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Politics, Citizenship, Diversity and Inclusion

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Service-Learning Approach to Citizenship Education and Professional Learning: The ROMunicare Project

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Premise

ROMunicare was a DG JUST action project implemented in Rome between October 2017 and June 2018. European Commission aims to fight against discrimination of Roma on the grounds provided for the Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. With the Treaty of Lisbon (2007), the Charter became binding for the European institutions and the Member States. All the partners of the project were Italian:

- the Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies (IRPPS-CNR) that has a long history in participating European projects in the field of human and political sciences (demography, sociology, economy, education);
- the Municipality of Roma-Capitale represented by the Department of Social Policy, where the Special Office for Roma, Sinti e Caminanti operates under the direction of the Major;
- ARES 2.0, a Roman company specialized in social communication activities, management of projects, social research and training;
- POPÍCA Onlus, an NGO that operates in Italy and Romania, where it deals with street children. On the national territory and in particular in Rome, it provides support services for immigration and Roma inclusion, with particular reference to education on minors.

A large part of the documentation produced during the course and at the end of the project activities is downloadable at the website of the project (www.romunicare.eu). Its principal aims were to:

- empower the awareness of Romanian Roma living in Rome in informal (un-authorised) dwellings on their rights and how to actively participate in them;
- train public servants and NGO Operators to human rights and citizenship;
- raise awareness about the importance of diffusion of anti-discrimination procedures through actions and practices and to support the adoption and diffusion of correct procedural action;
- create a dialogue between those targets that usually occupy conflictual positions;
- promote social inclusion following the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategy up to 2020 adopted in Italy by UNAR: *National Strategy for Inclusion of ROMA, Sinti and Caminanti 2101-2020*.

1. Social context

There are no shared estimates about the presence of Roma people in Rome. According to official data provided by the Municipality of Rome (see Table 1),

based on the survey carried out in 2017 by the Local Police's Unit for Public Security and Emergencies, the various Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti (hereinafter RSC) settlements in Rome urban area host over 8,500 people.

TABLE 1. Roma people living in Rome by type of settlements

Type of settlements/camps	Number	Population	%
Formal/official settlements*	7	4,503	52.1
Tolerated settlements *	11	1,145	13.2
Unauthorized spontaneous settlements*	19	2,144	24.8
Reception centre**	1	100	1.2
Buildings occupied solely by Romani***	2	750	8.7
Total	40	8,642	100.0

Sources: * Census by the Local Police of Roma Capitale – Public Security and Emergency Unit, Rome, 2017; ** Parliamentary Committee of Enquiry on security conditions and decay in cities and their outskirts, Chamber of Deputies, Doc. XX-bis, N. 19, 5 February 2018: 298; *** Associazione 21 luglio, 2108: 3.

Formal and tolerated settlements mostly host RSC who are Italian nationals or who come from the former Yugoslavia (and now stateless), whose presence in Italy is longstanding, while informal settlements mostly host Roma people coming from Romania and to a lesser extent from Bulgaria, who have arrived in Italy more recently after the entry of these countries in the EU.

With specific reference to unauthorized camps, other estimates (*Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulle condizioni di sicurezza e degrado delle città e delle loro periferie*, 2018) paint quite a different picture from those of the of the above mentioned Local Police's Unit, with a much higher number of settlements (up to 300) but lower overall population (about 1,200 people).

The informal dwellings are located mainly in the territory of the third, ninth and eleventh municipality districts (the municipality of Roma-Capitale is divided in 15 of such districts).The majority of the Romanian Roma in Rome come from urban areas, namely Craiova, Calarasi, Timisoara and Drobeta-Turnu Severin. The predominant religion is Orthodox Christian.

A survey carried out at the beginning of the project highlighted the training needs of both Roma living in informal dwellings and service Operators. About the former, the survey reiterated the existence of an extremely fragile human capital: one out four is illiterate, even if one out of three has either a middle school or a high school diploma; none is university graduate and the 54% of the Roma interviewed (150 people) do not speak Italian. Among the adolescents, there are also a lot of dropout and NEET. As for the Operators, the sample interviewed (114) expressed unfavourable attitudes towards Roma, regardless of the (quite high) level of education, and in particular among the Operators who declared previous work experiences with the Roma.

The inquiry known as 'Mafia Capitale' has negatively affected this social context, fuelling a climate of distrust among the Operators of public services and causing a greater deterioration of the life in Roma camps. There are well-founded fears that all this could compromise the already problematic implementation of the National Strategy for RSC Inclusion and slow down the progressive overcoming of the camps envisaged by the new 'Roma Plan' adopted in 2017 by the Municipality of Rome.

2. Theoretical framework

As a *Service learning*, ROMunicare consisted of *Frontal and Mutual Learning activities* for and between public services Operators and Roma people living in informal dwellings based on a *Philanthropic model*, that is «a mechanism for

personal development, as well as of critical thinking» (Hogan, Bayley, 2010: 421). According to Robertson (2000), this model developed three principal attitudes in both Operators and Roma people engaged in the project: reciprocity, reflection-on-reality and reflexivity.

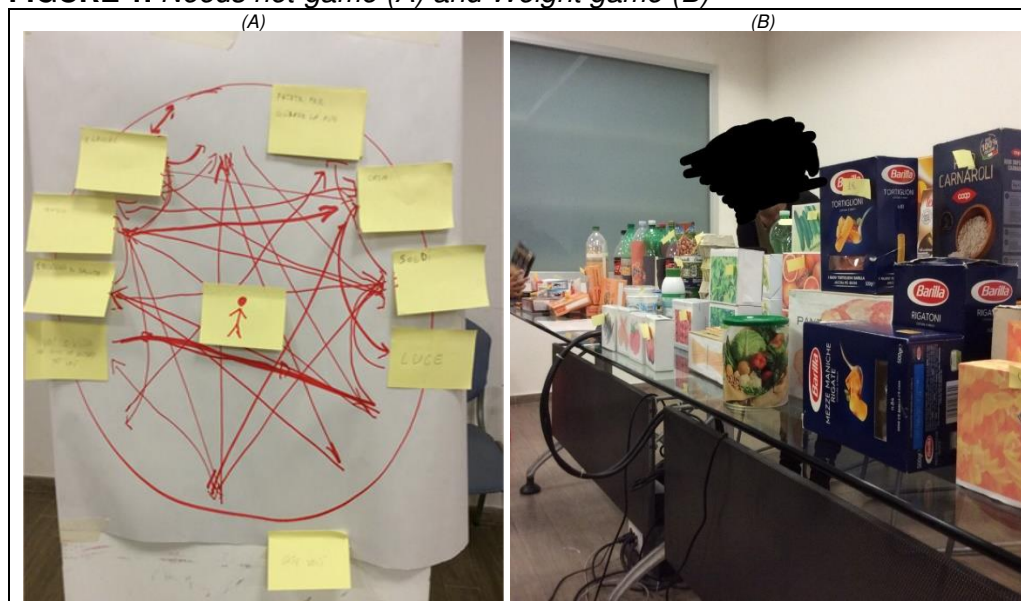
The first implies the 'development of knowledge', and it produced a tension between the theories related to Roma communities, prejudice phenomenon, citizenship and human rights. From this tension came the empowerment process between the researchers and the target groups. Thanks to a more consistent knowledge of the ROMunicare objectives, the second attitude has grown both in the operators and in the Roma people. They began to positively react dealing with the EU principle of non-discrimination and to reflect on the consequences of behaviours not adequate for the purpose to be achieved. These reflection efforts have produced a greater awareness of the Roma and of the Operators about the practices to adopt when they act in public services towards a shared and standardized model for the welcoming of Roma and other disadvantaged categories, in order to overcome biases and stereotypes and to create a favourable social environment for Roma citizenship.

3. The results of the Service learning

The training activities developed throughout three separate stages: a first cycle of frontal learning sessions dedicated to the Roma living in informal dwellings, a second action of frontal learning for the Operators of public services, and a final stage in which both the target groups have participated (mutual learning).

Frontal learning with Roma consisted of four meetings during which the following topics were addressed: Identity and prejudice; Needs, rights and responsibilities; Health; School, employment and housing. During this first cycle two tools were used, such as the 'flower game' and the 'needs net-game' (Figures 1), in order to strengthen the identity and subjectivity of the Roma and to promote greater awareness of active participation in citizenship rights.

FIGURE 1. *Needs net-game (A) and Weight game (B)*



Frontal learning with Operators has been organized in three meetings during which the following topics were discussed:

- principle of non-discrimination, human rights and integration of minorities;
- non-discrimination practices in the four axes of the European Strategy for the Roma Inclusion: Education, Work, Health and Housing;
- the new 'Roma Plan' and the evaluation of inclusion policies.

The operators were involved in a SWOT analysis (Strength-Weakness-Opportunities-Threats) in order to better understand the system in which they operate and to allow them a greater awareness of the aspects related to Roma inclusion.

Mutual learning, the third phase of training activities, served to create a dialogue between Roma and operators on a renewed basis. In particular, on the basis of the results achieved during frontal learning, this activity focused above all on stimulating the target groups to confront each other on three issues that emerged as the most relevant to favour the inclusion of Roma living in informal dwellings: Access to registered residence; School inclusion; Access to work.

The dialogue between Roma and Operators has developed on the basis of some hypotheses formulated by the project partnership, which has then become guidelines offered to the Municipality of Rome. Each of the aforementioned activities has achieved specific results. Thus, with regard to frontal learning carried out with Roma people, they were:

- awareness and acknowledgment regarding their status as subject of social and citizen right.
- questioning sensitive and discriminatory topics as 'homosexuality' in dwelling context to reduce negative stereotypes between ROMA.
- empowerment of participant women through the health and education issues.
- strong distrust of public authorities.

With reference to the Service learning with Operators, the relevant results were:

- awareness and acknowledgment of European legislation on non-discrimination goals, human rights and Italian Strategy for the Inclusion of RSC.
- lack of a structured link between central departments and municipal structures
- managerial goals poorly shared and too abstract; lack of tools for audit of the results.
- demotivation and discouragement, widespread among the Local Police operators (risks of burnout),
- last but not least, mutual learning highlighted the following results:
- establishment of a dialogue between two communities which historically had been in conflict.
- the residency issue emerged for both of considered targets as crucial question.
- producing new practices of hearing and helping to face the residency issue.
- promoting the implementation of ENI code (European not Registered) in the school system.
- emerging of discretionary and autonomy practices of public servant to deal with informal dwellings in Rome, according to the theory of street-level bureaucracy (Saruis, 2013),
- the incompatibility between fiscal code and ENI code produce exclusion of from health care.
- the introduction of ENI code for the school system could facilitate the inclusion of Roma pupils in the system.

Conclusions

Although the exogenous factors have slowed down and compromised the implementation of the project, ROMunicare was an opportunity for Roma and Operators to reflect on the social spaces in which they act and come into contact. Many have asked to replicate the project to consolidate the acquired knowledge and to improve the interaction not only between Roma and Operators, but also between the latter and the top figures of the public administration.

The results achieved are encouraging and could help to tackle the numerous problems of inclusion suffered by the Roma. From this point of view, it is necessary to make public decision makers responsible for the importance of periodically carrying out training and updating courses. Far from being the loss of time and resources, these activities can be powerful factors in improving skills for the benefit of the whole community.

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