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European Academic Network on Romani Studies

## Report on the “Primo incontro dei membri italiani dell’ European Academic Network on Romani Studies (RAN)”

(Bolzano/Italy, 17 March 2014)

### Report

*Responsible for the organization and planning of the workshop: Elisabeth Tauber*

*Support: Ulderico Daniele, Paola Trevisan*

The first meeting of the Italian Network members was held on 17 March 2014 at the Free University of Bolzano. It was organized by Elisabeth Tauber with the support of Ulderico Daniele and Paola Trevisan. The main objectives of this first meeting were the following: 1) to share experiences of academic interaction with administrations and policy makers on local, regional or provincial level; 2) to learn from the constructive and productive experience in the province of Bolzano, where academic, anthropological and legal expertise as well as Sinti expertise were taken into account by public administration for the legalization of a Sinti working context and 3) to discuss the draft law on the recognition of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti as an ethnic and linguistic minority in Italy.

The participants from the Network were: Ulderico Daniele, Sabira Kakouch, Chiara Manzoni, Oana Marcu, Sara Memo, Cecilia Rubiolo, Federica Setti, Santino Spinelli, Elisabeth Tauber, Paola Trevisan, Elisabetta Vivaldi. In addition to the Network members, Roberta Medda Windischer, Giorgia Decarli, Francesco Palermo, Kolis Summerer and Sabina Tosi Cabrini participated in the workshop. Local institutions were represented by Giulio Angelucci, Nadja Schuster and Karl Tragust, and two Sinti in their capacity as representatives of their families: Radames Gabrieli and Claudio Gabrieli. Two Skype presentations were organized with Giovanni Picker and Barbara Giovanna Bello, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

In her introduction to the workshop Elisabeth Tauber referred to the scientific discussion on the role of social sciences in the context of policy making quoting Bourdieu: The most ethereal of theorists cannot afford not to “sully his hands with empirical trivia”. This is true in research as it is true for the delicate context when it comes to bridging scientific research to policymaking and being actively involved in policymaking itself, as Foucault has worked out with the concept of governmentality. Tauber defines the main aim of the workshop as to look on how to overcome analytical simplifications and to create space for discussion on the complexities connected to policy making for and with Sinti, Rom, and Camminanti in Italy and elsewhere. According to Tauber all disciplines involved in policymaking should in parallel keep an ethnographic perspective on the rhetoric's and practices of politics which aim at “integrating or including” Romani communities.

The introduction was followed by Giovanni Picker's textual analysis of the national strategy report (strategia nazionale) focusing on housing. Since the core point of the strategy is ‘discrimination’, advising authorities on organizing anti-racist activities (workshops, trainings, etc.), it would be necessary to conceptually define categories such as ‘discriminazione’ and ‘razzismo’ within past and present conditions of Roma in Italy. Picker spoke via Skype.

Ulderico Daniele gave a comprehensive insight into the circulation of hidden knowledge (paradigm of the Italian Christian-pedagogical movement active in 1960 to 1980, which was adapted in the following years also by NGOs close to left wing movements) still present in many Roman public institutions on “Roma”, by this continuously defining “Roma” as the “needy users”. According to Daniele these institutional rhetoric is inhibiting an institutional interaction with actual, innovative academic research. Such an interaction would be

pressingly necessary as the “campi nomadi” in Rome are growing, yet *campi* are evicted and families completely abandoned by institutions.

This experience is shared by Paola Trevisan (and similarly by Chiara Manzoni in Turin) who documented on the actual dramatic situation in Reggio-Emilia, (paradoxically mentioned as an example of good practice in the strategy report) where inter-institutional miscommunication led to permit semi legal urban settlements of a local Sinti community. Trevisan reports on an institutional context in which outdated paradigms and “knowledge” on Sinti is operating on institutional actions. Additionally due to a lack of institutional attention on technically correct procedures today these Sinti families are facing dramatic expropriations.

Sabrina Tosi Cabrini confirms the previous presentations by pointing out the housing situation in Tuscany. Despite the efforts of the renowned “Foundation Michelucci” projects on housing are often marked by institutional contradictions which have negative effects on the living conditions of local Rom and Sinti communities.

The morning session was moderated by Elisabetta Vivaldi. Vivid discussions continued during the lunch break.

The afternoon session was opened by a welcome of the Rector of the Free University of Bolzano, Walter Lorenz, who emphasized the importance of academic research in the field of vulnerable groups, underlining that the FUB is fully supporting this research as well as initiatives aiming at bridging the gap between research and the world of policy making.

This introduction was followed by a presentation of the *Bolzano experience*, initiated in 2011 when Sinti, due to new European and national regulations on waste management, became subject to penal punishment for their micro-economic activity of scrap metal collection.

The Bolzano experience with the title “Legal complexities and ideological resistance in institutional interventions: working for and with different groups of Rom and Sinti. Critical reflections on an experience of institutional and academic cooperation in the province of Bolzano” was presented as a core contribution to this workshop since it perfectly underlines the complexities of inner-institutional logics and resistances when working for vulnerable groups, as well as the need for multi-disciplinary approaches and the need to directly involve the target group. It attests to the possibility of creating a win-win situation for all parties involved, while also highlighting that such experiences hang by a thread, as much depends on individual motivations inside the institutions, on the existential necessity of the presence of top hierarchical levels in such projects and the indispensable technical competences of the working group as such.

Three local administrators, Karl Tragust (former Head of Department of Social Affairs), Giulio Angelucci (Director of Office at the Department of Environment), and Nadja Schuster (Official, Department of Social Affairs) together with Kolis Summerer (FUB, Academic expert on Criminal Law) introduced the Bolzano experience. Kolis Summerer gave a brief introduction into how the practice of punishing scrap metal collection based on criminal law

had to be interrupted “by bending a legal interpretation”. Giulio Angelucci explained the specifications of environmental law to show how with the good will of the public institutions it was possible to legalize the collection of scrap metal. He resumes that today there are approx. 160 subjects registered for this activity, half of them is practicing this economic activity, among them approx. 50 Sinti. These numbers show that the decree, the elaboration of which had been initiated by a request from Sinti, has positive side effects also for non-Sinti, allowing them to practice a niche economy.

Nadja Schuster analyzed the inner and inter institutional dynamics which seem to work “pro-Sinti” only at certain historical moments in the institutions, when certain factors come to coincide. Karl Tragust defined his role as the “symbolic door opener” towards politicians and towards other departments (Legal Department of the Province, Chamber of Commerce and Department of Work). Tragust also underlined the high level of technical expertise of the working group. The working group was coordinated and advised by the anthropological expertise of Elisabeth Tauber (FUB), the project design was delivered by Susanne Elsen (FUB, Applied Social Sciences). Radames Gabrieli and Claudio Gabrieli, head of Sinti families in the province, were consulted by the Head of the Department of Social Affairs in order to describe the specific details of their economic practice. This would allow for the formulation of the decree in accordance with the particular needs of the local Sinti families.

Interestingly enough the decree itself - legalizing a longstanding economic activity- is a small and very “easy” document, for which the group of experts had invested two years of work.

The last part of the workshop was dedicated to a critical discussion on a draft law for the recognition of Sinti, Roma and Camminanti as an ethnic-linguistic group presented by Francesco Palermo (expert on constitutional law, actual independent Senator in the Italian Parliament) and critically analyzed by Barbara Giovanna Bello (expert on law and society). Bello, while agreeing on the draft law itself, critically reflected on the necessity to add institutionalized but independent organs which would control the practice of the law. After Bello’s presentation via Skype, participants of the workshop initiated a vivid discussion. Some members were agreeing on the actual draft while others, among them Santino Spinelli (Rom abruzzese, associate member of the Network), asked why one should work on an *ad hoc* law for the target group when Italy already has a law protecting 12 linguistic minorities (legge 482). Sabrina Tosi Cambini sees in this draft law a high risk for the target group, as it might involuntarily create a tool against Romani communities. Karl Tragust asked why there should be a law on ethnic linguistic particularities while the real problem in Italy is the lack of a more inclusive social legislation, which would target not only Romani people but Italians in general.

The workshop was concluded with a discussion on possible follow-up meetings. Elisabetta Vivaldi suggested to extend the work of the Italian group to the South/Naples in the near future, as this could be very beneficial for academics/policy makers but also to further promote the Network’s role and its contribution in a part of the Peninsula that too often remains forgotten.

The next meeting will be organized by Ulderico Daniele and Francesco Palermo in Rome. Both will get in contact with UNAR (NCP) and decide on a convenient date to continue the discussion initiated on possible spheres of concrete cooperation between public institutions and academic expertise.

Elisabeth Tauber

Bolzano, 28.03.2014