



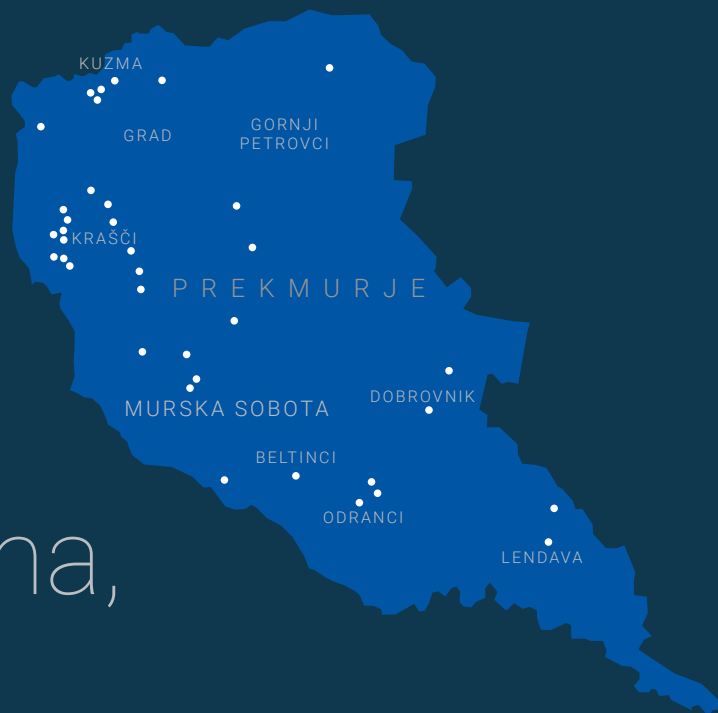
III.1

Map of Romani settlements
and hamlets in Prekmurje.



3.11

Prekmurje Roma, Slovenia



Samanta Baranja

The Prekmurje Roma live in the north-easternmost region of Slovenia, bordering Austria, Hungary and Croatia. Traditional occupations and the institution of Romani chiefs have almost completely disappeared with the exception of the Romani settlement of Kamenci which has even transformed into a cultural tourist site, offering an insight into the Romani cultural heritage. The development and preservation of the culture of the Prekmurje Roma depends on their socio-economic status – the higher it is, the lower is the level of awareness of the importance of preserving the Romani cultural heritage.

ROMANI GROUPS IN SLOVENIA: HISTORICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

According to historical sources, the arrival of the Roma to the area of today's Slovenia dates back to the 14th century. However, more accurate and frequent data come only from the 17th century onwards, especially from central registers.

The first bigger flow of Roma to the area of today's Slovenia came from the North-East. These Romani families mostly settled at the border. The second flow arrived from the South-East. Unlike the earlier arrivals, these Roma had been mostly nomads and continued to travel in the area. According to the places where they settled and the names of the countries they came from, these Romani groups are classified as Dolenjska Roma or Croatian Roma, Prekmurje Roma or Hungarian Roma, and the Sinti of Gorenjska (Štrukelj 2004).

Furthermore, during the Slovenian Independence War in 1991, several Romani families of former Yugoslavia migrated to Slovenia and settled mostly in bigger towns such as in Ljubljana and Maribor. This is the reason why they are referred to as Balkan or urban Roma (Baranja 2013).

The number of Roma currently living in Slovenia is estimated by various institutions, such as social work centers,

administrative units or non-governmental organizations, to be about 10,000 to 12,000. However, according to the figures of the 2002 population census which is based on the respondents' self-declaration, the number of the Roma was 3,246, while approximately the same amount of respondents, namely 3,834, stated Romani as their mother tongue.

ROMA IN THE PREKMURJE REGION

Prekmurje is predominantly a lowland region in north-eastern Slovenia which borders to Austria, Hungary and Croatia. The largest towns are Murska Sobota and Lendava. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2017) the region has 77,908 inhabitants divided between 19 municipalities of Prekmurje. Another numerous minority group of the region is represented by the Hungarians.

Today, there are around 3,200 Roma in Prekmurje, which accounts for about 4% of the total population. Roma are settled in the following municipalities: Beltinci, Cankova, Črenšovci, Dobrovnik, Grad, Hodoš, Kuzma, Lendava, Murska Sobota, Puconci, Rogaševci, Šalovci, Tišina, Turnišče. They live in 42 Romani settlements and hamlets, which are all positioned at the margin of the region: along the river Mura in the

III. 2

Prekmurje Roma during the filming
of the movie *Shanghai Gypsy*.

III. 3

One of the few preserved wooden houses
in the Romani settlement of Pušča.

south-west, alongside the creek Kučnica in the north-west (the border region of Slovenia and Austria) and at the edge of the vineyards alongside Dolga vas and Lendava in the south-east and the south of the region (Rudaš et al. 2013, p. 28).

According to the historian Štrukelj, the first arrival of the Roma to Prekmurje may be dated to the 14th century. Although there are no such records from the Prekmurje region itself, it is known that Roma arrived in the 14th century to Somogy, an administrative unit of the Kingdom of Hungary situated near to Prekmurje. The first written sources on the presence of Roma in Prekmurje are found in central registers from the 18th century onwards. For instance, the first record of a Romani child is dated to 1729 and found in the central register of Lendava.

Most Roma migrated to Prekmurje from the Kingdom of Hungary. They belonged either to the so-called Carpathian or the Vlach Romani group. In addition, under the rule of Maria Theresa, Roma from the Burgenland region (today's Austria) as well as Sinti migrated to Prekmurje. The Roma of the Lendava municipality came from Croatia and towns which border to Hungary. They were generally of the Chergash Romani group, consisting of blacksmiths and drill-makers who travelled for work. The most common Romani family names of the region include Horvat, Baranja, Kokaš, Cener, Šarkezi, Pestner, Olah, Ratko and Levačič.

PREKMURJE ROMANI AND ITS USE

According to the linguist Halwachs (2002), the group of Prekmurje Roma was historically associated with the group of Roma in south-western Hungary and with the group of Austrian Roma in Burgenland, and therefore the Romani dialects spoken by these groups are expected to be very similar. Prekmurje Romani, Burgenland Romani and Vend Romani in south-western Hungary belong to the Vend branch of the South Central dialects of Romani.

The particularity of Prekmurje Romani as compared to the other two Vend dialects has primarily a phonological nature. Prekmurje Romani uses alongside the inherited diphthongs *aj*, *oj*, *uj* also the diphthongs *au* (e.g. *aulav* 'word'), *ej* (e.g. *ejvda*

'barely') and *ou* (e.g. *oufto* 'eight'), which are most likely the result of the influence of the contact language (Prekmurje dialect of Slovenian) on Prekmurje Romani. Another characteristic feature of Prekmurje Romani is the optional sound change *-o* to *-u* at the end of the word, e.g. *mro/mru* 'mine', *dugo/dugu* 'long', *angušto/anguštu* 'finger'.

Prekmurje Roma call themselves *Ro(u)ma* in Romani; a Romani man is called *Rom*, a Romani woman *Romni*. The term referring to the non-Roma is *Go(u)rdja* (also *Go(u)rgja*, *Go(u)rdža*); the noun *Go(u)ri* is used for a non-Romani man while the noun *Ga(u)ži* is reserved for a non-Romani woman. The Prekmurje Roma also use a special name in the Prekmurje dialect to denote members of the majority population: *Pavri* 'non-Romani people, farmers', *Paver* 'non-Romani man', *Paverka* 'non-Romani woman'. These denominations are known passively by most inhabitants of Prekmurje. As for the etymology, it most probably comes from the German noun *Bauer* 'farmer'.

Prekmurje Romani is primarily used in verbal communication within the Romani community. The level of preservation and maintenance of Prekmurje Romani differs from settlement to settlement. In some settlements, only older speakers use it for everyday communication while the younger generation has only a passive knowledge of it. This is mainly the case of settlements where the educational level and the employment rate are higher as compared to other Romani settlements. On the other hand, Prekmurje Romani is the most vital in settlements which comprise of households of lower socio-economic status. Here, Prekmurje Romani is the first language of even the youngest generation.

Until recently, the opportunities to use Prekmurje Romani in the media and public spaces have been limited. However, there is a growing interest in the last years to use Romani in these domains too. As a result, Romani is now present in the newspapers, magazines, teaching materials, music, film and television and radio programs. One of the most important newspapers which report about the life of Roma in both Prekmurje Romani and Slovenian is the newspaper *Romano them*, published by the Association of the Roma in Slovenia.

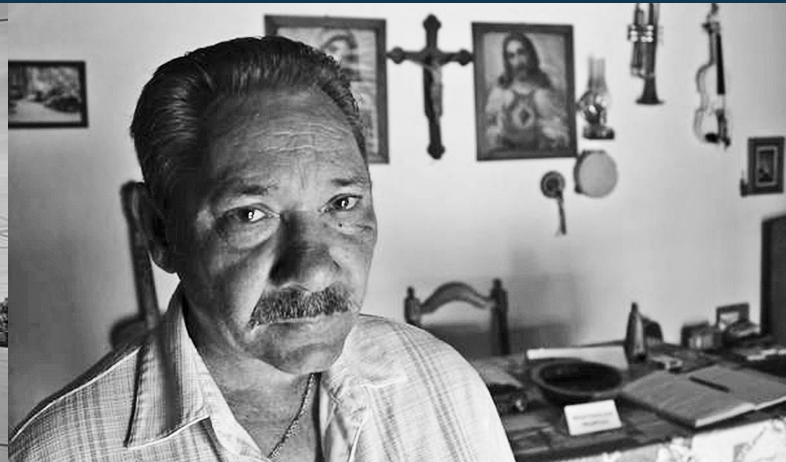
III. 4

Modern houses in the Romani settlement of Vanča vas – Borejci.



III. 5

Ludvik Levačič, chief of the Romani settlement of Kamenci.



There have been identified 130 children's and youth books in various dialects of Romani and/or Slovenian, which can help Romani children to strengthen literacy skills in their mother tongue and in the language of the majority population. These are included into the Catalogue of literature (2015) that contributes to the language development of Romani children.

The popular Romani music groups from Prekmurje are *Langa*, *Halgato band* and the ethno band *Del tuha*, singing both in Romani and Slovenian language. Their texts for songs are also prepared by Feri Lainšček, a renowned Prekmurje writer who is, among others, the author of the novel *Nedotakljivi* 'Untouchables' after which the Slovenian drama film *Shanghai Gypsy* (Slovenian: *Šanghaj*) was filmed in 2012. A special feature of the film is that most of the dialogues are in the Romani language.

The radio station *Murski val* with a head office in Murska Sobota is one of the first radio stations in Slovenia which dedicated a program to broadcast up-to-date information on the life of the Prekmurje Roma. The radio program is called *Romskih 60* 'Romani 60' and broadcasts in Prekmurje Romani and Slovenian.

In 2003, in Murska Sobota the Romani Information Centre and the Romani Radio Production (ROMIC) were founded where domestic and foreign literature on Roma is collected and the first Romani radio in Slovenia works. The main purpose of these activities is to preserve the cultural identity and language of the Romani community.

In 2007, the weekly Romani program *Amare droma* 'Our paths' started broadcasting on the national radio with a focus on the political, social, educational and cultural issues of the Roma in Slovenia and abroad. The program is broadcasted in various dialects of the Romani language and Slovenian similarly to the Romani TV program *So vakeres?* 'What are you talking about?' which is seen twice a month on the national channel since 2008.

Despite the numerous attempts to introduce Romani into public space, it has still no equivalent position as compared to the other languages spoken in Slovenia. One of the challenges that need to be given special attention in the future is the integration of the aspects of the Romani language and culture into the educational system. In this respect, we are faced with numerous obstacles such as the lack of quality educational materials, shortage of well-trained professionals in

teaching Romani and the low motivation of Romani children and their parents to learn Romani.

CULTURE OF THE PREKMURJE ROMA OR WHEN TRADITION MEETS MODERNITY

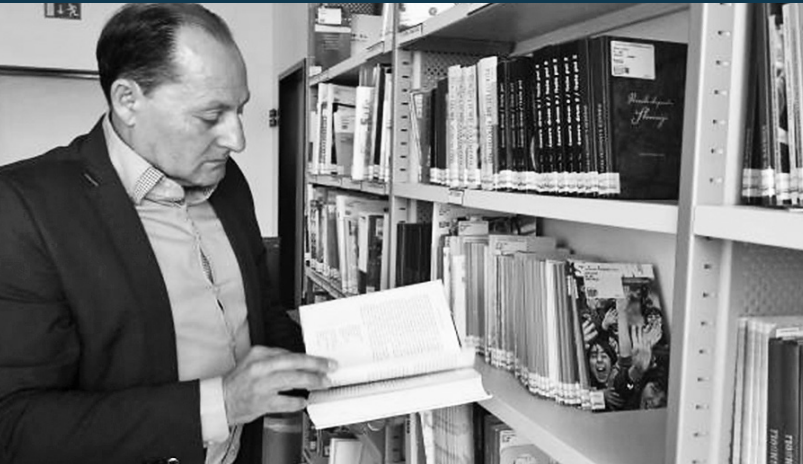
According to the historian Štrukelj (2004), the Prekmurje Roma began to settle down in the 19th century. One of the first major Romani settlements was formed on the territory of the village Černelavci where the Horvat family was the first to settle down. Roma lived in so-called knitted houses which were single-sided and covered with straw, corn or roofing cardboard. The wicker walls were externally and internally plastered with mortar from mud. On the top of such plaster the walls were painted with lime. The Prekmurje Roma also resided in houses made of a clay mixture and in wooden houses plastered with clay mortar. Modern built homes began to appear in Romani settlements in the last decade of the 20th century.

Traditionally, there was a chief among the Roma in each Romani settlement of Prekmurje. He took care of mutual relations of the Roma in the settlement and functioned as the mediator between the Roma and the non-Roma. The institution of the Romani chief in Prekmurje has only been preserved until today in the Romani settlement of Kamenci where various initiatives are launched in order to preserve the Romani cultural heritage. The first Romani museum and the first Romani equestrian centre in Slovenia are located in Kamenci. Elsewhere, the Romani chiefs have been replaced by Romani municipal councillors whose main task is to mediate between the Romani community and the local policy-makers.

Traditional occupations, including blacksmiths, drill-makers, grinders, stone crushers, knitters and horse sellers, are mostly extinct. Also begging, which was usually performed by Romani women with a child in their lap, is disappearing while it is only preserved in areas with a high level of poverty. Another important source of living was fortune-telling. It was a typical occupation of Romani women. Given the poor employment opportunities in the Prekmurje region, the Roma have started to work massively in neighbouring Austria. A considerable part of the Prekmurje Roma is employed at leather factories in Feld-

III. 6

Darko Rudaš, president of the Forum of Romani Councillors in Slovenia.



III. 7

Religious images in a Romani house.



bach and Wollsdorf as well as in the agriculture sector in Austrian Styria. Further reasons for the labor migration of the Prekmurje Roma to Austria are the satisfactory income level as compared to the Slovenian standards and a pleasant work environment for the employees.

The Prekmurje Roma strongly maintain beliefs related to birth, marriage, death as well as to some (religious) holidays. If a woman is pregnant, all her wishes need to be satisfied. Otherwise, the child would get a birthmark on the body. For instance, if strawberries are eaten in front of the pregnant woman while she is not offered by them, and meantime she touches a certain body part of her own, the future-born baby will have a strawberry stain on the same body part. Newborns that are not yet baptized have to wear a red colour ribbon around their wrist as protection against the so-called evil eye. A woman visiting for the first time the newborn should not have her period, because the newborn can get cradle cap and rash.

The day before the wedding, the newly-weds must sleep separately. On the wedding day, when the groom comes for the bride or the bride for the groom (depending on where they will

live after the marriage), it is necessary to smash a plate in the front of the entrance door. It is believed that it brings them happiness. In recent years, because of the large number of wedding guests, it became common to organise the marriage together with the baptism of the couple's child.

The Roma are still very afraid of death. If someone dies, usually the whole community mourns for the deceased by wearing black, avoids listening to music and watching television. Most Prekmurje Roma is Catholic. However, they do not practice it actively. The majority of the Roma do not go to the church, because they believe they are religious by their hearts. Their homes are adorned by a significant number of religious images. Especially they worship the Virgin Mary.

The most important religious holiday is Christmas which is mostly celebrated in the same way as it is by the majority population. On Christmas Day, the woman should not leave her home before noon if she wants to bring happiness to the house. On the New Year's Day, in order to bring happiness to the family, a man should enter the house first. Also a man should be the first who wish happy New Year to a woman.

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