



Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

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Final Research Report: Life at the Crossroads of Social Change.

The objectives of this research study were to invigorate Croatian Romani women's empowerment and bring their lived experiences into public view. The project was conceptualized in terms of two closely related stages at which action research and gender analysis intersect. The first stage sought to establish an empowerment program based on Romani women's needs. The outcome of the first stage was accomplished through the collaboration with the Croatian Employment Service. The second stage sought to bring to light the lived experiences of Romani women in Croatia's post-communist political economy. This report offers interpretations of my research data and recommends strategies for social change for different stakeholders.

This study would not have been possible without the collaboration of Romani leadership and the Croatian Employment Service or Hrvatski Zavod za Zaposljavanje (HZZ), which advanced my project by, among other things, arranging for my access to study participants and showing interest in Croatian Romani women's empowerment and employability. My recommendations are directed at three constituencies: Romani leadership; policy makers and legislators; and the HZZ. These recommendations have already been disseminated to the Romani leadership and the HZZ, who after reading my report and arranging for a roundtable discussion with the interviewees and Romani leadership, agreed to incorporate them. I will continue to monitor this process and evaluate subsequent developments. On the macro legislative level, I have a commitment from the Center for Human Rights (CHR) in Zagreb to help disseminate my report and recommendations to Croatian policy makers and legislators, as well as to the international community that supports the advancement of Croatian Romanies. (In order to accommodate the dissemination process and exercise sufficient quality control, I had my report professionally translated into Croatian.)

CHR, which is currently preparing a report on the situation of Romani employment in Zagreb and Međumurje, and the influence of the European Union on Croatia's integration, proposed that we jointly disseminate our reports. The reports will be published on a variety of websites including, on the governmental level, the Office of the Ombudsperson (for general matters, children and gender); the Office of National Minorities; the Council for National Minorities; and, on an international level, the European Union; the Roma Decade; and a variety of Croatian NGOs, including the Institute for Democracy (IDEMO). CHR also envisions roundtable events taking place sometime in the spring of this year (2007), during which the information would be communicated verbally to Romani leadership and other interested parties.

In the course of examining the lived experiences of Romani women in Zagreb, I refined the initial questions in my research proposal in order to situate this diverse and multi-faceted minority culture against the backdrop of the rapidly changing political economy of Croatia. As my research objectives narrowed, I focused on how unemployed Romani women contribute to their household income in light of their unemployment, and the refashioning of minority rights legislation in Croatia, particularly Croatia's recent interest in the plight of Romanies.ⁱ I also closely examined the different contexts which shape the lives of Romani women, e.g., the cultural, social, political and economic forces that influence their lives, and inquired as to what extent these forces are resisted or renegotiated.

As explained in my research proposal, I have pursued the foregoing questions within a framework of action-based gender analysis, which deconstructs the ways in which men and women express the *meaning* of their everyday existence through their ongoing interactions with their environment.ⁱⁱ Cultural analysis provides a lens through which the normative context of the everyday life experiences of individuals can be examined. It begins with the premise that people's experiences and perceptions are culturally constituted. Action-based analysis provides a particularly potent set of tools for examining how the political and economic changes following the collapse of self-managing socialism—notably, the *Brotherhood and Unity* characteristic of the former Yugoslavia—have impacted the working lives of Romani women in Croatia. This methodological approach also helps to disclose the ways in which women connect with their cultural communities; seek to overcome feelings of inadequacy brought about by displacement, migration and immigration; and negotiate the social and cultural transformation of their environment. In particular, it offers a way of understanding these phenomena by revealing the wider societal, local and personal forces that mediate them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The ethnographic data supporting this study were collected from a number of different sources. Action research in service of Romani women's empowerment was conducted by the immersion of the researcher in the study community; through informal interviews and conversations; and by means of in-depth interviews with Romani and non-Romani women in Zagreb.ⁱⁱⁱ

I immersed myself in the study community in order to get a sense of Romani women's experiences, spending ten days (10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) in different Romani households. To ensure that I would get a realistic picture of the Romani community in Zagreb, women from different ages, cultural backgrounds, places of origin in the former Yugoslavia, and levels of education were included. On any given day, when visiting a

particular household, I spoke with *many* Romani women. Visiting a household meant contact with anywhere from five to fifteen women, many, if not most, were either unemployed in the formal sense, underemployed, or generating income through informal means. Visiting the households and neighborhoods where Romani women live meant that I also had the opportunity to speak with and witness the living conditions of ethnic Croatians and others living at the margins of Croatian society.^{iv}

I also had the opportunity to visit and engage in informal interviews (five of which were taped and transcribed) with Romani women through a number of different venues, including community gatherings, meetings with community leaders and youth substance abuse prevention seminars.^v

Six in-depth interviews with Romani women—who are officially registered as unemployed persons in the HZZ in Zagreb—and two in-depth interviews with women of Croatian ethnicity, who are registered with the HZZ and who have no ties to the Romani community, are included in this analysis.^{vi} The latter group was added in order to explore the similarities and differences between the two groups and place Romani women within their specific social, political and cultural contexts.

Three groups, a total of 67 Romani women, were invited by HZZ to participate in the study. Of those groups, 35 women (52%) appeared for the meeting during which the research study was introduced. Of the 35 women who were introduced to the proposed study, eight (20%) signed up for the interviews. In the end, six women were included in the interviews.^{vii}

In order to learn about study participants' educational histories and labor experiences, and to better understand the lives and plights of the interviewees, I asked questions pertaining to the circumstances that prevented study participants from completing their education, finding acceptable employment, and achieving a desirable standard of living. I also asked questions about the nature of employment—that is, the important criteria for desirable employment, such as stability, latitude for the expression of creative intelligence, and independence. Study participants' perceptions of what constitutes ideal employment, their aspirations for the future, their assets and talents and what, if anything, prevented them from achieving their employment goals were also solicited. Also explored during these in-depth interviews were women's views about support systems, what constitutes success for them, and the social reality of (re)entering the labor market.

CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Croatian Romanies form a diverse cultural group, which nevertheless shares similar traditions, a common language, and a shared history of brutal marginalization since their arrival in Europe some thousand years ago (Crowe 1994, Fraser 1993, Hancock, 2003). What characterizes European Romani history is their resilience in the face of the many regimes that sought to actively exclude them from permanent settlement and full social, economic and political participation, and their resourcefulness in employing the forces that aimed to suppress them as a means of forging an existence through the informal economic sectors and semi-permanent settlements.^{viii} Croatian Romanies also share the opportunity—for the first time in Croatia's history—to become the beneficiaries of new social policies, such as the prioritization of human rights, including an emphasis on the rights of women and minorities cultures in Croatia. Croatian Romanies, however, are not a homogeneous group for a number of different reasons, and for this reason not all Romanies are positioned to take advantage of Croatia's minority rights legislation.

Minority cultures such as the Romanies got reshuffled in 1991, between the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the emergence of the Croatian nation-state. As such, Romanies now living in Croatia arrived from different parts of the former Yugoslavia. Accordingly, they bring with them different experiences, in terms of education, the particular professions of their forefathers, how long they have been stationary, social acceptance in a given region, and political participation. In addition to these differences, many have had international lived experiences during the former regime (as economic immigrants) and more recently during the war in Croatia (as political immigrants). The social characteristics of those who lived abroad and returned to Croatia in the mid 1990s include interrupted or discontinued education, lack of Croatian citizenship papers due to missed application deadlines, loss of real and personal property due to the war, social displacement shared by migrants, immigrants, refugees and victims of war of many nationalities.

Croatian Romanies engage in different religious and cultural practices, and enjoy different levels of social standing, economic opportunities and levels of women's emancipation. In addition to these differences, not all Romanies living in Croatia today officially identify themselves as Romani. The last census counted about 9,500 Romanies in Croatia, but reliable estimates indicate that anywhere from 30 to 40 thousand Romanies reside there. Perhaps more importantly, anywhere between 20 to 50 percent of Romanies are *undocumented*, which precludes access to healthcare and other social services, including educational and employment opportunities.

This subgroup of Romanies exists, as did their forefathers and mothers, at the margins of society. Without documentation, members of this subgroup have few rights and hardly any opportunities for advancement. Other subgroups of Romanies—e.g., those with membership in the working and middle classes of Croatian society, and who have been stationary for many generations—face different problems in terms of employability, competition in the free market place, political representation and discrimination. Romani women, however, face across the subgroups double discrimination.^{ix}

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS

Romani women face a number of obstacles that prevent them from achieving their goals and desired standard of living. Certain impediments to achieving success have been directly expressed by the study participants; others were concluded from the context in which study participants presented themselves. There are three primary indicia of Romani women's unemployment and underemployment: (i) gender inequity, along with the absence of attractive employment opportunities and a desirable standard of living; (ii) poor access to education, social displacement, and the *labor of caring*; (iii) inadequate systems of support and neglect.

Gender inequity, access to employment and a desirable standard of living:

Romani women are most concerned about their living conditions and how to economically sustain their families. Differently put, they are most concerned with housing issues and income-generating potentials. What Romani women want most is *stable employment*, which is both a cultural norm associated with job security imagined in the previous regime and an economic reality. But what Romani women need in order

to achieve this goal is greater gender equity and greater control over their lives and an understanding of the political mechanisms that can enable them to achieve this control.^x

Interestingly, the control group expressed similar desires and frustrations about not being able to find *stable employment*. In interviews, Romani women emphasized that they do not want government handouts, just *stable employment*. (This sentiment is echoed by many Croatians, of all levels of education, nationality and experience.)

One of the differences between the two groups, however, is that the control group does not have as supportive of a cultural community as the former.^{xi} This is because in the past, Romanians, as a historically marginalized minority culture, have sought sustenance from their cultural community.^{xii} Globalization and a complex intersection of other forces (which are beyond the scope of this discussion) have tended to erode these communal relationships. Today, the sustenance of individuals is maintained through nuclear families and extended households. The needs and values of Romani families not only provide sustenance to the study participants, but, in many instances, also prevent Romani women from achieving economic independence, and greater control over their lives more generally. This begins with cultural values that socialize little girls to serve their elders—something to which little boys are not subjected—and extends to the social hierarchies that oblige married women in a given household to serve their in-laws and devote themselves to maintaining and reproducing their families. The emphasis on the collective and the *sustenance* of others over one's own needs and desires continues to be a common practice among Romani women from all walks of life, including those with higher levels of education.

Working for the collective, rather than for the individual, echoes the cultural values associated with self-managing socialism and *Brotherhood and Unity*, which are now part of Croatia's sociopolitical history. Working for the collective—in this case, the extended household—is characteristic of many marginalized peoples who hold the view that one's life, labor and paycheck is never solely one's own, but the shared property of the collective. Emblematic of the current cultural milieu is a comprehensive downgrading of the value of the collective that is pejoratively associated with the previous regime.

Moving closer toward free market capitalism has resulted in a more individualistic model of social relations. In particular, 80% of the current labor force is comprised of contingent labor (short-term employment which legally cannot exceed 3 years) and, to a lesser extent, seasonal labor, in which some Romani men and fewer women are employed. Only 20% of the labor force is in the so-called *stable employment* sector, i.e., employment that is not regulated by limits on its duration. According to HZZ, *stable employment* characterizes most government municipal jobs. This decline of such jobs and industry jobs is reflected in the number of individuals on social welfare in Croatia, which has risen substantially from 65,000 in the late 1980s (when the *stable employment* sector was greater) to 311,000 presently (Državni Zavod za Statistiku, 2006). The consequences of the large contingent labor sector are also reproduced in the current national unemployment rate of 15.7 %, with alarming numbers for women (19.9%) as well as men (11.8%) (August 2006: Mjesečni Statistički Bilten, HZZ). Croatia's recent boost in the tourist industry and the *incline* of contingent labor has at the same time resulted in a decline in national unemployment numbers which were as high as 19% a couple of years ago.

Furthermore, many Romani women have internalized values that do not allow for gender equality within their households. Although they want to realize a better standard of living—e.g., adequate housing, citizenship papers, and job security—they frequently

do not see their individual roles in achieving this. Rather, they view such changes as only resulting from “higher up,” that is, from economic or political reforms. Accordingly, they understand their particular roles as limited to maintaining and supporting their households. Interestingly, when asked who of their siblings is the most successful and why, Romani women most frequently gave examples of brothers or sisters who had “made it own their own” and who did not receive support from government institutions. Many Romani women—again, not all since change is on the rise—do not view themselves as independent career makers or individuals who have control over their social and economic lives. To illustrate, when I asked women under 40 and as young as 26 how they envision their future, they often responded by insisting that their lives are already predetermined and that change is no longer realistic or desirable for them, and that only the lives of their children count. This view was frequently articulated by community leaders, spouses and others. When I asked these women what they want most for their children, the answer was most frequently “a place to live and a secure job.” Rarely did anyone mention a better education, more gender equality and freedom, or stronger political representation for the Romani community.

Overall, Romani women are extremely hardworking and resourceful. I cannot emphasize this point enough because many negative stereotypes exist in Croatian society, which depict Romanies as lazy, dirty, and as people who beg and steal for a living. My ethnographic evidence shows that Romani women contribute substantially to their household income and engage in a wide array of unpaid household labor activities, including keeping their living environment meticulously clean.^{xiii} All women who I visited, including the sick or elderly, engage in unpaid household labor activities and many participate in informal income-generating activities, a characteristic which they share with the control group. Those working in the informal sector sell clothing at the market without having obtained the permits needed to secure health and retirement benefits. As a result, they frequently have their goods confiscated, and are fined and harassed by the police. They also face court appearances when caught. In some instances, they are jailed for failure to pay their fines. Other informal sector income-generating strategies include collecting iron, copper, aluminum, plastic bottles and tires (all of which activities are common in Zagreb), as well as collecting products that are found in the forest, such as chestnuts, acorns and herbs (a practice that exists primarily outside of Zagreb).^{xiv}

Education, social displacement, and the *labor of caring*:

Croatia’s goal of increasing Romani access to the labor market through educational opportunities has made a positive step toward implementing much needed social change for this minority culture. At present, the number of Romani kindergartens is on the rise and efforts have been made to include all Romani children in preschool programs. The National Program for Roma has provided stipends, which help to finance secondary education. Further, prospective university students enjoy so-called positive discrimination. Sixteen individuals from Romani origin currently study at universities across the country. Although this number seems low in comparison to Macedonia, which has a comparably sized Romani population but only 2 ½ million citizens in comparison to the 4 ½ million in Croatia, there has been a marked increase in the number of Croatian Romani students since 2002.^{xv} This positive change is due in part to the efforts of Romani leadership and the support administered through the National Program and the

Roma Decade. Similarly, the numbers for students enrolled in secondary education have been on the rise, as have the numbers of adults reentering the basic (8th grade) schooling system.

Although these changes are positive, many women I spoke with did not see obtaining an education as something that would radically alter their lives. I should note that I observed marked differences in attitudes toward this issue, between women who have completed 8th grade and those who have not. The latter are less inclined to find themselves at the crossroads of social change through educational means. Even though many women learned about the value of education and frequently stressed the necessity of obtaining an education during interviews, the majority did little to encourage their children to complete primary education and young girls were rarely encouraged to go beyond 8th grade. Few women are interested in furthering their own education, although some recognized the merit of education (if not for themselves, at the very least for their children). Their responses were frequently that they feel too old, are too ashamed, or do not see the use of completing their education as adults.^{xvi} These women frequently emphasized that their lives belonged to their children and that they need to fulfill their obligation to provide for their families prior to thinking about advancing their own needs.

At the same, what women told me during interviews and in private conversations differed substantially from what they told me in public with their elders and other household members present. To give an example, a soon to be married 15 year old woman said that she saw her future as a homemaker who engages in all the required activities to maintain her now 10 member household. In private, I learned that this young woman had received “5” and “4” grades (“5” being the equivalent to an “A” grade) in school and that she speaks 3 languages fluently. She told me that she would like to “have been” a social worker. Clearly, the “have been” qualifier, along with the notion that her life is not her own, illustrates the high price women pay for their *labor of caring* and the internalized values that do not allow for gender equality. Another example comes directly from one of my interviewees who, during our interview and with her father present, said that she wanted to become a nurse aid or someone who works with ill children and therefore has enrolled in the free Puska Škola to complete her 8th grade education. After the interview, which was taped, her father told her angrily that she has unrealistic expectations and had “answered my questions incorrectly.” He claimed further that the only employment his daughter is suitable for is maintenance, at best in a municipal capacity, but more likely working in a hotel or office building.

Ideas about education are passed down to Romani children, who grow up in a cultural milieu where education is sometimes emphasized, but not practiced, by adult members of the household. Thus, children are often faced with conflicting models of behavior. I was told repeatedly that schoolbooks and secondary education are too costly for parents, yet both are subsidized by the government. I also saw little material evidence of educational materials in the households I visited, e.g., no books or educational games, and often no suitable space in which to study. Although all households I visited had TV sets—some even more than one—educational channels were rarely watched. Moreover, when asked about the last book they had read, interesting movie they had seen, or cultural event they had attended, most women said that they have no time for such activities, as though such activities were a waste of time.

Adding to the already dire attitude toward education observed among too many members of the adult population is the fact that Croatian society is rapidly moving toward technological advancement and labor sectors that will require increasingly higher levels

of education. The statistics provided by the HZZ do not look promising. The largest group of unemployed individuals is comprised of those who have completed secondary education (August 2006: Mjesečni Statistički Bilten, HZZ).

Romani women with who lived abroad during the war or who's parents were economic immigrants are (like the control group) at an even greater disadvantage. Interviewees expressed feeling socially distanced from their immediate surroundings, their education disrupted and lives altered too early. For many women, marriage was seen as a way out of their state of displacement and a return to something more familiar—namely, family, tradition and the reproduction of the *labor of care*. When asked about their individual assets during the interviews, women repeatedly said that what they know best is to care for their household, clean, cook and take care of their children. Fantasy jobs were always in the nurturing professions, such as social work, nursing, teaching kindergarten, working with children, cooking, cleaning at a big company (i.e., one that will not go bankrupt), and hairdressing.

Systems of support and neglect:

Romani women enjoy a variety of support systems, but also face a number of obstacles that hinder their full and equal participation in Croatian society. These social systems of support and neglect occur on the micro- (or household) and macro- (or societal) levels.

On the micro-level, Romani women enjoy unprecedented support from their families, which provide them with a sense of safety, security and belonging. Many women do not have feelings of ambiguity with respect to their social positions in their households. However, Romani women have also begun to question and, in some instances, to revolt against the patriarchal cultural forces that dictate their particular roles in a given household. This process is slow and in many (but not all) instances has started with the current generation of young Romani women.

At the same time, young Romani girls, particularly those who are *not* discouraged from marrying young and *not* encouraged to further their education, are at a great disadvantage in terms of reaching their potential for full and equal participation in Croatian society. Croatian law requires that all individuals under 15 attend school, yet many young Romanies are not in school. In all households that I visited on a regular weekday, I found youngsters at home, including young teens, who had never attended school. The unprecedented support and care of parents can at times have dire consequences. When I asked a mother why her 5 year old child is not attending a preschool program, she said because the child does not want to—as if the child has the experience and knowledge to decide what is best for him. One mother decided that her 12 year old daughter would no longer attend school because the daughter suffered monthly epileptic attacks; the mother believed that her daughter would not be safe outside her home. Another mother decided that her daughter would not continue her secondary education because of her daughter's disability. Instead, the daughter would have to attend a special school outside of Zagreb—paid for through stipends—but her mother decided that this would be too much for her daughter. Similarly, one mother allowed her 16 year old son, who attends secondary school, to have his 15 year old girlfriend stay with him overnight. Knowing that they are having unprotected sex, she commented that if God will give them a child they will deal with the consequences as a family.^{xvii}

All Romani interviewees and almost all Romani women I spoke with had experienced discriminatory hiring practices. Women show up at an interview after they have been told

on the phone that the company is hiring only to be told that all positions have been filled. This was particularly distressing in instances where Romani women had completed secondary education. In the end, these women resorted to informal labor activities and worked side-by-side with women with very little education. Thus, their education hardly served as a model of inspiration for younger women. Another factor is that certain women receive a substantial amount of aid from the state to help support their children, which makes formal employment unattractive.

Although informal labor activities correspond in general to lower levels of education for both Romani and non-Romani women, the latter had different experiences. None of the Romani women interviewed had ever worked as babysitters—a *labor of care* they enjoy—while the women of Croatian ethnicity found such employment through the informal sector. Because of existing stereotypes, Romani women are even discriminated against in the informal economy. Croatian women readily admitted that they would never hire a Romani woman to clean their home or watch their children.^{xviii} Moreover, inspection police at the open air markets is said to pick and choose whom they ticket, and often target Romani women as opposed to individuals of different ethnicities.

On the societal level, Romani women's empowerment is directly relevant to countries that seek EU membership. Various programs provide support for Croatian Romani in education (through kindergartens, stipends and positive discrimination), employment (though programs organized by the HZZ), legal assistance (recently 600,000 Kuna and the services of 35 attorneys were made available through the Office for National Minorities), and a variety of other support programs, including housing (prospects for 2007 look promising), sports and culture. None of these programs, except for local healthcare outreach, which is supported by international NGOs, is geared specially toward Romani women. In terms of preschool and employment programs, interviewees and Romani leaders complained about the futility of segregating Romanies into separate categories. Almost everyone I spoke with did not perceive the (well-intentioned) HZZ programs as particularly useful.

Although Croatia has made serious attempts to raise the social and economic standard of its Romani population in the last five years, several international reports, among them Amnesty International, the Roma Rights Center and the U.S. Department of State, indicate that discriminatory practices in schools, places of employment and societal attitudes towards the Romani continue to persist and, in many instances, are not taken seriously by educators, policymakers and legislators. Negative stereotypes, which cast Romani women as welfare system abusers and parasites, continue to persist. Non-Romani Croatians frequently expressed feelings of resentment toward social policies implemented for the advancement of Romanies. The view that Romani people suffer from no particular social setbacks or that they have had the same opportunities as ethnic Croatians is common. Although a smaller minority of Romanies can *pass* as ethnic Croatians, many continue to be judged based on their race, or, if Muslim, by their family name. By refusing to acknowledge the historic marginalization of Romanies, non-Romanies remain willfully ignorant of their unearned privileges or, in John Rawls's phrase, luck in the natural lottery.^{xix}

Despite the best of intentions, societal support systems can sometimes become systems of neglect in disguise. To illustrate, since March 1, 2006 Zagreban Romani women receive a substantial amount of money (3,000 to 9,000 Kuna) for the birthing of each child; for 3 or more children the amount is 9,000 Kuna for 6 consecutive years.^{xx} The criteria for receiving aid requires proof of Croatian citizenship, and proof of having

lived in Zagreb for at least five years prior to the birth of the child. Even though the aid is helpful and necessary for poor families, it inadvertently encourages women to remain in traditional roles as homemakers and reproducers of more than two children per household, while excluding those women and children without citizenship papers or Zagrebean residency.

Another example of damage and neglect on the societal level is school abstinence. It is hard to believe that young Romanies not attending school have slipped through the system, yet talking to the social services center in Peščenica-Žitnjak (Zagreb), I learned that the center is responsible for about 11 primary and 6 secondary schools. In addition to their numerous administrative responsibilities, the 10 social workers employed at the Peščenica center are each responsible for 10,000 residents (the ideal is 1,500) in any incidents that require their intervention. I was told that intervention activities among the Romani population are most frequently triggered by children either not going to school or doing poorly in school.^{xxi} The process of intervention for children who are not attending school begins with a call to the parents inviting them to their offices. After that, a social worker visits the family at their home. The process sometimes ends in court, but only where there are multiple violations (e.g., various forms of neglect and or abuse). I was told that parents frequently ignore the warnings of the Peščenica center and that the center is not able to prosecute solely on the basis of non-attendance in schools.

MOVING TOWARD POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

Romani women's empowerment requires the promotion of gender equity for women of all ages and levels of education, including women's rights to self-determination and political representation, and greater access to economic and educational resources. Poor women in Croatian society—poor Croatian Romani women, in particular—need special programs to help them overcome their marginalization. Romani women's empowerment can be conceptualized through the enhancement of life skills, healthcare education, self-esteem (including awareness of gender inequities and the development of strategies for the enforcement and protection of Romani women's legal rights within and outside of their households). Employability is *one* aspect of Romani women's empowerment. Central to this, is the enhancement of existing skills for the purpose of generating income, boosting self-confidence and the motivation to continue their education, and programs aimed at achieving a greater sense of control over their economic lives. I conclude with recommendations for Romani leadership, policy makers and legislators, and the HZZ.

Recommendations for Romani leadership:

It has been said that women are the pillars of their households. Women are also part of another collective: their communities and society at large. By engaging in their own empowerment, women can serve as examples to their families, communities, society and, perhaps most importantly, to other women. A healthy community is a community in which *all* members have control over what is being proposed with respect to the issues that concern them. Romani leaders know very well what happens when their voices are excluded from decision-making processes. Nedžakin Kamerovski, president of the Roma Forum for National Minorities for the city of Zagreb or the Vijeća Romske Nacionalne Manjine Grada Zagreba, poignantly said at a meeting organized by the Forum za Slobodu Odgoja or the Forum for the Freedom of Education this autumn: "I only ask, till when will others, non-Romanies, decide about Romanies lives?" "Similar words of caution go out to the *all* members of the Romani community: How long will men and other women

decide about the lives and plights of Romani women? A healthy community is one in which women, and men, participate in the decision-making processes that affect them. Today, too few Romani women are visible at community meetings. Too many women live in servitude of their in-laws, their elders, their sons and daughters. Too frequently “women’s issues,” which are concerns for the entire community, are not taken seriously. Suppressing the very values and norms that limit Romani women’s advancement and prevent them from achieving greater control over their lives are not non-Romani issues—they are human rights issues. I recommend that the leadership:

- publicly honor and acknowledge the educational achievements of Romani who have completed secondary education and have obtained higher levels of education;
- speak out about the importance of education for *all* Romanies and stress the culture of education and the importance of maintaining that culture in their homes;
- organize motivational speaking sessions in which successful Romani women can speak to the community about how they arrived at their social positions;
- contact local and government officials to provide greater incentives for Romani women to pursue education and employment; and
- speak out publicly in Romani communities about the need for Romani women’s emancipation, and their full participation in society by acknowledging that one Romani woman’s liberation positively affects the entire Romani community.

Recommendations for policy makers and legislators:

There are grave consequences for women who engage in the informal labor sector for an extended period of time, including the fact that women are not able to enjoy the benefits of formal employment, such as promotion, prestige, personal gratification, investment, pension benefits and a more equitable position in the household. Women engaged in the informal economy often receive social welfare benefits, including health care and housing maintenance aid that are very costly for the state to maintain. Also costly for the state are the fact that women in the informal economy are frequently apprehended, ticketed and at time even jailed by the inspection policy. Women’s health is also frequently compromised as a result of their labor activities, which ultimately is more costly for the state than government initiatives that back positive discrimination for Romani women in *all* sectors of employment. Moving toward greater democratic reforms and inclusion in the EU, Romani men and women, as all national minorities, should be proportionately represented in different employment sectors. Differently put, if Romani make up a certain percentage of the total Croatian population they should enjoy proportionate representation in government, law enforcement agencies, universities and other *stable employment* professions.

Croatia has made many improvements since 2000 in the arena of human rights. Its promise to substantially increase funding for housing in 2007 is amiable. Romani women and men need adequate housing in the immediate sense. In order not to become a burden to the state financially, they also need adequate employment. On paper—e.g. in terms of Croatian minority rights legislation—Croatia looks like a model society for minority cultures. But Croatia can and *must* go further. In particular, it must fight against the damaging public announcements of its leaders who have proclaimed that Croatia has “nothing to apologize for,” a reference to Croatia’s troubled past during World War II

and the xenophobic 1990s. I recommend that policymakers and legislators provide and lobby for:

- the allocation of more resources for social service agencies, such as *Centre za Socijalnu Skrb*;
- more time and resources that focus specifically on the restructuring of Romani women's education on all age levels, e.g., by providing special programs and empowerment seminars for women;
- the support of events organized by Romani leadership that publicly honor and acknowledge the educational achievements of individual Romani;
- greater incentives for Romani women to complete secondary education, e.g., by specifically targeting them through the National Program for Roma in order to make them more competitive in the labor market;
- greater employment opportunities in all sectors of labor, especially those that require specialized training and secondary education for *all* men and women in Croatia;
- expanded opportunities for the next generation of Romani who complete higher levels of education in the *stable employment* sector through positive discrimination;
- the appointment of properly-credentialed Romanies to political office;
- the representation of Romanies in general and Romani women in particular with proper credentials in law enforcement, municipal and government bodies;
- an expansion of and emphasis on multicultural education programs in which students enrolled in primary and secondary education are given the opportunity to critically examine and learn about the histories of all cultures in Croatia.

Recommendations for HZZ:

Market-based activities and the view expressed by many study participants that “we are born traders,” as well as the fact that *stable employment* in Croatia is more frequently achievable through positions which require higher levels of education are realities which influence Romani women's employability. The fact that the restructuring of Croatia's political economy is moving further away from institutionalized socialism should ideally move working class Romani women (those with basic 8th grade education) into liberalizing strategies for small business enterprises. The unemployed did not give positive feedback on current workshops aimed at increasing their employability and, by its own admission; HZZ did not spend enough money in 2006 on programs specifically intended for the Romani population. At the same time, Maria Halić, an employment specialist at HZZ's Zagreb office, told me about a number of innovative and exciting opportunities to help boost Romani women's employability. Yet the training, workshops and employment opportunities ultimately did not succeed because HZZ could not find enough interest among its unemployed Romani population. Not all of my recommendations for the HZZ are realizable under current laws and conditions. Thus, I propose lobbying for the achievement of positive social change through the legislative process, which must begin at the level of the Romani communities. As such, I recommend that the management of the HZZ:

- develop workshops in which Romani women learn how to manage a small business, apply for support for such a business and learn about the advantages of partnership in business from successful business professionals;

- create educational seminars which host small business owners and women who have successfully maintained their business;
- invite select groups of interested Romani women to discuss possibilities for training and re-employment;
- invite Romani leaders, and Romani women in particular, to support Romani women interested in training and educational seminars organized by the HZZ;
- provide opportunities for collaboration with Romani leaders;
- organize community outreach events in which employment specialists discuss the current state of affairs, allowing for an open dialogue and community participation;
- organize small workshops for Romani and non-Romani women with at least an 8th grade education, which would focus on the enhancement of existing employable skills; and
- work with policy makers and legislators on developing employment for Romani with the proper credentials in the *stable employment* sectors, such as law enforcement, municipal and government bodies.

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ⁱ I use "unemployment" to refer to formal income generating activities as opposed to informal activities or illicit activities, such as sex work or drugs sales which are not addressed in this study.

ⁱⁱ The action framework is important in this study because of its emphasis on advocacy. My analysis does not support the cultural relativity model, e.g., it does not focus solely on Romani women's experiences on their own terms, or on not passing judgment on their actions, but instead recommends ways in which Romani women can benefit and rework the societal values system in which they subsist.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the study participants in notes taken by the researcher and transcription data. Study participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point or choose not to answer questions during the introduction of the project as well as prior to the actual interviews. Permission to gain access to information about study participants' educational and working life histories was asked multiple times to ensure that study participants knew their rights and the limitations of the study, e.g., the researcher explained that the interviews would not directly result in gainful employment but in potential workshops that may lead to employability. Study participants were also informed that the

information they provided would be kept strictly confidential and that individual identities would not be exposed by their participation in the study.

^{iv} Zagrebean Romani live in a number of integrated neighborhoods dispersed throughout the city of Zagreb, including Peščenica-Žitnjak, Plinarsko naselje, Petruševac, Kozari Putovi and Dubrava. Many also live in city-owned flats in the city center. Romani families live in all these localities alongside other economically marginalized Croats. Some live in dwellings described as “wild” building styles, e.g., structures that violate zoning and other building regulations set forth by the governing municipality.

^v Information provided by Romani leadership was crucial to this research. Among these people are Ramiza and Nazif Memedi, Kasum Cana, Alija Mešić, Ivan Rumbak, Božo Nicolić, Sandra Pavelić, Husein Veli, and Rozika Đurđević. Also consulted were a number of professionals who have direct experience with members of the Romani community. Among them are Jasmina Papa from the *United Nations Development Program* (UNDP), Marija Kenzović from the *Centar za Socijalnu Skrb Zagreb*, Lovorka Marinović from the *International Organization for Migration* (IOM), Jasenka Đenović and Ljerka Franić from the *O. Š. Dr. Vinka Žganca* School in Kozari Bok and Maria Halić from the *Hrvatski Zavod za Zaposljavanje* in Zagreb.

^{vi} Originally, three women of Croatian ethnicity with 8th grade education were invited by HZZ, one of whom canceled just hours before the interview.

^{vii} One of the two women not interviewed changed her mind just hours before the scheduled interview. The other woman decided to travel internationally and was therefore not able to grant an interview.

^{viii} I refer to Croatian Romanies as those individuals, documented and undocumented, who currently reside in Croatia.

^{ix} For a discussion on Romani women’s double discrimination (as marginalized ethnic minorities and as women), see Kocze 2003.

^x For a discussion about recent change in gender equity during the post socialist period, see Silverman 1996; and Gall and Kligman 2000. For discussions specifically on Central European Romani and political change that affect both men and women, see Vermeer 2006.

^{xi} The control group refers to unemployed ethnic Croatian women with little education living in Croatia. Having observed their living conditions, and discussed their economic immigrations patterns and current job prospects, I conclude that these women are marginalized in their own right.

^{xii} Even though there have been factions and discord between Romani leaders at crucial times, e.g., when Croatian researchers took the lead in investigating the Roma Decade monitoring project, Romani leaders from all parts of the country came together in solidarity to oppose actions perceived as excusatory.

^{xiii} Concern with cleanliness of one’s surroundings and personal hygiene are strong Romani cultural values that have existed for a long time and have been much written about by international scholars. The view of Romanies as dirty is, on the one hand, associated with poverty (all people living in poverty with substandard hygienic conditions are less clean than those who have access to running water in their homes). On the other hand, it is associated with xenophobic and racist attitudes, e.g., Jews in Europe have often been referred to as “dirty,” as have Mexican Americans living in the U.S.

^{xiv} Income-generating activities such as scrap metal collection and informal market sales were almost exclusively the domain of Romanies in the former Yugoslavia. Today, study participants explain they are competing with ethnic Croats and others in these so-called gray or informal economies.

^{xv} Dr. Bajram Berat, a Romani leader in Macedonia, provided this information.

^{xvi} In Zagreb, only 25 adult men and women are currently enrolled in evening classes in order to complete basic education. This number is extremely low and community leaders should be urged not to only set an example but to encourage their members above all else to complete their education even if they don’t see the immediate benefit of doing so.

^{xvii} It should be noted that premarital virginity for women continues to be an important Romani cultural value. The same is not expected from Romani men. At the same time, many Romani couples are not married; some because of economic welfare reasons. Marriage often means co-habitation, in which the woman moves into her in-laws’ residence. This is also because of cultural norms which dictate residence patterns and because of the lack of economic independence for the young couple.

^{xviii} Some stereotypes associated with not wanting Romani women watch non-Romani children arise from the centuries’ old myth of Romani stealing Christian children. Others are discussed under footnote xiii.

^{xix} The term “unearned privileges” is borrowed from Peggy McIntosh (1988) and the notion of the natural lottery from John Rawls (1971).

^{xx} The Gradski Ured za Zdravstvo, Rad, Socijalnu Zaštitu i Braniteljstvo for the city of Zagreb secures social aid for Zagrebean residents with children. For the first child born after March 1, 2006, parents receive 3,000 Kuna; 6,000 for the second child and only once; and 9,000 for all subsequent children for 6 consecutive years.

^{xxi} Marija Knezović from the *Centar za Socijalnu Skrb Zagreb* informed me that although drug problems are on the rise in the Romani population as in the rest of the society, they are not characteristic of social work intervention. Jasenka Đenović and Ljerka Franić from the *O. Š. Dr. Vinka Žganca* School in Kozari Bok said that aggression, drugs and other activities that need reporting have not been a concern in their school and among Romani students. The most frequent problem is with students not showing up to school after the age of 12-15 and sometimes even earlier.