissertation also provide evidence that shows that Romani women are engaging in a social mobilisation at the very grassroots that is having an impact at different levels, in their own lives (at an individual level), in their families (community level) and also in shaping and fostering a Romani women’s

movement from below (societal level) which give voice to those women traditionally silenced (De Botton, Puigvert and Sánchez-Aroca, 2005, Sordé, 2006; Brooks, 2012; Oprea, 2012).

This way, the case studied in this research is an example of how Romani women are finding ways out in order to escape and avoid the risks posed by what Beck (1992) called *reflexive modernization*, which throws basic community, family or even equality principles that are central within the Roma culture. In this very sense, the present research has provided an outstanding example to illustrate how Romani women are challenging the risks posed by an educational system that many times segregates Romani students leading them to school failure, a system created at the Modern time not designed to include cultural and ethnic diversity. A system that is forcing many Romani women to negotiate their cultural identities in order not to get trapped in the vicious circles of gender stereotypes and ethnic discrimination. However, by means of dialogue and engaging in collective debate, Romani girls and women of different ages, towns and cities from Catalonia organise in DKM in order to create-meaning and face the so generalized disenchantment created in society by the process of reflexivity, responding from within their lifeworlds with new alternatives of social change.

From a Habermasian approach (1987), these Romani encounters (the Meetings) and other spaces of social participation created within DKM are indeed spaces in which the *lifeworlds* of the Romani women and girls are deeply reinforced. Through intersubjective and egalitarian dialogue women and girls exchange their views on the topics raised: educational expectations, the role of family in the school, gender issues within education, fears related to the Romani girls access' to higher education due to difference in cultural traditions, respect or not of virginity, barriers faced at the time of access to the labour market, family conciliation, and other multiple topics. Thus, they agree that they can live modernity according to their own cultural values and without subduing to any norm because of imposition but as the result of an individual and free decision. In turn, it is from this agreed position from which they collectively decide to engage in processes of social transformation and to promote a collective mobilisation from below, thus gaining quotes of power within their families and communities meanwhile respecting their cultural identities.

In what follows I will discuss the results that have been presented in Part 5 of this dissertation in order to contrast them with the four sub-hypothesis raised for each specific objective and highlight the specific contributions from them.

### **A grassroots association as a hub of social change: *an emancipatory oriented approach***

Sociologist Erik O. Wright defined the idea of *real utopias* as those “utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity (...) utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change (...)” (Wright, 2010, p. 4). In some way they are those projects that have effectively combined dreams and reality at the same time, with the advantage that they have been implemented in real life. The analysis conducted in this dissertation may lead us to cage DKM as a *real utopia*, a case where a mainly volunteer-run association with a reduced annual budget is contributing to transform the lives of many Romani women, first and foremost, those who are nearer their geographical reality, but also those who are located far away its headquarter located in the neighbourhood of Bon Pastor (Barcelona), those Romani women who are in other localities all around Europe and are slowly moved by the waves of the organising of this association that is struggling for the inclusion of the grassroots Romani women perspective.

Addressing **specific objective 1 focused on the underlying features of the association**, the analysis carried out enables to characterise this association with what I will call an emancipatory-oriented approach. Under this approach, I include those features that rather unique, are the ones essential in order to understand why the association has coined a transformative character that promotes the involvement of Romani women. The stories gathered in the present dissertation show how these women’s involvement enhance their human agency, finding in each of the spaces created by the association sites how their *lifeworlds* are reinforced and charged of collective meaning-creation. This way, in a much lesser extent than non-Roma people for whom communitarian spaces are much reduced than for the Roma, Romani women and girls engaged in DKM are leaning towards decolonising their lifeworlds (Habermas,



1987) and facing discrimination, thus imagining themselves as university students, professionals, mothers and grandmothers and much more.

Based on my own analysis, I defined this emancipatory oriented approach in five features related to leadership, basic ruling principles, membership composition, and activities' approach. The first feature identified is how the association's members share and explain their public narratives (Ganz, 2009): while acknowledging the triple discrimination grounded on reasons of gender, ethnicity and class (the latter mainly manifested due to their lack of academic credentials of the grassroots Romani women), DKM calls for their engagement in the mobilisation, respecting the Romani cultural values and thus struggling for a Romani feminism. These narratives are well-reflected in the positive role models promoted at the intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting, where Romani women who have succeed in any type of educational trajectory explain their case, being a role model for other women. As showed in the scientific literature, the transformative potential of the story-telling in the form of public narratives are not only demonstrated to be a personal empowering endeavour but also a collective one, leading to a unique social mobilization. The connection between the personal self, the shared experience of Romani women and the collective realisation of being political subjects comes up all throughout the pages of the present investigation through the gathered voices.

The second feature I included within the emancipatory approach is the value of cultural intelligence (Flecha, 2000), understood as the human capacity that everyone has for engaging in an egalitarian dialogue. My research shows that the DKM assumes cultural intelligence of its members and participants as a core ruling principle of the association, using it as an element for the women's empowerment. This principle is deeply rooted not only in the foundational objectives of the association related to the idea of meaning creation, but also ensured by its members in each of the spaces and activities that are developed within the framework of the association. The deployment of cultural intelligence is not reduced to the collective acknowledgment or in the everyday practice of the organization but it also becomes a key feature that revalue the same women in all their personal spheres. As showed in the two last chapters of the results part, this interplay has been clearly illustrated in the case of enhancing the women opportunities in terms of education and employment.

The third feature identified within the association, which guides relationships among Romani women themselves and Romani women and non-Roma women is solidarity networks. This solidarity within the DKM has a specific characteristic, it emerges from the bottom-up, putting at its very centre the needs of the Romani women and therefore all the association activities are oriented towards defining the ways to address them. This defining feature connects with the roots of Romani Feminism as well as its strong entrenchment into the Romani culture. What I found is not that the association promotes these networks, but on the contrary, they have a long standing existence within the Roma community, so what the association has done is to be built above them. Or in other words, this feature is how the president of the association likes to put it “it is the Romani way of doing things”, therefore, the fact that from the very beginning DKM was meant to be built from within the Roma culture and not from the outside is clearly showed in the present dissertation throughout the significance and the importance identified here to be attributed to solidarity networks.

The fourth feature identified is related to the diversity of backgrounds among DKM members. This characteristic differentiates DKM from other grassroots associations of Romani women: its members’ wide diversity in terms of age, educational backgrounds, ethnicity composition (Roma and non-Roma members), nationality, socioeconomic level, etc. Diversity has been found to represent an asset for the association in two regards. On the one hand, it shows to be key at the time of reaching grassroots Romani women across the territory (Romani extended families share networks with DKM members). On the other hand, it enables the access to wide networks of contacts, key knowledge and salient information: what is indeed a useful resource at the time of carrying out any type of action. As Morris and Staggernborn (2004) and Ganz (2000) points out, leaders –they say– inherit relational frames from those previous institutions and spaces in which they have participated, from which they gain skills and which influence their later decisions. Transferring this to the case of DKM, given the wide diversity of backgrounds among members any time that an activity is discussed and implemented, as it takes into account multiple views and wide possible situations, possibility of its succeed increases due to the strategic capacity of the association.

Finally, the last feature identified that equips the association with an emancipatory-oriented approach is what I have called its *successful-based rationale*. DKM has differentiated itself from other associations in the sense that it has always grounded itself on “what works”, evidence-based actions that contribute to the betterment of the lives of the Romani women. By doing this, the association has been rigorous in implementing those actions for which there is evidence that if applied will indeed lessen the plight of Romani women, looking for ways of better contrasting results and supporting their actions. This way of working has been followed for instance at the time of designing and carrying out EU-funded projects: looking for those actions and strategies that contribute to the inclusion of the Romani women, and therefore finding allies in terms of institutions that work in the same regard. Within this rationale it should be mentioned the careful account that the association has placed on transparency, as a way of achieving excellence and claiming that the Romani women’s movement is also of excellence.

An important dynamic should be observed in relation to transparency and how associations manage public funding. As the case studied points out, when there is an accurate and transparent management of funding, processes of resistance generated by other institutions, associations or either by single actors that work on the same topic but from different approaches may emerge. Such processes are manifested through different ways, in my analysis it has come up with examples of organisations or individuals who, not totally sharing this position themselves, they would like to see DKM embedded into not a so strict principle of transparency. The case studied in this dissertation shows how when this occurs there are several ways of effectively facing these types of mistrusts, being the most important one making public all information related to public-funding and budget (e.g. uploading it to internet). Another one is carefully deciding the association collaborations, meaning that before of engaging with other actors a strict scrutiny is performed so DKM members are sure that their reputation will not be negatively affected. This “strict scrutiny” is by no means a legal or formal procedure but an informal process of finding out about that organisation or person throughout the already existing contacts.

In all, the five mentioned features one in dialogue with the other endow DKM with an emancipatory-oriented approach that makes that this grassroots association not only to

foster and enhance Romani women's human agency, but also to achieve a further impact on the Romani women's mobilisation. All these features identified are aligned with the main components of my sub-hypothesis 1, therefore validating it. In general terms a core element should be emphasised in relation to the features identified: the centrality of the voices of grassroots Romani women.

Romani women and Romani feminism in relation to how Romani women's mobilisation is organised under DKM, involves that each woman decides how she wants to perform her Roma identity and cultural values. This is in line with Giddens (1994) conceptualisation regarding the practice of traditions in today's society: it is not leaving of traditions, but in some cases their individual recreation to current times, or their personal negotiation with the close ones. For instance, in the 1st International Congress of Romani Women, organised by DKM in which Romani women from 14 European countries participated, these women debated about how nowadays Romani feminism, according to them, should look like. Many of them attended leaving their parents, husbands and children at home, and on the contrary on what many may think, they were totally supported by them. At the International Congress, agreement was reached on a core element: this feminism should have as a common frame dialogic feminism in which all voices could be included, based on solidarity and on the equality of differences (*Conclusions of the 1st International Romani Women Congress: The Other women*, 2010).

Drawing from my own analysis, I show in this dissertation that steps are therefore being made by Romani feminists, in order to be heard in spaces of debate and decision-making platforms, steps which are being led by associations and platforms such as the one studied in this dissertation.

A contribution from this dissertation **to contemporary sociological theory is shedding light to those spaces in which human agency is deployed, even in those cases where there might seem to be reduced capacity for social change.** This research has evidenced that even though the hard weight of social structures –inequalities based on ethnicity, gender, class– Romani women find spaces of interaction in order to lessen these constraints. However, in order to be able to capture these processes of transformation led by the *Have-Nots* (Alinsky, 1989) adequate theoretical and

methodological frameworks to identify and interpret them are needed. The communicative methodology of research implemented from a gendered approach is indeed a suitable standpoint from which to depart.

### **Broadening Romani women's and their families' opportunities**

Another of the specific objectives of this dissertation was to **examine the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women in broadening their opportunities (specific objective 2), and explore in turn the same impact on their own families (specific objective 3).**

In order to define which opportunities I wanted to look at, I draw from the idea of opportunity of Amartya Sen (1999), related to his capability approach, thus taking into account how broadening opportunities involved advancing towards substantive freedom to live better. Therefore, Sen's approach of capability focused on a person's real opportunities has served as guiding framework to fully capture them: a Romani association of Women as a collective actor which is making arrangements in order to influence the Romani women's substantive freedom to live better. With this important aspect decided, I focused the attention of this research on looking on changes which occurred around opportunities in the field of education, employment and social participation, fields that contributed to the empowerment of Romani women and deeply enhanced their human agency.

In relation to specific objective 2, the communicative analysis done illustrates that Romani women who are engaged in social mobilisation widened their educational, employment and social participation opportunities. This finding confirms sub-hypothesis two that underlined the broadening of the mentioned opportunities.

In line with this, this dissertation illustrates how Romani women when engaged in social mobilisation embrace a process of social transformation that encourages them to recover trust in their own persona: they are able to assume new educational challenges and therefore as women who can exert their transformative human agency (Freire,

1996), imagining for instance how they can reach high school educational institutions without leaving aside their cultural values.

A key element has been identified for Romani women to succeed in their activities within the framework of the Romani women's association studied: networks of solidarity that are constantly created and re-created among Romani women themselves, within the association, and also with other non-Roma women who provide support. Thus, these networks of solidarity that already existed among Romani women, are reinforced and strengthened at the time of carrying out the activities. Counting on the support of other Romani female members from the association, those "who are always there," reminds them of the importance of not dropping out, bearing in mind role models, and those activities that fit their needs.

Many of the Romani women interviewed have embraced new educational projects once they have attended to an intergenerational Romani Women Students' Meeting and have seen how being both Roma and student is not conflicting, and how it is also possible to attend school making from these spaces sites where the Roma culture can also have a place on an equal footing. Romani women when they engage in spaces of social participation such as those fostered and created by DKM they start participating in the activities and those informal spaces of their children's schools, realising that this is the way how they can raise their voices and claim for the right of a good quality education for their children. Hence, in this way also Romani women are taking the lead in social transformation, exerting their human agency and asking for more spaces of participation for the Romani families at educational institutions. This as a way of preventing that their children suffer from segregation and low-quality education.

That said, if educational and employment opportunities are indeed broadened for grassroots Romani women once they get involved in the activities of DKM, their opportunities of social participation also increase. Several evidences have been provided of how those women who commanded and extended Roma families once they got involved in spaces of social participation gain a capacity of active leadership: they emerged as role models within their families and also within their communities. This is directly related to my specific aim 3: to explore the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organized in a Roma association of women, in broadening the

opportunities of their own families. In this research I have conceptualised the idea of family linked to the Roma cultural values, conceived as the extended Roma family and therefore in tight relation to the idea of a closed community.

Data analysis allows me to validate sub-hypothesis 3 raised upon specific elements of the Romani feminism such as the importance of family cohesion. In this sense, findings of this research evidence that Romani women's engagement in social mobilisation has an influence at the community level, contributing to broadening the opportunities of their families and other members of their closed community.

Three specific spheres related to family have been identified to be affected once Romani women are organised under the Romani women's association studied. First, once Romani women engage in social mobilisation have their educational and labour opportunities broadened, given the new expectations they have, their participation in new activities that involve going out from the family and starting to participate in new educational and social spaces, there is in many cases a negotiation of gender roles and family responsibilities within the members of the families in order that the own women can do these new activities.

My analysis shows that dialogue is an element which tends to be always present in these negotiations, as Romani families used to organise their daily life in a more communitarian way than non-Roma families, it has been also observed how decisions are not taken without thinking on the consequences that one action can have on the entire family. Therefore, the way how to reach consensus seems to be more present in the daily life, what enables this negotiation of roles, which not only occurs among Romani women and Romani men, but also among Romani women and their mothers, friends, sisters, neighbours, other siblings, or at the time of taking care of children. Against what is generally expected, as it has happened in other groups, Romani women's mobilisation do not suppose breaking with their cultural values but against this, for the grassroots Romani women engaging in activities that are related to their empowerment involves counting with their families, reinforcing family cohesion. This involves renegotiating their roles within their families, in their gender relations, in the church, in the job place, in their children's school, or in the market, to mention some.

The second sphere identified is related to the rise on the expectations on their children and on their family members. Once Romani women feel empowered, these empowerment is transferred to other members of the families in the sense that they project more educational or employment expectations on them. These women no longer accept that their children or other relatives have to face segregation, racism or have projects that they could clearly see that is due to a lack of further life expectations, thus they try to engage them in new educational projects or training activities, or also in new spaces of social participation that open up new venues of opportunities.

The third sphere identified is how Romani women once empowered, they also begin to influence beyond their families, in their own closed communities through the spaces of social participation in which they are now engaged. Thanks to their participation in DKM activities many Romani women get involved, as said, in new educational and social spaces where they do not only take care of their children for instance, but they also exert authority on those other Romani children that are in these spaces. For instance, Romani women who have completed the official training with the specialty of school canteens offered by DKM (*Romí Training*) and who are now working in schools, or those others who are not yet working but are developing internships, these women because of their cultural identity feel also a responsibility towards other Romani children from these institutions, and are positive role models for them. In turn, they are *generators* of trust for those Romani families that know that if a Romani women is present within the school of their minor children they are seen to be under good protection. For this reason, coexistence tends to improve, as when a conflict emerges these women can mediate among the students and the school or with the families, if necessary. These women also feel reinforced within their professional space and more respected within their community because they hold now a position of public status, and in turn reverts in feeling more empowered.

In all, this dissertation provides new evidence on how when Romani women engage in processes of individual empowerment triggered by their participation in the Romani women's movement the way how they are perceived within both their family and their closed community is changed: women are seen as more autonomous, more self-confident and with more abilities to resolve situations in different type of spaces: the



family, the educational spaces (for instance within their own jobs), and also in social life.

### **Articulating the Romani Women's Movement: Organising at the community level**

The analysis conducted shows that in order to understand the impact that the Romani women organisation studied have had in shaping and fostering a Romani women's movement at the grassroots level first needed to be recognised some inherent characteristics of this collective actor –DKM. Identified these characteristics gathered within what I have called the 'emancipatory-oriented approach' in this section I will discuss findings related to **specific objective 4** of this research: *to explore the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Romani association of Women on shaping and fostering the grassroots Romani women's mobilisation at the community level and beyond.*

DKM's general aim is to work for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of Romani women while ending discrimination in all social spheres. In order to do so, data analysed has showed that the inclusion of the voices of the grassroots women in all those spaces of dialogue and decision-making platforms (recognising their cultural intelligence), the creation of networks of solidarity and the promotion of existing solidarity among Romani women, are found to be key features. The DKM has found some of the keys to engaging Romani women in the mobilisation at the community level, is through the working "with" those Roma women at a grassroots level and thinking deeply how to involve them, as their participation matters. These findings are in line with elements outlined in sub-hypothesis 4, which allows me to validate it. Bearing this in mind I will proceed in what follows to discuss findings analysed in Chapter 9. This will enable me to draw some conclusions regarding the Romani women's movement and its articulation from below at the community level.

In Chapter 9, I analysed through the study of one specific action, the intergenerational Romani Women Student's Meeting, and how the Romani women's association has contributed to the organising of the Romani women's movement at the community level in Catalonia. With 17 editions at its record and approximately among 200 and 250

participants at each of its editions since 2004 on, the Romani Women Students' Meetings have been an excellent way of reaching out to Romani women and girls: going to their own neighbourhoods, something that had not been done by any Roma association in Catalonia till DKM started to do it. In this sense, moved by the motivation of making Romani women from each neighbourhood the protagonists of the activities and because of taking into account their needs, the association made a turn and went a step beyond: acknowledging the need that different forms of participation have to be possible in the Romani Women Students' Meetings, starting with their planning, organising ahead and using its wide networks of social contacts through its members, the association has then impacted at the community level.

On what evidence can this impact be grounded in? This research provides two sources of evidence of how the studied association has contributed to the activation of the associational life (Smith, 1997) at the community level. First, in some of these communities where DKM has mobilised Romani women through the intergenerational Romani Students' Meeting, after the gatherings these same Romani women have constituted local Romani women's associations in their neighbourhoods, with an aim oriented to struggle for their collective rights. DKM has supported these associations in different ways. For instance, when these associations need assistance at the time of managing any bureaucratic task, presenting the recently created association during the celebration of the Student's Meeting, organising other activities in the neighbourhood that can involve mobilising the entire Romani community from that area and other stakeholders at the service of this recently created association, and advising these associations regarding management or other administrative tasks related to how to deal with an organisation. By means of the Romani Women Students' Meeting, an activity that has reached social recognition in Catalonia among Roma and non-Roma people (e.g. consider that it is highly covered by media every time that it is celebrated), the activation of the associational life among Romani women has started to emerge in different neighbourhoods in Catalonia. Besides, other Romani women who were organised in mainstream Roma associations have started to consider organising a women's-only Romani association.

The second source of evidence provided is the fact that after the celebration of the meeting and when no formal association emerges, this does not imply that nothing has

changed after the Meeting. My data shows that the neighbourhood is certainly shaken and the DKM being the generator of the waves, at the same grassroots there are local women who from being engaged in the “chairing committee” of the encounters, once they end-up, due to this experience they become many times community leaders within the local community. Change is even bigger if taking into account that these women, the majority of the times have never organised an event of this magnitude: it involves contacting local authorities, other NGOs representatives and other stakeholders from the community. These women act many times as a bridge between the association and the neighbourhood, being “visible faces” and representatives in the educational centres and the ones who can better mobilise others at the time of doing other activities in the area.

I have also identified in this dissertation that Romani women community leaders in the framework of the association studied can emerge in a different way, from those cases of Romani women who have worked, done their internships or who volunteer in the association. It has been inquired how those Romani girls that access the DKM holding scarce labour experience, and for instance carry out their internships in the association (e.g. women and young women who do middle-training courses or upper-middle training courses of social integration, social work, education and are interested in work in the social sector), once they finish, they acquire a set of skills that make them to read the world in a different way than how they did when they started.

Drawing from Baggetta (2009) contributions on the benefits of engaging in civic associations for widening opportunities, DKM becomes a site where these grassroots women can widen their interpersonal interactions on a daily basis, they exercise management and representation functions, which is, they get governance experience, and they make many institutional relationships. The novel contribution of DKM’s approach for these grassroots Romani women is the impact that widen their civic opportunities is that for them, they impact on their own communities. These Romani women who either work in DKM, or are just members of the association, or even participate in their activities, become agents of change within their communities. So DKM can be considered as a civic association that contribute to fuelling civil society and to promoting and sustaining democracy (Baggetta, 2009; Putnam, 2000; Almond and Verba, 1989; Skocpol, 2003). However, the specific contribution it brings in this regards is that it gives voice to a socially disadvantaged group, Romani women,

claiming for them to access in an egalitarian way to all spaces of public debate and decision-making to mainstream society. And beyond this, that because of its emancipatory-oriented approach, it successfully achieves it reaching not only the community sphere but also going beyond it.

Based on the analysis done, three specific contributions are derived from the case studied for the field of social movement theory and organising in relation to the specific case of the Romani women, which has not been pointed out yet. First, this dissertation makes visible the processes of personal transformation of many Romani women illustrating how when Romani women's collective agency is well organised, Romani women themselves become community leaders. By engaging in these processes, women are able to softly channel civic opportunities that indeed contribute in creating *civic citizenship* within Romani women communities. In turn, this fosters spaces of community dialogue among Roma and non-Roma people that challenges racism and gradually contributes to improve coexistence and reinforce social cohesion.

Second, another issue observed and a contribution of this dissertation goes in line to Melucci's (1992) approach of social movements as constructions of collective identity and group solidarity: Romani women knitting networks of solidarity in order to shape a Romani Women's Movement at a grassroots. Indeed, this movement is moved by a common ethnic identity, what endows it with a symbolical and cultural character (Melucci, 1992). Recuperating Melucci's conception of social movements as an individual and collective appropriation of the meaning of the action, which have three main components: group solidarity, a definition of the conflict, and a 'breach of compatibility of the system within which the action takes place', all three components can be, to some extent, found in the Roma-led movements. In this sense, this dissertation brings novel evidence that illuminate these components among the Romani Women Movement and the Romani feminism: solidarity among the Roma people, an elements even more present in Romani feminism, regardless of their country; a definition of a conflict drawn upon the lines of a historic social injustice towards the Roma communities in Europe and in the world throughout lifetime; and some structural issue within the system that must be modified, for instance, in the field of education or the struggle of Romani feminism to be listened within mainstream feminism without having to negotiate any of the Roma cultural values.

Besides this, the Romani Women's Movement at the community level, in some instances, is expressing itself through the rise of new ethnic-based associations. In other cases, it is emerging as bounds of friendship (e.g. derived after the encounter of the Romi training, in spaces such as the one of the Romani Women Students' Meeting), bounds of solidarity (reduced groups of women who are active within their communities).

Third and more generally, this dissertation contributes with new specific knowledge on advancing Touraine's (1985; 2006) theoretical developments about the role that women have adopted within social movements: as agents of change and agents that want to be protagonists of their own lives. Drawing from this, the specific contribution of this research is its approach on Romani studies, looking at the social reality of grassroots Romani women as those women who traditionally silenced, are also making major steps forward in their individual and collective empowerment.

### **Working at the European level for a shared purpose**

As defined in Chapter 10, I argue that DKM has widened the network of Romani women's associations in Europe to which it collaborates (for instance through partner institutions by means of collaborating in EU-funded projects), how it has achieved public recognition at the EU level, and how step by step it is achieving that the voices of the grassroots Romani women are included in public spaces of debate and decision-making platforms at the European sphere.

Considerations need to be mentioned in relation to this issue as they enable to understand how DKM has slowly accessed the European sphere thus making a substantial contribution to the Romani women's mobilisation that is taking place at the European level, the need to include the voices of the grassroots women from all those very neighbourhoods from around the continent.

Data analysed has evidenced that two activities have allowed the association studied to access the European sphere, as previously explained, EU-funded projects and the 1<sup>st</sup>

International Congress of Romani Women: the Other Women, organised by the association in October 2010. From the communicative analysis conducted, different strategies implemented at the time of managing the EU-funded project have been identified as important factors to achieve impact at the European sphere. Let's discuss them first.

I have also explored the DKM strategies in managing and implementing EU-funded projects. The association conceives them both as a means and as an end, a way to networking with other grassroots associations in order to strengthen the Romani women's rights movement. However, what sets the DKM apart is that rather than working "on them" the association works with them", through the development of the projects and considering the various factors that are important to the Roma community (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Gómez-Alonso & Vargas, 2003).

In this regard, DKM has several contributions to make not only to the Romani Women's Movement but also to mainstream Roma Rights' Movement: a specific *methodology* at the time of implementing and managing projects underpinned by its emancipatory-oriented approach which puts at the centre the needs of the grassroots community, of the own subjects, ruled by the principle of cultural intelligence and solidarity and looking at "what works". This way of working guarantees that Romani women have always to be included in the elaboration of the projects till their beginning to its very end. Although the large majority of these women may not have academic training they can provide an entire world of insights for the projects to succeed. In this sense, breaking down with hierarchies among technical staff and Romani women at the time of developing the projects, making as a required criteria that partner's institutions also bring to the working meeting Romani women (something that never used to happen), always taking into account the social impact on the Roma community that these projects will have, all these are criteria that have indeed marked a new pattern of working. Under DKM's way of developing projects, Romani women participate in all types of decisions, including those on the management, funding or strategic lines, not just those ones regarding how to deal with the management of leisure time. This evidences how under the studied association there is a real *demonopolisation of the expert knowledge* (Beck, 1997): the voices of Romani women count and they have a say within the structures. Step by step,

this way of doing is being transferred to other institutions that collaborate with the association in other EU-funded projects in Europe.

This way of working means giving back the voice to those Romani women from below (Trehan, 2009), and finding one effective solution where different actors can play a role in the integration of this social group, including different stakeholders and local agents in an effective way (Guy, 2009; Sobotka and Vermeersch, 2012).

The second activity I draw part of my results has been the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Romani Women, which marked a turn for the association at a European level, as it involved its public recognition and strengthening its networks of contacts with associations and groups of Romani women who are informally organised from some cities of Europe that share a similar approach. As showed, the congress represented an opportunity for grassroots Romani women from all of Europe, to debate topics related to education, employment and even more, feminism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: it was an opportunity to discuss issues that were of concern to them.

The present dissertation illustrates how this Congress was different than initiatives that have been previously organised with a top-down approach. Hence, this time at Barcelona there were non-academic women being organised by themselves. Moved by facing those in similar situations, all these women claimed for equality of differences, and as a symbolic outcome and an agreement made by them in the Congress, they wanted to have the 8<sup>th</sup> of October to be recognized as the international day of Romani women.

The congress planted the seed for the creation of Romnia, a broad platform of Romani women and pro-women organisations and activists from Europe that should be oriented to empower Romani women through networking, advocacy, research and documentation. DKM was one of the founding members of Romnia, bringing the approach of working at the grassroots level and inspiring the model and bringing it the claim of all those women who have participated in the congress regarding that they also wanted to participate in these spaces of decision-making.

Although Romnia has not succeed in its mission yet, it has served to bring into dialogue several organisations that share similar approaches. An important observation has to be done in relation to the main barrier that has hindered this Platform to succeed: its lack of a clear leadership. This has been recognised as an obstacle for this Platform to reach further but is an element that should be taken into account in general among organisations working at the grassroots level that want to embrace the Romani women's mobilisation at the European level: coordination is needed, and in order to reach coordination leadership needs to be agreed; or in further stages, innovative ways of organisational forms created. Articulating a Romani Women's Movement at a European level that is informed by a grassroots Romani women's mobilisation needs to resolve issues such as the ones of clear leadership, what stills a challenge to be assumed.

What is worth emphasizing at this point is the capacity of a grassroots based association such as DKM, mainly volunteer-run of being able in 10 years time (1999-2010, date of celebration of the Congress) going from the community sphere to the European sphere, not leaving at any time its deep commitment with its constituencies.

In all, the analysis done in this research allows me to draw some specific contributions related to how a grassroots association has used its strategic capacity to knit a network of allies aimed at raising the voices of grassroots Romani women within the European sphere. Findings indicate that the Romani women organisation studied brought two specific elements to its European collaborator institutions, the centrality of the voices of grassroots Romani women; and working from an evidence-based approach. Besides this, the case studied is an example of how although barriers found for instance at the time of articulating a wider platform of Romani institutions at the European level, by means of sharing resources and a similar working approach, synergies and networks can be built in order to make a mission succeed.

This dissertation develops useful knowledge for other grassroots associations, organisations and NGOs which are working with Roma people and Romani women. It showcases a specific methodology of implementing projects, strategies and actions to include the subjects on a transformative way. This is a methodology that makes them real agents of their own life, of their transformation and of the process of change that it is expected to occur with the implementation of these type of project.



Besides, EU institutions have the institutional schemes and the political legislations to end up with Roma poverty, but there is an urgent call by these institutions to ask local associations how to do in order to involve local agents, local authorities in order to make this aid to be effective to really tackle the subjects. If aid is not implemented taking them into account, as has been extensively showed up now in the cases of the PHARE policies (Guy, 2009, 2013) widely assessed, funding is under risk of being underused or misused, and even worse Roma communities' lives aggravated. There is evidence that sheds lights on the singularity of the case of Catalonia in this regard, as a positive case and thanks to be backed in evidence-based research (Generalitat de Catalonia, 2015; García-Espinel, 2016).

All said evidences that there is a different way of doing it possible, providing clues for a different implementation and use of these aids. Deeply described at the beginning, the emancipatory-oriented approach of DKM has indeed marked a difference on how funds have been managed, by the two issues mentioned here: the inclusion of the voices of the subjects, and the presence of evidence-base at the time of implement what works, are two keys that may be transferable to other cases.

## **Prospective**

More than three years of research have indeed contributed to answer the research objectives that I have initially raised, delving into issues that were of my concern but indeed generating new research questions, not only specifically related to Romani women, but also related to the overall topics related to them.

Different lines of research and new questions are opened up now with this dissertation. Three clear axes which are the focus of attention are derived from it.

A first line of research inquiry is related to the processes of mobilisation of Romani women and how they are taking place at the European level. Further research is opened in relation to how these processes of mobilisation of Romani women at the community level in the national countries are contributing to set up the European Romani women's

movement. This is a reality not yet well-articulated under formal structures of organisation. Therefore, an in depth analysis of the ways these women's organising processes at the community level -in order to inquiry the common strategies of co-organising at the European level-, is a specific focus of research opened with this dissertation. The later grounded on the hypothesis that although not formally articulated, these social mobilisations and Romani women leading them are indeed connected (as it has been showed in the case of DKM or in the case of Romnia's members).

The second research area opened up concerns the issue of the broadening of opportunities and on inquiring on a gender dimension of the solidarity networks created among Romani women and Romani men. DKM established the horizon of advancing towards the achievement of freedom and, in the terms used in this dissertation (Sen's Capabilities approach), towards empowerment. Within this framework, a grassroots association of women that achieves broadening the educational, employment and social opportunities of their members and participants (the opportunities that I have finally looked at) is an association that is effectively advancing towards its goals. Linked to this is the process of empowerment that Romani women are not experiencing individually, but together with their families, which holds a central value within the Romani culture. Thus, Romani women when engaged in the Romani women's mobilisation, not only turn into positive role models within their families and community but they become agitators of change. Based on this specific case, this dissertation opens up a new field of research within Romani women's studies and social movement theory, which is the in-depth analysis of those actions and dynamics of solidarity between Romani women and Romani men that are contributing to Romani women's emancipation. Against what is normally believed, thousands of Romani men are accompanying Romani women in their struggle for gender equality and their empowerment. The scientific study of this social reality could contribute to overcome prejudices and to shed light on how women's emancipation in general has historically been a struggle in which both women and men participated; and in this, Roma are no exception. This dissertation has contributed in this regard; nonetheless, this is a topic that deserves much more attention.

Finally, the third line of research opened up with this dissertation is related to what was mentioned about the spaces of how Romani women are contributing to create civic citizenship. In this sense, research about how Romani women and non-Romani women

are collaborating within communitarian spaces such as educational centres, leisure spaces, sport associations, worship, among others spaces, is indeed of sociological and social interest in order to inquire about how ethnic minority women are contributing to generate civic citizenship bonds and also to strengthen associational life. Besides this, inquiring on how these spaces are generators and *reinforcers* of citizenship and solidarity can also advance the inquiry on the different types of solidarity, being feminist solidarity one them and how networks of feminist solidarity can prevent women to fall in networks of human trafficking, a topic of special concern for vulnerable groups.

This dissertation has been an attempt to visualise the lives of those many Romani women which from different sites, moved by a common dream, are leading the change for social transformation pursuing what they envision for themselves, their children and their people today, making a real *Road for Freedom* for tomorrow.

## REFERENCES

- Acton, T. (1974). *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Acton, T. (1998). *Authenticity, expertise, scholarship and politics: Conflicting goals in Romani studies. Inaugural lecture series*. London: Greenwich University Press.
- Acton, T., & Klimova, I. (2001). The International Romani Union: An East European Answer to West European Questions? In *Between Past and Future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- Alinsky, S. (1989). *Rules for Radicals. A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage Books. A Division of Random House.
- Almond, G., & Verba, S. (1963). *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Aminzade, R., Goldstone, J., McAdam, D., Perry, E., Sewell, W., Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (2001). *Silence and voice in the study of contentious politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Andaluzia, G., & Moraga, C. (1981). *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Persephone Press.
- Andrews, K. T., Ganz, M., Baggetta, M., Han, H., & Lim, C. (2010). Leadership, Membership, and Voice: Civic Associations That Work1. *American Journal of Sociology*. doi:10.1086/649060
- Aubert, A., & Flecha, R. (2003). Educación Democrática de Personas Adultas: Educar desde la Inclusión. *Gitanos Pensamiento Y Cultura*, 21, 1–20.
- Aubert, A., Melgar, P., & Valls, R. (2011). Communicative Daily Life Stories and Focus Groups: Proposals for Overcoming Gender Violence Among Teenagers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 295– 303.
- Baggetta, M. (2009). Civic Opportunities in Associations: Interpersonal Interaction, Governance Experience and Institutional Relationships. *Social Forces*, 88(1), 175–199. doi:10.1353/sof.0.0231
- Balibar, É. (2004). *We, the People of Europe: Reflection on Transnational Citizenship*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Barany, Z. (2011). *The East European Gypsies. Regime Change, Marginality and Ethnopolitics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization: institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences / Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. Theory, culture & society*. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.deakin.edu.au/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat00097a&AN=deakin.b2039470&site=eds-live\nhttp://ezproxy.deakin.edu.au/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=25116>

- Beck, U., Bonss, W., & Lau, C. (2003). The Theory of Reflexive Modernization: Problematic, Hypotheses and Research Programme. *Theory, Culture & Society*. doi:10.1177/0263276403020002001
- Beck, U., Giddens, A., & Lash, S. (1994). *Reflexive Modernization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. D. (2000). Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 611–639. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611
- Bernasovsky, I; & Bernasovka, J. (Eds. ). (1999). *Anthropology of Romanies. Axiological and anthropogenetical study*. Praga: Nauma & Universitas Masarykiana.
- Bițu, N., & Vincze, E. (2012). Personal Encounters and Parallel Paths toward Romani Feminism. *Signs*. doi:10.1086/665955
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brecher, M., Rak, I. W., Westhead, E. K., & Jones, A. M. (2000). The long-term effect of quetiapine (“Seroquel”) monotherapy on weight in patients with schizophrenia. *Int. J. Psych. Clin. Pract.*, 4, 287–292.
- Brooks, E. (2012). The Possibilities of Romani Feminism. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(1).
- Bruner, J. (1991). The Narrative Construction of Reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1–21.
- Burawoy, M. (2005). For a public sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70, 4–28.
- Cahn, C. (2002). *Roma Rights: Race, Justice, and Strategies for Equality*. New York: The International Debate Education Association.
- Castañeda, H. (2015). European Mobilities or Poverty Migration? Discourses on Roma in Germany. *International Migration*, 53(3), 87–99. doi:10.1111/imig.12166
- Castells, M. (2009). *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture Volume II*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Castells, M., Fernández-Ardèvol, M., Linchuan Qiu, J., & Sey, A. (2006). *Mobile Communication and Society. A Global Perspective*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Cavalli-Sforza, F.; Cavalli-Sforza, L. (1994). *Quiénes somos. Historia de la diversidad humana*. Barcelona: Crítica.
- Chomsky, N. (1988). *Language & Politics*. New York: Black Rose Books.
- Cohen, J., & Fung, A. (2004). Radical Democracy. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 10, 169–179.
- Conclusions of the 1st International Romani Women Congress: The Other women*. (October, 2010.).
- Council of Europe. (2008). *European strategy on the Roma*. Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52008IP0035>

- Council of Europe. (2012). *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*. Retrieved from [http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/source/prems/prems79611\\_GBR\\_CouvHumanRightsOfRoma\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/source/prems/prems79611_GBR_CouvHumanRightsOfRoma_WEB.pdf)
- Couto, R. A. (1989). Redemptive Organizations and the Politics of Hope. *Politics of Hope* \*, 7(1).
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Davis, J. (2002). Narrative and Social Movements. In *Stories of Change. Narrative and Social Movements* (pp. 3–29).
- De Botton, L., Puigvert, L., & Sánchez Aroca, M. (2005). *The inclusion of other women. Breaking the silence through dialogical learning*. Dordrecht: Springer Publishers.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications, Third Edition.
- Derrida, J. (1967). *Speech and Phenomena" and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Directorate-General for Research Science, E. and S. (2010). *European Textbook on Ethics in Research*. Brussels. doi:10.2777/17442
- Einwohner, R. (2007). Leadership, Authority, and Collective Action. Jewish Resistance in the Ghettos of Warsaw and Vilna. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50(10), 1306–1326.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre). (1999). *A Special Remedy: Roma and Schools for the Mentally Handicapped in the Czech Republic. Country Reports Series*. Budapest.
- ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre). (2007). *The Romani Women's Movement: From East to West*. Retrieved from <http://www.errc.org/article/the-romani-womens-movement-from-east-to-west/2762>
- ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre). (2010). *Improving the tools for the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU*. Luxembourg. doi:10.2767/98810
- European Commission. (2010). *Europe 2020, a Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*. Brussels.
- European Commission. (2011). Working together for Roma inclusion. The EU Framework explained, 24. doi:10.2838/20959
- European Commission. (2012). *Council of Europe. Making Human Rights of Roma and Travellers a reality*. Retrieved May 1, 2015, from [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_en.asp)
- European Parliament. (2006). *European Parliament resolution on the situation of Roma*

- women in the European Union (2005/2164(INI)).
- European Parliament. (2008). *European strategy on the Roma, which endorse the EU Framework Strategy on the Roma Inclusion*.
- European Union. (1992). *Treaty of Maastricht on European Union*. Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:xy0026>
- European Union. (1997). *Treaty of Amsterdam*. Retrieved from <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/s50000.htm>
- Flecha, R. (2006-2011). INCLUD-ED. Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion from education in Europe. (6<sup>th</sup> FP). European Commission.
- Flecha, R. (2000). *Sharing words: Theory and practice of dialogic learning*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Flecha, R. (2001). *WORKALÓ: The creation of new occupational patterns for cultural minorities: the gypsy case* (5th FP). European Commission.
- Flecha, R. (2014). Using Mixed Methods From a Communicative Orientation: Researching With Grassroots Roma. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 8(3), 245–254. doi:10.1177/1558689814527945
- Flecha, R., & Soler, M. (2013). Turning difficulties into possibilities: engaging Roma families and students in school through dialogic learning. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 43(4), 451–465. doi:10.1080/0305764X.2013.819068
- Flecha, R., & Soler, M. (2014). Communicative Methodology: Successful actions and dialogic democracy. *Current Sociology*, 62, 232–242. doi:10.1177/0011392113515141
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage.
- FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights). (2012). *The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States. Survey results at a glance*. Luxembourg. doi:doi:10.2811/76056
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin. Retrieved from <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/22583/pedagogy-of-the-oppressed/>
- Freire, P. (1997). *A la sombra de este árbol*. Barcelona: El Roure.
- Friedman, E., Gallová, E., Kubánová, M., & Slosiarik, M. (2009). *School as ghetto systemic overrepresentation of Roma in special education in Slovakia*. Budapest.
- Fung, A. (2003). Associations and Democracy: Between Theories, Hopes, and Realities. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29(1), 515–539. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100134
- Ganz, M. (2009). *Why David sometimes wins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ganz, M. (2010). Leading Change. Leadership, Organization, and Social Movements. In N. Khurana & N. Rakesh (Eds.), *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice: A Harvard Business School Centennial Colloquium* (pp. 527–568). Boston: Harvard Business Press.
- García-Espinel, T. (2016). *Impacto político de la investigación europea sobre el pueblo*

*gitano: el caso del Plan integral del pueblo gitano de Cataluña*. Universidad de Granada.

- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Ethnomethodological Studies of Work*. London: Routledge and Paul.
- Gelbart, P. (2012). Either Sing or Go Get the Beer: Contradictions of (Romani) Female Power in Central Europe. *Signs*, 38(1), 22–29.
- Gheorghe, N. (2013). Choices to be made and prices to be paid: Potential roles and consequences in Roma activism and policy-making. In *From Victimhood to Citizenship: The Path of Romani Integration. A Debate* (pp. 40–97). Budapest: Kossuth Kiado.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *A. Giddens, The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Gomez, A., Puigvert, L., & Flecha, R. (2011). Critical Communicative Methodology: Informing Real Social Transformation Through Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 235–245. doi:10.1177/1077800410397802
- Gómez, A., Racionero, S., & Sordé, T. (2010). Ten Years of Critical Communicative Methodology. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 3(1), 17–43. Retrieved from <http://irqr.ucpress.edu/content/3/1/17.abstract>
- Gómez, J., & Vargas, J. (2003). Why Roma do not like mainstream school? A voice of a people without a territory. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73, 559–590.
- Gould, R. (2014). Roma rights and Roma expulsions in France: Official discourse and EU responses. *Critical Social Policy*, 35(1), 24–44. doi:10.1177/0261018314545595
- Guy, W. (2009). *Roma Inclusion at the Crossroads: Can the Lessons from PHARE be Learned?*
- Guy, W., & Kovats, M. (2006). EU-Funded Roma Programmes: Lessons from Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Retrieved from [www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=64](http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=64)
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reasons and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1999). *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Han, H., Andrews, K. T., Ganz, M., Baggetta, M., & Lim, C. (2011). The Relationship of Leadership Quality to the Political Presence of Civic Associations. *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(01), 45–59. doi:10.1017/S1537592710004081
- Hancock, I. (1975). Some contemporary aspects of gypsies and Gypsy nationalism. *Roma*, 2(1), 46–55.



- Hancock, I. (2002). *We are the Romani People*. Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press.
- Hangley, B. J. (2002). The Democratic Responsibility: Rights and Freedoms as Tools. In C. Cahn (Ed.), *Roma Rights: Race, Justice, and Strategies for Equality* (pp. 175–184). New York: The International Debate Education Association.
- Hayes, M., & Acton, T. (2007). *Travellers, Gypsies, Roma: The demonization of difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Hooks, B. (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. South End Press.
- Izsák, R. (2009). The European Romani Women's Movement: The struggle for human rights. *Development*, 52(2), 200–207. doi:10.1057/dev.2009.9
- Jasper, J. M. (2011). Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37(1), 285–303. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150015
- Jun, K.-N., & Shiao, E. (2012). How Are We Doing? A Multiple Constituency Approach to Civic Association Effectiveness. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(4), 632–655. doi:10.1177/0899764011415119
- Kanter, R. M., & Brinkerhoff, D. (1981). Organizational Performance: Recent Developments in Measurement. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 7, 321–49.
- Kawczynski, R. (2015). Open Letter. European Roma and Travellers Forum.
- Klaus, S. and Marsh, A. (2009). A special challenge for Europe: the inclusion of Roma children in early years education and care. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22(3), 336–346. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2014.912896
- Knoke, D., & Premsky, D. (1984). What Relevance do Organization Theories Have for Voluntary Associations? *Social Science Quarterly*, 65, 3–20.
- Kovacs, M. (2012). The EU's Roma role. *Open Democracy*. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/martin-kovats/eus-roma-role>
- Lewy, G. (2000). *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liégeois, J.-P. (2007). *Roma in Europe* (3rd ed.). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1999). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.
- Mac Laughlin, J. (1999). European Gypsies and the historical geography of loathing. *Washington Review*, 22(1), 31–59.
- Margalit, G. (2002). *Germany and its Gypsies*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Marushiakova, E., & Popov, V. (2015). The First Gypsy/Roma Organizations, Churches and Newspapers. In *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* (pp. 258–293). Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Matras, Y. (1998). The Development of the Romani Civil Rights Movement in Germany 1945–1996. In *Sinti and Roma in German-Speaking Society and*

- Literature*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Matras, Y. (1999). Johann Rüdiger and the study of Romani in 18th century Germany. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society. Ser. 5*, 9, 89–116.
- Matras, Y. (2013). Scholarship and the Politics of Romani Identity: Strategic and Conceptual Issues. In *European Yearbook of Minority Issues, Vol. 10* (pp. 209–245). Brill | Nijhoff.
- Maxwell, J. (1996). *Qualitative Research Design. An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- McGarry, A. (2008). Ethnic group identity and the Roma Social Movement: Transnational organizing structures of representation. *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 36(3), 449–470. doi:10.1080/00905990802080661
- McGarry, M. (2010a). The Roma Voice in the European Union: Between National Belonging and Transnational Identity. *Social Movement Studies*, 10(3), 283–297.
- McGarry, M. (2010b). *Who Speaks for Roma? Political Representation of a Transnational Minority Community*. London: Continuum.
- McGarry, M. (2011). The dilemma of the European Union's Roma policy. *Critical Social Policy*, 32(1), 126–136. doi:10.1177/0261018311425201
- Mead, G. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Melucci, a., & Avritzer, L. (2000). Complexity, cultural pluralism and democracy: collective action in the public space. *Social Science Information*, 39(4), 507–527. doi:10.1177/053901800039004001
- Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society Hardcover*. London: Hutchinson Radius, cop.
- Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mirga, A., & Gheorghe, N. (1997). *THE ROMA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: A POLICY. Project on Ethnic Relations*.
- Morris, A. (2000). Reflections on Social Movement Theory: Criticisms and Proposals. *Contemporary Sociology*, 29(3), 445–454.
- Morris, A., & Staggenborg, S. (2007). Chapter 8. Leadership in Social Movements. In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*.
- Munte, A., Serradell, O., & Sorde, T. (2011). From Research to Policy: Roma Participation Through Communicative Organization. *Qualitative Inquiry*. doi:10.1177/1077800410397804
- Nepstad, S., & Bob, C. (2006). When do Leaders Matter? Hypotheses on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movements. *Mobilization: An International Journal*, 11(1), 1–22.

- Nepstad, S. E. (2004). Persistent Resistance: Commitment and Community in the Plowshares Movement. *Social Problems*, 51(1), 43–60.
- Nirenberg, J. (2009). Romani Political Mobilization from the First International Romani Union Congress to the European Roma, Sinti and Travellers Forum, 94–115. doi:10.1057/9780230281165\_5
- Nussbaum, M. (2003). CAPABILITIES AS FUNDAMENTAL ENTITLEMENTS: SEN AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), 33–59. doi:10.1080/1354570022000077926
- OHCHR (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). (2014). *Advocacy Brief on Roma Inclusion Policies*. Retrieved from [http://www.europe.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Press/Advocacy Brief on Roma Inclusion Policies - second draft.pdf](http://www.europe.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Press/Advocacy%20Brief%20on%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Policies%20-%20second%20draft.pdf)
- Okely, J. (1996). *Own or Other culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Open Society Foundations. (2015). *European Roma Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/european-roma-institute-concept-paper-20150515.pdf>
- Oprea, a. (2005). The Arranged Marriage of Ana Maria Cioaba, Intra-Community Oppression and Romani Feminist Ideals: Transcending the “Primitive Culture” Argument. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 12(2), 133–148. doi:10.1177/1350506805051234
- Parella, S. (2003). *Mujer, inmigrante y trabajadora: la triple discriminación*. Rubí: Anthropos.
- Parliament, T. E. (2005). Roma in the European Union.
- Pennings, J. M. (1976). Dimensions of Organizational Influence and Their Effectiveness Correlates. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21(4), 688–699.
- Petrova, D. (2000). *The denial of racism*.
- Puigvert, L. (2001). *Las otras mujeres*. Esplugues de Llobregat: El Roure.
- Puigvert, L., Christou, M., & Holford, J. (2011). Critical Communicative Methodology: Including Vulnerable Voices in Research through Dialogue. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42(4), 513–526. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ985967>
- Pusca, A. (2011). *Roma in the EU: Mobility, Discrimination, Solutions*. New York: IDEA & CEU Press.
- Putnam, R. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Radu, R. (2012). Well-being reconsidered: A capability approach to grassroots organizations’ contributions. In *Well-Being Reconsidered: Empowering Grassroots Organizations*. Budapest: Open Society Foundations.
- Ramakrishnan, S. K., & Bloemraad, I. (2008). *Civic Hopes and Political Realities*. New

- York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Ringold, D., Orenstein, M. A., & Wilkens, E. (2003). *Roma in an expanding Europe. Breaking the poverty cycle*. Washington: The World Bank.
- Rovid, M. (2011). Solidarity, Citizenship, Democracy: The Lessons of Romani Activism. *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, 10, 310–311. doi:10.1163/157181407782713729
- San Román, T. (1998). *La diferència Inquietant. Velles i noves estratègies culturals dels gitanos*. Barcelona: Editorial Alta Fulla.
- Sánchez Aroca, M. (2005). *Estudi de la població gitana de Catalunya*. Barcelona: Fundació Pere Tarrés, Projectes Socials. Retrieved from <http://xtec.gencat.cat/web/.content/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/0049/56aa4863-1520-45c7-973c-a9dfa812a7d5/Pob.-gitana-Catalunya.pdf>
- Sánchez, M., Clavería, E., & Fernández, M. (2003). Associació Gitana de Dones Drom Kotar Mestipen. *Educació Social*, 24, 105–116.
- Schütz, A., & Luckmann, T. (1974). *Structure of the Life-World*. London: London: Heinemann.
- Sen, A. (1989). Development as capability expansion. *Journal of Development Planning*, 19(1), 41–58.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf.
- Sigona, N., & Trehan, N. (2009). *ROMANI POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization, and the Neo-liberal Order*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sigona, N., & Vermeersch, P. (2012). Special Issue: The Roma in the New EU: Policies, Frames and Everyday Experiences. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(8), 1189–1331.
- Skocpol, T. (2003). *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Skocpol, T., Ganz, M., & Muson, Z. (2000). A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Voluntarism in the United States. *The American Political Science Review*, 94(3), 527–546. doi:papers2://publication/uuid/63833696-4194-42A0-ABAF-8F36CFAE7DC2
- Smith, D. H. (1997). The International History of Grassroots Associations. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*. doi:10.1177/002071529703800301
- Smith, D. H. (2000). *Grassroots associations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Snow, D. A., Rochford, E. B., Worden, S. K., & Benford, R. D. (1986). Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review*, 51(4), 464. doi:10.2307/2095581
- Sobotka, E., & Vermeersch, P. (2012). Governing Human Rights and Roma Inclusion: Can the EU be a Catalyst for Local Social Change? *Human Rights Quarterly*. doi:10.1353/hrq.2012.0050
- Solé, C., Serradell, O., & Sordé, T. (2013). Ciudadanía en femenino. Aportaciones de

- las mujeres inmigrantes marroquíes, ecuatorianas y rumanas en España. *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 47, 51–66.
- Sordé, T., Flecha, R., & Mircea, T. (2013). El pueblo gitano: una identidad global sin territorio [The Roma people: a global identity without territory]. *Scripta Nova. Revista Electrónica de Geografía Y Ciencias Sociales*, XVII(427(3)).
- Sordé, T., Serradell, O., Puigvert, L.; Munté, A. (2013). Solidarity networks that challenge racialized discourses: The case of Romani immigrant women in Spain. *European Journal of Womens Studies*, 4(20), 87–102. doi:10.1177/1350506813510425
- Sordé, T. (2012-2015). TRANSROMA. Estrategias de movilidad, retorno y prácticas transnacionales entre población gitana rumana. Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad.
- Sordé, T. (2006). *Les reivindicacions educatives de la dona gitana*. Barcelona: Galerada.
- Sorde, T., & Mertens, D. M. (2014). Mixed methods research with groups at risk: New developments and key debates. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 8(3), 207–211. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1558689814527916
- Sordé, T. (2006). *Les reivindicacions educatives de la dona gitana*. Cabrera de Mar: Edicions Galerada & Institut Català de les dones.
- Sordé, T. (2007). *Quitarse de la escuela. Processes of persistence and dropping out among Romaní girls*. Harvard University.
- Sowa, J. E., Selden, S. C., & Sandfort, J. R. (2004). No longer unmeasurable? A multi-dimensional integrated model of nonprofit organizational effectiveness. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33(4), 711–728.
- Spirova, M., & Budd, D. (2008). The EU Accession Process and the Roma Minorities in New and Soon-to-be Member States. *Comparative European Politics*, 6(1), 81–101. doi:10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110123
- Stake, R. (2010). *Qualitative Research: Studying how Things Work*. New York: The guildford press.
- The World Bank. (2010). *Economic costs of Roma exclusion*. Washington DC. Retrieved from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/Economic\\_Costs\\_Roma\\_Exclusion\\_Note\\_Final.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/Economic_Costs_Roma_Exclusion_Note_Final.pdf)
- Tocqueville, A. de. (1840). *DE MOC R A C Y I N A M E R I C A*. (E. Nolla, Ed.) (Vol. 2). Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, Inc.
- Touraine. (2006). *Le Monde des Femmes*. Paris: Fayard.
- Touraine, A. (1985). An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements. *Social Research*, 52(4), 749–787 doi:10.1177/0011392104043498
- Trehan, N. (2009). Human rights entrepreneurship in post-socialist Hungary : from the ‘ Gypsy problem 5 to ‘ Rom ani rights 5 A thesis submitted for the degree o f Doctor of Philosophy Nidhi Trehan Department of Sociology London School o f Economics and Political Science, (July).

- Trehan, N., & Sigona, N. (Eds.). (2009). *Romani politics in contemporary Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization, and the Neoliberal Order*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). (1999). *Human Development Report*. Oxford.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). (2005). *Faces of poverty, faces of hope. Vulnerability profiles for Decade of Roma Inclusion Countries*. Bratislava. Retrieved from <https://es.scribd.com/doc/151052693/Faces-of-poverty-faces-of-hope>
- Valls, R. (2003-2004). CALLI BUTIPEN: Mujer gitana y mercado laboral. Instituto de la Mujer, Comisión Interministerial de Ciencia y Tecnología, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. Retrieved from <http://creaub.info/projects/Calli/index.html>
- van Baar, H. (2012). Socio-Economic Mobility and Neo-Liberal Governmentality in Post-Socialist Europe: Activation and the Dehumanisation of the Roma. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(8), 1289–1304. doi:10.1080/1369183x.2012.689189
- van Baar, H. (2013). Travelling activism and knowledge formation in the Romani social and civil movement. In M. Miskovic (Ed.), *Roma Education in Europe: Practices, Policies And Politics* (pp. 192–203). New York: Routledge.
- Vargas, J., & Gómez, J. (2003). Why Romà do not like mainstream schools: voices of a people without territory. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(4), 559–590. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.73.4.k6807432592612j3>
- Vermeersch, P. (2011). *The Roma in domestic and international politics: an emerging voice?* Budapest.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, L., & Brandy, H. (1995). *Voice and equality, civic voluntarism in American politics*. London: Harvard University press.
- Vermeersch, P. (2002). Ethnic mobilisation and the political conditionality of European Union accession: The case of the Roma in Slovakia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/13691830120103949
- Vermeersch, P. (2012). Reframing the Roma: EU Initiatives and the Politics of Reinterpretation. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(8), 1195–1212. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2012.689175
- Vermeersch, P. (2014). The Romani perspective: experiences and acts of citizenship across Europe. In F. I. Engin & P. Nyers (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies* (pp. 477–486). London & New York: Routledge.
- Woodcock, S. (2012). Gender as Catalyst for Violence Against Roma in Contemporary Italy. In *Roma in Europe: Migration, Education, Representation* (pp. 51–71). New York: International Debate Education Association.
- Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning real Utopias*. London: Verso.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research : design and methods*. Applied social research

*methods series* (Vol. 5.). Retrieved from  
<http://unisa.aquabrowser.com/?itemid=|unisa-bibs|1104221>

## **APPENDIXES**



## **ANNEX 1: Narrative of Quimar**

Good afternoon to all of you. I am Miranda and I am very happy to be here with all of you today. I am a biologist, something that honestly makes me feel so proud of myself because if I have to tell you the truth, I've always wanted to go to college, I have always loved science and I have always wanted to dedicate to something related how to use science in order to help people (...)

I would like that you know a little bit my story: I grew up in a poor family. No one except my aunt had continued beyond compulsory studies and unfortunately she drop them (...)

(...) I will not say that everything has been a bed of roses and that I have not brought me a great effort, because he has not. But I assure you it's the best decision I ever made in my life: to continue my studies after ESO has not only prepared me to get a job that excites me but also made me braver, he has made me face me to simple things but they can scare like finding myself in a completely new environment in a totally different world than I had before. And, you know best of all? I discovered that this world I like and what is even better, which is not incompatible with my gypsy world. With this, girls, what I mean is that not think that by studying not going to be able to do what and you wanted, like having a family, because, in fact, studies will help you care for your family, it will allow you to better paid work and possibly more time you invest. I would also like to convey that the study does not make you less Romany, but it will make your whole environment is proud to have a piece of gypsy besides being a student, "curranta" to have gotten what he wanted. I say totally heart that all the effort that I had to devote to my studies is more than rewarded, not thinking I'm doing what I want, but to see the look of pride with my family watching me. The best thing I have right now is to know how proud we all feel about me. And the truth is not bad, to show people who believe that we are not able to have higher education, how wrong they are.

With all this what I want is to encourage all you who are thinking about studying or not

thinking and also to feel encouraged and to encourage your daughters, nieces, cousins, sisters ... to study, because studies is the key to open doors in the future.

I hope that within a few years the reason for this meeting is not related to the study incentive but to have you explaining us how wonderful was your academic life and how much you enjoy the other aspects of your life (Quimar, Sep. 2014).

**ANNEX 2: Table 1. Summary of Data Collection**

<b>Specific objective</b>	<b>Unit of analysis</b>	<b>Level of analysis</b>	<b>Source of evidence</b>
To carry out an in-depth analysis of a Roma association of women as a case where the Romani women's human agency is effectively fostered and enabled, understanding and defining which are the underlying features that make possible that this association becomes a hub of social change for Romani women.	Association	Association's organizing features	Interviews Participant communicative observations Documentary information of DKM: minutes of assemblies; agendas; project's reports directed by DKM; evaluations of the projects and activities implemented Communicative focus group: validation of results
To examine the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women in broadening their opportunities.	Romani women and Association	<b>Individual:</b> impact of the Romani women's collective agency on the own women's	Interviews Participant observations Communicative daily life stories
To explore the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women in broadening the opportunities of their own families.	Romani women and Association	<b>Community:</b> Romani women's family. Impact of the Romani women's collective agency on their families.	Communicative daily life stories Interviews Participant observations
To explore the impact of the Romani women's collective agency organised in a Roma association of women on shaping and fostering the own grassroots Romani women's mobilisation at the local level and beyond	Romani women and Association	<b>Societal:</b> Lifeworlds of the grassroots Romani women on the Romani women's mobilization → impact of the Romani women's collective agency on the grassroots Romani women's mobilisation	Communicative daily life stories Interviews Participant observations

### ANNEX 3: Table 2. Fieldwork Study Participants

#### Group A. DKM members. Total: 11

Pseudònim	Profile
<b>Maria</b>	Romani American women. 37 years old. Holds a university degree. Married and mother of one. Currently living in UK.
<b>Carmen</b>	Romani women. 37 years old. Holds a university degree. Married and mother of two.
<b>Esther</b>	Romani women. 50 years old. Primary education. Divorced and mother of one.
<b>Aurora</b>	Romani women. 26 years old. Holds a university degree. Currently doing PhD. Single.
<b>Victoria</b>	Non-Romani women. 55 years old. Holds university degree. University teacher. Married.
<b>Georgina</b>	Non-Romani women. 38 years old. Holds university degree. Married and mother of two.
<b>Pilar</b>	Non-Romani women. 50 years old. Holds university degree. Single and mother of one.
<b>Tatiana</b>	Romani women. 31 years old. Married and mother of two. Primary education.
<b>Petra</b>	Romani Romanian women. 37 years old. Single. Holds a university degree.
<b>Elena</b>	Non-Romani women. 36 years old. Holds university degree. Married and mother of one.
<b>Núria</b>	Non-Romani women. 38 years old. Holds university degree (Collaborator)

#### Group B. DKM community of participants. Total: 15 Romani women.

Pseudonym	Profile	Relation with DKM
<b>Soledad</b>	28 years old. Zona Franca. Single. She holds a middle-level training diploma in social integration. Currently working as shop assistant.	Internship (2011-2012)
<b>Sara</b>	25 years old. Badalona. Single She holds a middle-level training diploma in administration and an upper-level training diploma in social integration. She is working full time in a Roma association that works for the the rights of the Romani people.	Internship and work in DKM from 2010 to 2011
<b>Leticia</b>	35 years old. La Mina. Married and mother of two children. She is currently working as school canteen	Official Trainers course (Bon Pastor, 2014) Romani Women Students'

	monitor, and also as domestic worker in a particular house	Meeting (2014)
<b>Patricia</b>	42 years old. Married and mother of 4, grandmother of 3. Roquetas. Barcelona Unemployed. She receives an unemployment benefit.	Official Trainers course (Trinitat Nova, 2013)
<b>Lourdes</b>	27 years old. Married, mother of two children. Trinitat Nova, Barcelona Left secondary school. Working as canteen monitor in the school of her neighbourhood and also as domestic worker in a particular house	Official Trainers course (Bon Pastor, 2014)
<b>Belén</b>	39 years old. Divorced and mother of women. Campclar, Tarragona. Currently working with a part-time contract providing family training, and as canteen monitor in the IES Mediterrani school-Tarragona. She also volunteers in the same school.	Romani Women Students' Meeting (Reus, 2010) Participated in Rom-UP project (2012-2013)
<b>Sulamita</b>	26 years old. Married, mother of one. La Mina Currently working in a Romani association for the educational inclusion of Romani students.	Worked in DKM from 2007-2009. Involved in the organisation of the Romani Women Students' Meeting of Sant Roc (Barcelona, 2009), and the Romí Training (Sant Roc, 2009)
<b>Eva</b>	26 years old. Single, Sant Adrià. Holds a middle-level training programme in administration. She is currently preparing the exams to access university to people over 25 years old. She runs a bar.	1 <sup>st</sup> International Romani Women Congress (2010) Romani Students' Meeting (Campclar, 2013)
<b>Cecilia</b>	50 years old. Married and mother of three, grandmother of 3. Sant Adrià, Barcelona. Primary education. Unemployed	Participated in the Official Trainers course (Sant Roc, 2015)
<b>Blanca</b>	25 years old. Married and mother of two, Sagrera-Barcelona. Compulsory secondary education. Middle training programme in hairdressing (unfinished). Unemployed	Completed the Official Trainers course (Bon Pastor, 2014)
<b>Asunta</b>	34 years old. Married and mother of two. Figueras-Girona. Middle level training in special education. Currently studying the middle level training in social integration. She is unemployed. Informal job: market.	Romani Women Students' Meeting (Figueres, 2014)
<b>Jasmine</b>	17 years old. Single. Bon Pastor-Barcelona Secondary compulsory education Informal job: market.	Participated in the Romí Youth Space. English Course (2011)
<b>Antonia</b>	17 years old. Single. Bon Pastor- Barcelona (cousin of Jasmine) Secondary compulsory education Informal job: market.	Participated in the Romí Youth Space. English Course (2011)

**Group C. Women who represent Romani women's associations which collaborate with DKM**

Pseudonim	Profile	Relation with DKM
<b>Mireia</b>	Romani women. 45 years old. Divorced. Mother of one. Vallés Occidental.	Romani Student's Meeting, 2011 President of the Association: Badia Romani Women's association (pseudonym).
<b>Coral</b>	Romani women. 43 years old. Married and mother of two. Reus-Tarragona.	Romani Women Student's Meeting Reus, 2009 1 <sup>st</sup> International Romani Women Congress, 2010 Member of Shine Association of Romani Women (pseudonym; local association of Romani women from Sant Josep Obrer, Reus)  Completed the Official Trainers Course Sant Josep Obrer, 2010
<b>Angeles</b>	Romani women. 35 years old. Married and mother of four.	Romani Women Student's Meeting Reus, 2009 1 <sup>st</sup> International Romani Women Congress, 2010 President of Shine Association of Romani Women (pseudonym; local association of Romani women from Sant Josep Obrer, Reus)  Completed the Official Trainers Course Sant Josep Obrer, 2010
<b>Ana</b>	Non-Romani women. Technique of the association KAMIRA	Representing member of the Federation of Associations of Romani Women, Kamira

## ANNEX 4: Informed Consent



### CONSENTIMIENTO DE PARTICIPACIÓN

Apreciado/a,

Gracias por su participación en la tesis doctoral “Taking the lead in social transformation: *The case of the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen*” (*Tomar la iniciativa en el cambio social: El caso de la Asociación Gitana de Mujeres Drom Kotar Mestipen*), realizada por la investigadora Emilia Aiello, miembro del Grupo de Estudios de Inmigración y Minorías Étnicas (GEDIME) de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Para la realización de esta tesis se ha obtenido financiación del Programa de Formación del Profesorado Universitario (FPU, Convocatoria 2013-2017). Esta investigación se enmarca en la línea de investigación consolidada sobre pueblo gitano y minorías étnicas desarrollada en el GEDIME y liderada por la Doctora Teresa Sordé i Martí, quien juntamente con la Doctora Carlota Solé i Puig, dirigen esta tesis doctoral.

La tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo analizar en profundidad las transformaciones sociales que están llevando a cabo las mujeres gitanas de base en el ámbito de la Asociación Gitana de Mujeres Drom Kotar Mestipen y cómo esto lleva a ampliar las oportunidades sociales de las mujeres gitanas que participan en ella (a nivel individual, comunitario, y social) de diversas formas, así como las contribuciones que dicha asociación está haciendo al movimiento de mujeres gitanas de base.

La participación de mujeres gitanas es esencial para llevar a cabo esta investigación, ya que son las principales informantes de la misma. Así mismo, es básico también la participación de mujeres no gitanas que son miembro de la asociación y de técnicos/as relacionados al asociacionismo gitano.

La metodología que se utiliza para la realización de la tesis es cualitativa: contempla principalmente relatos de vida cotidiana, entrevistas semi-estructuradas y en menor medida, grupos de discusión.

### ***Respecto a su participación en la investigación,***

Cumpliendo con el marco legal internacional<sup>55</sup> aplicado a la ética en la investigación científica<sup>56</sup>; su participación en esta investigación es de carácter voluntario y totalmente confidencial. La entrevista, relato de vida o grupo de discusión se grabará siempre y cuando Usted dé el consentimiento. Su identidad será anonimizada mediante la codificación de la grabación, y el posterior análisis de la información.

Si durante la consecución de la entrevista, relato de vida o grupo de discusión Usted desea detener el diálogo o la grabación, podrá hacerlo en cualquier momento. Además, deber de saber que siempre tiene el derecho a renunciar a participar en la investigación a no contestar a cualquier pregunta.

Puede ponerse en contacto con la investigadora Emilia Aiello en

GEDIME – Grupo de Estudios de Inmigración y Minorías Étnicas. Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona

Avenida Eix Central. Edificio B  
08193 Bellaterra (Cerdanyola del Vallès)

Teléfono: 93 581 24 06

### **CONSENTIMIENTO**

He leído la información anteriormente presentada en relación a la investigación “Taking the lead in social transformation: *The case of the Roma Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen*” (*Tomar la iniciativa en el cambio social: El caso de la Asociación Gitana de Mujeres Drom Kotar Mestipen*) y manifiesto que estoy de acuerdo en participar en dicha investigación de forma voluntaria.

---

<sup>55</sup> Declaración Universal de Derechos Humanos y Carta de Derechos Fundamentales de la EU.

<sup>56</sup> Códigos éticos de la *Asociación Internacional de Sociología* y de la *Asociación Europea de Sociología*.



Nombre del/la participante

---

Firma

---

Fecha

---

Firma del/la investigador/a

---

Fecha