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## THE CREATION OF RESILIENT ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE

Case study of a bottom-up initiative from North-Eastern Hungary

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### ABSTRACT

The notion of cultural heritage has become an essential part of social science discourse in recent decades, and its position and institutionalization vis-à-vis history-writing has been consolidated. Regarding minority culture and heritage, a central issue to consider is to what extent the previously marginalized minority heritage can stand on its own or emerges as part of the mainstream canon – due to increasing attention and acceptance. In the case of Roma heritage, one cannot ignore that the marginalization of Roma in Hungary is still palpable in numerous aspects and that their often very deprived social status also has an impact on the access to cultural heritage. Furthermore, this ongoing marginalization has a great impact on the access to power and control: as in academia and in political activism, the genuine presence of a “Romani voice” is still a goal to be achieved in heritage production as well. Therefore, in order to sensitively problematize and understand the present times’ cultural challenges (which may take the form of political activism as well), we are aiming to introduce the concept of resilient Roma cultural heritage in Hungary. In order to do so, the paper will test the applicability of this concept (of resilient cultural heritage) to a specific case study of the First Roma country House.

Since the early 2000s, when resilience has become a central concept of cultural heritage discourses, cultural heritage is often manifested as a tool that gives a community the opportunity to create a reserve that increases its resilience and renewal capabilities. This model aims to link the theory of resilience with the preservation, use/re-use and management of cultural heritage. To create a bridge between the two concepts, participatory approaches seem to be the most suitable.

By looking at the case study of the First Roma country House in Hodász,<sup>2</sup> we would like to analyze the specific and unique position of a bottom-up cultural initiative that tackles the institutionalization of Roma traditions and heritage and creates real social cohesion on a local level, in a highly rural deprived area (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg country). Our study (based both on field and desk research) on the Roma country House in Hodász, as an eminent example of resilient cultural heritage, represents the first stage of a large project, focused on the access to cultural heritage for wider participation in the preservation, (re)-use and management of European culture.<sup>3</sup>

**Keywords:** resilience, minority heritage, Roma heritage, community participation

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2 <http://romatajhaz.withssl.com/>

3 <http://reach-culture.eu/pilots-and-best-practices/minority-heritage>

## THE CREATION OF RESILIENT ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE

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### Case study of a bottom-up initiative from North-Eastern Hungary

*In memory of Lina Rézműves*

In this paper, our aim is to analyse the concept of resilient Roma cultural heritage in Hungary. To test the applicability of the concept, we will examine a specific case study of the First Roma country House, in Hodász, North-Eastern Hungary.<sup>4</sup> Before analysing our case, the paper will propose a brief overview on the theoretical framework of the current regime of cultural heritage, minority heritage and its situation in the Hungarian context.

The notion of cultural heritage has become an essential part of social science discourse in recent decades. Moreover, researchers like Luciana Lazzaretti consider that the current (third) cultural heritage regime offers a more complex notion of cultural heritage and moves from a conservation- or object-oriented approach to a value- or subject-oriented one (Sonkoly–Vahtikari 2018: 11–12). This paradigm-shift leads to a genuine transformation in heritage discourse appearing both in contemporary policies and social sciences, where cultural heritage is considered to have major social and economic impacts on society. Considering that in this third regime, different social and economic values may be represented in cultural heritage management, heritage itself becomes the expression of social inclusion and democracy (Lazzaretti 2012: 229–230). According to Gábor Sonkoly, the heritage in this new paradigm is defined in a continuous time (sustainability, resilience, management of change, etc.), in a continuous territory (determined by spatial categories, which imply belonging and community-based perception such as places of cultural heritage and cultural/urban landscapes) and by the perception of its local community, which is the custodian of the survival of cultural diversity, and consequently, of heritage values (Sonkoly 2018: 10–11).

### RESILIENT CULTURAL HERITAGE AND COMMUNITIES

Nowadays, more and more sciences have are engaging with the concept of resilience. Among the many reasons for this popularity, its complexity and various interpretations should be highlighted. Hence, it could be challenging to define common characteristics of the models' understanding in different disciplines. Nevertheless, most of the research using resilience theory is basically system-based and rooted in post-positivist epistemology (Lang 2011: 17). The first appearance of resilience in the social sciences arose out of system-based theories in the 1970s and 1980s and at that time it was mainly connected to ecosystem related research. In the 1990s the exclusively ecological interpretation expanded to society by using the concept to understand complex socio-economic systems. Thanks to this shift of focus and the growing debates

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over sustainability, adaptivity and vulnerability, resilience has become part of political discourse, especially in development policies.<sup>5</sup> It evolved into an interdisciplinary research direction in which ecology seemed to lose its leading position as researchers started to talk about nested socio-ecological systems (Westley et al. 2002: 119). The growing interest on resilience as a concept for understanding, managing and governing complex systems represents a move beyond the dominant auto-organisation-based ecological definitions (Walker et al. 2006). Apart from its extended research areas, the novelty that social sciences brought to the theory is in the switching scales among the examined systems. Psychology, the first discipline among the social sciences to discover the concept, first examined the individual, and then gradually extended to families and later to communities. In brief, by applying the concept to understand change in hybrid and complex systems like communities, it became part of cultural heritage discourses.

Every community is affected by various trends of change. The capacity to respond to these changes shows a wide range of socio-spatial differences and disparities. The theory of resilience offers a model to understand multi-dimensional transformations in complex social systems and the occurring disparities due to their adaptivity to change. Researching the responses raises questions of governance and controllability. By conceptualizing resilience as a systemic capacity to cope with challenges, it seems to be necessary to create the institutional background of the management of change. Resilience as social strategic category functions if we reconsider structural determinants. Establishing the frameworks of community governance gives the option to promote human agency in the adaptive cycles. Consequently, the question of institutionalizing community governance becomes crucial. More precisely, the ways in which the processes, vulnerabilities, risks and challenges are identified, understood and managed by the community need to be considered (Lang 2011: 15–16). Who acts towards resilience? As Thilo Lang summarized, despite the systems thinking nature of the model of resilience, it is not the system as a whole, not the “community” who is able to act but the individual and collective actors. These processes of participatory governance appear as *“social processes that are shaped in a tense atmosphere of structure and agency.”* (Lang 2011: 21).

The new paradigm that relativized the role of authenticity led to new concepts entering heritage discourses. The continuous recreation of heritage is defined through the lens of sustainability and resilience. The fear of loss of past is transformed into the fear of loss of identity. The main question in preserving identity is change: how the community relates itself to change, how it manages change, how it adapts to change (Sonkoly 2017: 32–35). In short, the model of resilience is about understanding change in complex systems. It explains how social systems engage in forward-looking behaviour and what types of institutions are established and developed to cope with anticipated uncertainties (Yorke et al. 2002: 451). Building resilience is important since it reveals *“the ability of a system to absorb disturbances and still retain its basic function and structure”* (Walker–Salt 2006: XIII) and *“the capacity to change in order to maintain the same identity”* (Folke et al. 2010) The management of change becomes crucial for communities as it offers risk-spreading and insurance strategies for social and economic development (Yorke et al. 2002: 433).

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<sup>5</sup> The inclusion to the political discourse is made by the declaration before the Rio+20 conference. United Nations Secretary-General’s high-level panel on global sustainability 2012: *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing*. United Nations, New York.

According to David E. Beel and his co-authors, the notion of resilience in the context of community heritage appears as human agency that, on the one hand, helps to understand how different cultural repertoires have been maintained through generations and on the other hand, describes a set of relationships that continue to maintain those cultural repertoires, especially as practices move towards digital forms. Thus, in the case of resilient communities, their activity to maintain their heritage is represented by the concept of ‘heritage from below’ paraphrasing the concept of ‘history from below’<sup>6</sup>, describing the social conditions of history rather than a narrative based on the lives of ‘great men’. This new narrative in heritage studies offers a manifestation of counter hegemonic practices. Therefore, these community heritage projects do not conform to a top down narrative, but aim to represent the ‘ordinary’ lives and practices of the local community (Beel et al. 2015: 462).

Recently there has been increasing interest in rural areas as an alternative for leisure and tourism to urban areas, and it is crucial to understand how resilience may be understood in this context. According to Jacinthe Bessière, as rurality does not mean anymore a peasant society and therefore these areas are opening up, tourism might gain new attractivity here, serving a nostalgia for the “good old days” and the finding of an improbable authenticity in the innocent and mythic, close-to-nature villages (Bessière 1998: 22–24.) In this new context, the interpretation of the concept of resilience might also go through changes. Instead of understanding it as a process of how communities react after external shock, we might sense that cultural activity will have a main role in these forms of resilience. As David E. Beel and his co-authors state, rural communities are continually changing, while rural areas themselves are constantly shifting with regards to external and local changes (Beel et al 2015: 461). This constant change also implies the difficulty of focussing on one specifically resilient reaction. Beel, citing Kristen Magis, emphasizes the resilient character of rural communities, living in an uncertain, unpredictable environment which leads them to build personal and collective capacity, enabling the sustainability and renewal of the community, as well as the development of new paths for their future (Beel et al 2015: 461). When a community is able to construct its own resilient heritage, it also means that the stories told might differ from the mainstream narrative. This (also political) will to represent the everyday life of (often marginalized) communities – distinguishing from the national heritage and historic canon – leads us to the concept of minority heritage and its relationship towards mainstream heritage.

### MINORITY HERITAGE

Since the beginning of the 2000s, critical heritage studies have put great emphasis on the interpretation of native cultures within a post-colonial narrative and on their integration in the national cultural canon. The UNESCO declarations from 2003 on the priority of cultural diversity have also contributed to the integration of the intangible cultural heritage of previously oppressed first nation minority groups in the collections of national heritage (Vrdoljak 2005: 16–18). Regarding minority culture and heritage, a central issue to consider is to what extent the previously marginalized minority heritage can stand on its own or emerges as part of the mainstream canon – due to increasing attention and acceptance. Notions like contested or dissonant heritage explain the tensions that emerge during the process of heritagization and the process of becoming a touristic site. According

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<sup>6</sup> This historical movement, taking ordinary people as its focus, emerged in Great-Britain in the 1960s and was mostly represented by historians of the History Workshop movement at Ruskin College like Raphael Samuel, Edward Thompson

to Tunbridge and Ashworth, due to the zero-sum character of heritage, once something becomes a cultural heritage, those who do not identify themselves with that tradition are excluded. In order to redefine cultural heritage in the postcolonial (and, in the Hungarian context, in the post-socialist) world, mainstream heritage needs to be rewritten to move from the periphery to the centre. Moreover, minority heritage should be possible to interpret outside its own ethnic boundaries, in its “racialized” difference (Ashworth et al. 2007: 44–60).

Finding a proper and acceptable path for minority heritage is pertinent because, as Rodney Harrison explains, heritage originates in the modernist nexus of European state formation and Romanticism, which is connected in the field of politics to nationalism. Therefore, as the nation state constructs a collective social memory for itself, it will use heritage as an educational tool and will select those stories or narratives which are appropriate to create a sense of belonging. Thus, national heritage will be partial and the place for the heritage of minorities within it will be subject to selection (Harrison 2010: 169–170). In other words, this is what Laurajane Smith calls the *Authorized Heritage Discourse*, referring to the claims that institutions present when creating national narratives of heritage, based on technical, professional expertise and aesthetic judgement (Smith 2006: 12).

Furthermore, if we repeat the emblematic arguments of Stuart Hall, we may understand that this selectivity and the authorization of heritage discourses is closely related to the power and authority of “*those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter.*” (Hall 2000: 6) These people, the “colonisers”, have been primarily upper or upper middle-class white people, particularly men, and this means that “other heritages” did not count (Littler 2008:91). These power relations concerning the creation and maintenance of heritage have been valid until more or less the 1970s–80s, but during the last few decades the question of “otherness” and “unauthorized” heritage have gained more importance, together with a shift towards the creation of “heritage industry”. At this point, we are referring to the third cultural heritage regime, already introduced at the beginning of this text, where community participation and social impact are much more emphasized than before. According to Harvey, in this recent period, new heritage practices that are built on the true involvement of the community may re-interpret the traditional roles of heritage producers and consumers. Therefore, minority heritage will be closely connected to the new regime and to new heritage practices which are built on the involvement and participation of social groups that had been traditionally excluded from deciding and preserving their heritage (Harvey 2008: 30–31).

### ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE

Europe’s largest transnational ethnic minority, the Roma, do not have a visible and well- established political and cultural representation. For a very long time, their representation in the European cultural canon has been interpreted along the dichotomy of “we” and “them”. According to McGarry: “*Roma thus become objects of research and policymaking, a puzzle to be solved, a problem to be fixed. Roma as objects are shaped by discourse which imposes boundaries between Roma and non-Roma and ascribes negative associations on group identity. It is important to include the active participation of voiceless groups such as Roma in research lest their needs be distorted. The presence of ‘a Romani voice’ within research is crucial so that Roma do not*

*remain mere objects of research but become active players in informing research agendas*” (McGarry 2014: 758). This passive and oppressed role in research may also be relevant in regards to cultural understanding and the construction of Roma representations. However, once the “Romani voice” may be heard, it should be accepted in its heterogeneity. According to Roma activist Nicolae Gheorghe, Romani identity and memories have been more based on the experience of discrimination and external stereotypes than on commonly shared meanings of being Roma in an ethnic sense. Therefore, Gheorge states that *‘representations of Roma culture are often simply responses to other people’s expectations of the performance of otherness’* (McGarry 2014: 763). What may be constructed besides this otherness has to be de-essentialized and adaptable for various different sub-groups.

This shift in the struggle over representation may be compared to the famous description of Stuart Hall when, in his essay *New Ethnicities*, he describes the change that occurred in the 1980s in black identity politics. From a struggle over the relations of representation to the politics of representation itself, the hegemonic, singular, unifying black experience of the first phase has transformed into the understanding of a more complex representation that includes, in this second phase, references to the dimensions of gender, class, and sexuality (Hall 1989: 442–443). It seems that what has already been achieved in Great Britain regarding the positioning of black representation and identity is still some way off for the status of Roma culture and heritage in Europe. Even if a shift may also be detected in this field and the monopoly of non-Roma artists and theorists on representing the Roma has been broken in the last few decades, Roma artists and scholars are still too few to have the authority and power to decide and manage their cultural representation (Junghaus 2007: 17).

Recently, however, a historic moment occurred when in late 2017 the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) opened in Berlin with the aim of being the promoter of Romani contributions to European culture. Today it is still too early to see its real impact in European cultural policies but we cannot deny its exemplary and unique position, especially when compared to other European Roma museums and cultural centres that mostly represent only one specific aspect of the Roma culture or history (for example Flamenco and basketry museum, or the Roma holocaust) and stay in most cases very apolitical, not reflecting on the sensitive and tense relations between Roma art and political-cultural reality (like the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno) (Cserti Csapó 2014: 150–166). Even if the importance of these local institutions should not be underestimated, their existence maintains a dual heritage system where the Roma cultural heritage is not canonized and does not become an immanent part of the national heritage.

Concerning the Hungarian Roma heritage, on the one hand dissimilarity is still very much emphasized in it, in the sense that in spite of the assimilatory social and cultural policy of the state-socialist era and its discriminatory and oppressive practices, authentic Romani culture (dance, music, and language) was maintained in the post-socialist era, and its status consolidated. On the other hand, the possibilities of and obstacles to inclusion in the majority society are continuously present, as well as the questions regarding integration into the canonical cultural heritage.

This duality is illustrated by Sándor Romano Rác’s notion of „outsider culture” and its critics who consider the exclusion of Roma culture not as a permanently existing ethnic character but as the result of a

specific social and economic situation (Binder 2010: 174–176). The Kamill Erdős Gipsy Museum in Pécs, the multimedia collection entitled “The Virtual House of Roma Culture”, edited by Péter Szuhay and Gábor Fleck, or the First Roma country House in Hodász, are all important initiatives to represent Roma heritage. However, because of their small size and their marginal, almost invisible role in public education, Roma culture and tradition and their contemporary practices are only available to a very limited public.

If we try to link the above-mentioned concepts and adapt the resilience and local community-theories to the use and protection of Roma heritage, we might sense a lot of contradictions and tensions between theory and practice. In order to test this adaptivity, we focus on a specific case and analyse the establishment and functioning of the first Roma country house in Hodász.

### THE ROMA COUNTRY HOUSE IN HODÁSZ

Hodász is a large village in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg country, located about 50 km from both the Ukrainian and the Romanian border. Of its 3300 inhabitants, around 40% are Roma (both Vlach and Hungarian Gypsies). The country house is located in the largest segregated area among the three zones appearing on the website of the village.<sup>7</sup> According to a demographic study, based on the census of 2011, the surroundings of the country house are characterized by a very low level of education (70% of the local population only finished primary school), very bad housing quality (Almost 50% of the flats are low comfort, 45% without comfort; lacking bath, toilet, gas and electricity) and a high ratio of unemployment and inhabitants who lack a regular income.

Despite the disadvantaged environment, the Roma community in Hodász has a long and complex history. With its Roma Greek Catholic chapel and a kindergarten, created in the middle of the Roma settlements, the community has a long history of social cohesion and community resilience.<sup>8</sup>

In 1940, Miklós Sója was appointed as a Greek Catholic clerk in Hodász. The young churchman quickly found the Roma settlement of the village, called “Choleric”. After the regular visits of Sója in the slum, from hovel to hovel, the community converted to evangelism and built together a cob-chapel. Later, they translated the liturgy to the Romani language so that they could practice the worship-service in their own language. Today, the cob-chapel has been reconstructed as a prestigious building and is surrounded by a community house, an elderly house, a mothers’ shelter and a kindergarten. Thus, besides its importance and unique position as the only Roma Greek Catholic Parish in Hungary, it also plays an important role in local community building, and in some ways it takes over public social services.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.hodasz.hu/dokumentum/hodasz\\_attekinto.jpg](http://www.hodasz.hu/dokumentum/hodasz_attekinto.jpg)

<sup>8</sup> Our analysis on the Roma Country House is based both on field and desk research that was conducted from spring 2017 to spring 2018. In 2017, we have visited twice the Country House and conducted participant observation during which we have visited the buildings of the Country House, the former building of the String Kindergarten and the Roma Greek Catholic Parish. During these occasions, we have met the colleagues of the Chapel and of the Country House and had informal conversations with them. Besides, we have made semi-structured interviews with Melinda Rézműves and through the last years, we have had several informal discussions with her during various kind of meetings and encounters. These interviews and conversations enabled a deeper understanding of the history and the present functioning of the Country House. The information that are not cited properly in our article are based on the information gained from these above-mentioned oral testimonies.





*“String” Kindergarten in Hodász*

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The first and only Roma kindergarten in the country, the so-called ‘string-kindergarten’ (named after the strings that had been stretched around the Roma settlement) was founded in 1970 by Lina Rézműves, mother of Melinda Rézműves, the owner and manager of the Roma country house. After a year of functioning inside the “strings”, the local community established a small kindergarten-building, with the help of the People’s Patriotic Front, operated under the leadership of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party. The children of the slum, living at the margins of the village and excluded from the local institutions, could start to attend kindergarten.<sup>9</sup> Under the leadership of Lina, they were offered a bilingual education and a very open, inclusive approach (comprehending a permissive mentality toward the presence of the parents and younger brothers or sisters as well). Thus, the Roma kindergarten of Hodász soon became well-known, even in the state-socialist context.

The two institutions- the parish and the kindergarten- bear witness to the particular history and unique regional status of Hodász. Taking into consideration the demographic data and the different indicators of social, spatial, and educational segregation, as well as the levels of unemployment in the region and in the Mátészalka sub-region, it seems that the majority of the local Roma population is living in very disadvantageous life conditions, and therefore the presence of such institutions is even more significant (Forrai 2012: 5). Besides the town of Nagyecsed (located about 25 kilometers from Hodász), where the local Hungarian and Gypsy dance traditions have been submitted to the national inventory of the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list, there is no other place in the surrounding area where Roma cultural practices can be safeguarded and exhibited.<sup>10</sup>

The Roma country house was founded and is managed by Melinda Rézműves, who was born and raised in Hodász and who is Lina’s daughter. According to her, the country house was established in Hodász because from an ethnographic aspect there has been a Romani language-speaking, traditional Roma community living in the village since the 18th century. This community is also able to represent other, culturally similar communities of the region.

The country house comprises three buildings in all: the main building is a small cob house that presents the living conditions of a relatively wealthy Roma family with traditional furniture and home utensils. The site

<sup>9</sup> <http://romatajhaz.withssl.com/index.php/rolunk>

<sup>10</sup> [http://szellemikulturalisorokseg.hu/index0.php?name=0\\_nagyecsed\\_i\\_ciganytanc](http://szellemikulturalisorokseg.hu/index0.php?name=0_nagyecsed_i_ciganytanc)





*Visitor group in the Country House*

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also has a shabby house dug in the ground that represents the living conditions of the 1940s. This latter building is somewhat disturbing: what the visitor can see hardly exceeds the minimum requirements of human living standards. The half-underground house is a one-spaced hovel in reality, consisting of an earthen floor, two 'dikó's (narrow beds made of wooden planks) and a 'brugó' (very rudimentary stove that was also used as a hot-plate, made of plate-iron).

While the main building contains wooden furniture and a gas-oven in the kitchen, the other building only has nails to hang the clothes on. In both houses, a basin of water stands for toilet purposes. Even though the shabby house illustrates the living conditions of the period before the slum clearance in a domesticated and arranged manner (being decorated with flower-stands and painted in blue and white), it clearly displays the misery of Romani people in Hodász.

The traditional buildings are completed by a bigger community house where various activities take place and which is more capable of hosting larger groups. In this way, the different functions of preservation and re-use of cultural heritage are divided at the two sides of the street: while the small, traditional buildings have representational functions, the recently built community house enables real participation in several different activities.

Since its foundation, the country house has been a private property and is managed by an NGO. The functioning and the activities of the country house have been made possible by various grants and funds (at the national level TÁMOP<sup>11</sup> and the Ministry of Human Capacity; at the international level EEA Grants). Even though the country house greatly exceeds the standard character and requirements of such places, and functions much more as a community centre and cultural hub, it does not receive any normative contribution either from the local authorities or from any governmental funds. The Roma country house has been invited to the annual meeting of the Hungarian country-house Alliance in 2015 and, since 2013, has a cooperation agreement with the Hungarian Heritage House to promote traditional Roma professions by organizing folk ribbon and basketry trainings for youngsters.<sup>12</sup>

11 Social Renewal Operational Programme

12 <http://www.hagyományokhaza.hu/page/12800/>

As a “living country house”, numerous activities are offered which are either organized within the framework of a specific grant or in the case of an organized group visit. The programmes and activities described below have been carried out within the framework of various grants<sup>13</sup> and although these grants have run out, some of the activities are still retained. Moreover, the Country House is continually seeking new grant opportunities, which means that its profile is constantly broadened with new occupations. Various artistic and professional workshops are provided, most of them linked to the traditional occupations associated with Roma life in rural areas and which are in part related to the nomadic lifestyle of the past. Professions like blacksmithing, carving or leathering are presented together with various art activities like folk ribbon and painting, and with the cooking of typical Roma meals such as bokoji (“Roma bread”). Multilingual media workshops have contributed to a more progressive understanding of cultural traditions, where youngsters receive web radio training and create short films about the neighbouring villages. This training has been offered by radio / media specialists who engage children to make interviews (in Romani and in Hungarian) with local inhabitants and thus create portraits of the Roma population of the village.<sup>14</sup> The country house is also engaged in the promotion and training of Roma museum pedagogy. The EEG project entitled *My Grandfather’s Treasure Program for the Bases of Roma – Non-Roma Intercultural Paths and Attractions*, which was carried out in 2016–2017, encouraged children to become Local “knowledge carriers” and to look for tangible and intangible examples of Roma heritage not only from Hodász but from the neighbouring villages as well. Besides its own programmes and activities, the country house has also initiated the *invention of local traditions*: in 2015, they organized the first common Christmas celebration in the village, which was taken over in the following year by the local authority.

The above-mentioned activities obviously have a great impact on local community building: involving disadvantaged children in arts and in creative activities, teaching and learning traditional techniques and Roma crafts may strengthen cultural diversity and social cohesion. The web radio, available also from the country house’s website, enables children to join a virtual community and to reach out from a small village. According to Andrew Flinn, community histories and archives are the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential (Flinn 2012: 20–21). Being a member of the local community and a highly skilled ethnographer at the same time, Rézműves represents an authentic actor in the field and someone who can easily reach out and facilitate the involvement of the local community.

13 Main recent grants:

Duration	Project title	Supporting fund
2012–2014	A hodászi Roma Tájház a kreatív ipar szolgálatában ( <i>The Roma Country House of Hodász in service of the creative industry</i> )	TAMOP ( <i>Social Renewal Operational Programme</i> )
2016	Lina-Romanyi Mentorica Program a Hodászi Roma Lányokért ( <i>Program for Roma girls in Hodász</i> )	Ministry of Human Capacities, Hungary
2016–2017	Nagyapám kincse program a Roma-nem Roma Interkulturális Útvonal és attrakciók alapjainak megteremtéséért ( <i>“My Grandfather’s Treasure” Program for the Bases of Roma – Non-Roma Intercultural Path and Attractions</i> )	EEA and Norway Grants
2018–2021	Mirinkle Roma Kulturális Örökség a Nyírségben és Szatmárban ( <i>Roma Cultural Heritage in Nyírség and Szatmár regions</i> )	EFOP ( <i>Human Capacity Development Operational Program</i> )

14 [http://www.hermanottointezet.hu/sites/default/files/competir\\_kiadvany\\_20141118.pdf](http://www.hermanottointezet.hu/sites/default/files/competir_kiadvany_20141118.pdf)



*Flute lesson in the Country House*

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Concerning the sustainability of heritage practices, it is almost a commonplace to emphasize the role of digitisation and digital heritage. Citing David E. Beel again, this process is comprehended as both a resilient step forward and a process that aims to make such collections and histories more resilient in the future. In the case of the Roma country house, one may find both intangible and tangible heritage collections on its website. Besides the photo collections of artefacts, household objects and thematic photo collections (from 1951 to the present), comprising ethnographic and sociological collections, photos of religious life, of the Roma kindergarten, and of cultural events, as well as video and sound archives including recordings of tales, folk songs and interviews.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, it seems that the Roma country house fulfils all the expectations that one could have about a local heritage site that protects, manages and re-uses its cultural traditions and practices and moreover involves the local community and therefore fosters social cohesion. Through its digitised platforms, it enables the sustainability of an otherwise almost forgotten and invisible rural culture.

### RESILIENT COMMUNITY OR INDIVIDUAL HEROES?

The success of this case study is however ambiguous. To what extent shall we talk about the redefinition of local rural identity and the contribution of this culture to build a sense of solidarity among rural communities and residents (according to Bessière and Brennan) and moreover, among Roma and non-Roma population if in the case of Hodász the local Roma heritage is protected in the middle of the Roma settlements, in an officially declared segregated area? What is the real impact of the community involvement in heritage practices when the community itself is living in extremely deprived housing and social conditions? And also, to what extent can we expect the local community to conserve and represent its heritage when the majority society, including the local authorities as well, are more ignorant than supportive of the case? This last question traces us back to the above-mentioned dichotomy of “we and them” between Roma and non-Roma groups. In the case of Hodász, it seems that in different historical and social contexts and despite its still persisting marginalized status, the “Romani voice” has been heard. Even if none of the three local institutions (the chapel, the kindergarten and the country house) have had an explicitly political mission, their existence has demonstrated a very powerful will for self-representation, identity building and knowledge production.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.romatajhaz.withssl.com/index.php/kiallitoter>

One can guess how many EU-funded projects have been undertaken in the last few decades since cultural heritage, social participation and the sharing of heritage have become main common strategies. For instance, the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe has been in existence since 1987 and contributes to increase the visibility of living European heritage. In the third regime of cultural heritage discourses, the communities are supposed to define their own heritage more autonomously (Sonkoly–Vahtikari 2018: 14). This process reflects on the shift in the role and behaviour of individuals from being cultural consumers to cultural producers. The dominant role of traditional organisational structures has been questioned as they could not satisfy the public's needs and interests. In this narrative, participatory heritage could be defined through the engagement of individuals in cultural activities outside the existing traditional institutions or not necessarily in interaction with them (Roued–Cunliffe–Copeland 2017: XV). However, the Hodász case showed that a certain institutionalization should be proceeded in order to sustain the initiatives economically. By looking at these previously described initiatives and activities, could we consider that the case of Hodász is a good practice of resilient cultural heritage? To what extent could we think about resilient communities? How should we evaluate empirically this phenomenon that seems to differentiate this village from others in the same region? To answer these questions and find possibilities to dissolve the ambiguity between theory and practice, further researches should be carried out.

With its attempts to engage and mobilise inhabitants and build connectedness among them through cultural heritage, Hodász has a very unique position in this heavily marginalised region and community. Melinda Rézműves' mission is explicitly this by fostering certain forms of heritage practices which can serve as reserves to achieve social cohesion. Resilience seems to be a useful model to understand this dynamic approach in a contemporary and historical perspective. The long-term existence of community development initiatives in this segregated Roma area exemplifies the role of human agency in the management of change. The bottom-up nature of the religious, educational and cultural "missions" (Roma Greek Catholic chapel, "string-kindergarten", Roma Country House) is very different from the practices of other villages and towns with similar socio-economic prospects in the region. Among several reasons for the low number of activities concerning the preservation, use and re-use of cultural heritage, the limited chance for rural tourism due to the negative connotation related to the Nyírség region and the poor recognition of its cultural values (or even those related to the landscape) should be highlighted. The few examples mostly represent the emergence of top-down narratives. What evolves from this is that resilience is- in this sense- a comparative concept of describing systems and system capacities to reveal disparities among them. This demonstrates the dual nature of the concept: it is used both as a capacity and as a process (Fejérdy–Z. Karvalics 2015: 115). Understanding resilience as a process allows conceptualisation of the democratization process of heritage ownership, its impact on social cohesion, the preservation of local identity through time and the strategic thinking behind that. Therefore, it is challenging to measure all the impacts of the activities because they could be more complex than what hard socio-economic indicators could show. One of the major impacts of the Country House is the building of communal connectedness and strengthening of social ties, which requires further research. Furthermore, its programmes and short-term projects could be considered as successful initiatives, as participatory practices are integrated in the heritage agenda. However, it should be noted that long-term sustainability is still a question when such a small institution struggles to survive from one project to another and suffers from a lack of official recognition.

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