

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE LIFE OF THE ROMA COMMUNITY. CASE STUDY TIMIȘOARA AND CLUJ-NAPOCA

Marius IMRE PARNO<sup>1</sup>

Marius VASILUȚĂ-ȘTEFĂNESCU<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD Student at Sociology, West University of Timișoara (Romania)

Email: [marius.parno77@e-uvt.ro](mailto:marius.parno77@e-uvt.ro)

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, PhD, West University of Timișoara (Romania)

Email: [Marius.vasiluta@e-uvt.ro](mailto:Marius.vasiluta@e-uvt.ro)

**Abstract:** *The Roma ethnicity from Romania it is very significant in terms of population reported to the statistical data, as well as to the unofficial data issued by Roma organizations. This community it is in the spotlight of local public institutions and also of non-governmental organizations (Ionescu and Cace, 2006: 67). In official documents we can talk about Roma people since the second half of the fourteenth century (Petcuț, 2009: 17). Roma ethnicity is formed of several subclasses. The names of these subclasses are generated by the profession practiced, for example: the group of musicians (Lăutari), the group of spoon makers (Lingurari), the group of goldsmiths (Aurari), the group of silversmiths (Argintari), the group of tinsmiths (Spoitori), the group of florists (Florari), the group of blacksmiths (Fierari) and so on. In this article I will present qualitative research through the interview method. The question of the research was formulated like this: I consider that although all the people from Roma community practice traditional jobs, as well as non-traditional jobs, there is no connection between trades and the defining subgroup to which they belong and for the membership at a specific subgroup. The general objective is to aim the identification and the qualitative analysis of the traditional and non-traditional economic practices of Roma community from Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca. The technique I used is the interview technique. The tool used in this research is the semi-structured interview guide. At this research 20 people of Roma ethnicity participated, 10 people from Timișoara, 10 people from Cluj-Napoca. The results of this research provide to the local public institutions and to the non-governmental organizations an integrated, grounded approach to understanding the traditions, the traditional and non-traditional trades so that the disparities between the Roma community and the majority population could be reduced.*

**Keywords:** *Roma ethnicity; Roma people; traditional trades; non-traditional trades; Roma, Gypsy; Timișoara; Cluj-Napoca*

### 1. Introduction

Recently, the issue of Roma has attracted the attention of Romanian and European institutions because the gap between the Roma community and the contact population is too large (Zoon, 2001: 40). The massive migration of Roma from all over the country to European spaces has also aroused this concern (Fleck and Rughiniș, 2008: 169). The sociologist Achim Viorel shows that the Romans have existed in Romania since the second half of the 14th century. Sociologists say that there are three types of slaves: monastic slaves, liberal slaves, and prince slaves (Achim, 1998: 18). George Potra said that after a long and difficult period of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, Gypsies gained ultimate freedom. From the beginning of liberation, we have witnessed the integration of Gypsies (Potra, 2001: 105). Most of the time, Roma communities are located on the outskirts of towns (Horvath, 2017: 195 ). They are poor

communities with almost no access to infrastructure, education and health care, almost no employment opportunities, and their housing is precarious (Fleck and Rughiniș, 2008: 123). We are witnessing the polarization of the Roma. The conservative Roma keepers of their traditions, language and customs has a low degree of integration and acceptance among the majority of the population (Foszto, 2009: 153). These ethnic groups include: Gaborii, Caldărașii, Spoitorii, Aurarii, Lăutarii. These groups engage in traditional trade on a small scale (Toma and Foszto, 2011: 15). Within the scope of social distance, the acceptance level is lower than that of the integrated Roma nation.

Other peoples who abandon the Roma's tradition and who don't use the Romani language have a higher success rate in the process of integration. Some of these groups are: Vătrașii, Băieșii, Rudarii, Caștalii. They live in the majority of the population and have access to quality education, medical services, stable jobs and they have a home that provides them with a decent life (Kiss, Foszto and Fleck, 2009: 85). Within the social distance between the Roma and the majority of the population, their acceptance of interracial marriages is higher (Bădescu, Kivu and Robotin, 2005: 19).

In traditional ethnic groups, formed of two or three families living in the same house, there is a greater respect and attachment to the family they come from. Within the family, traditional industries are passed on from generation to generation, from father to son, based on the system theory, which determines a country, a family, and a closed system. They live and manage together. Since there is no market for services and products derived from the practice of traditional industries, in his case, the main business is entrepreneurship. The defining elements of Gypsies, except for visual identification elements, such as skirts, hats, moustaches, gold jewellery, and money in hair is Romani language. The Romani language is learned in the family and passed on from generation to generation.

The Romani language has origins from Sanskrit in India. The linguistic arguments prove that Gypsies are from India (Grigore and Sarău, 2003: 5)

For assimilated Gypsies, they are more likely to leave the family due to the following reasons: high level and quality of education, some of them are graduates of higher education, have stable jobs and own high-quality housing. For these groups, the source of a better life is the practice of non-traditional trade (Toma and Foszto, 2011: 15).

In recent years, the existence of European funds and programs has facilitated the qualification or requalification of Roma in non-traditional occupations. Through these non-traditional industries, job opportunities have increased (Ionescu, 2014, p. 149).

In particular, the Roma community of Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca recorded a high coefficient of external migration. The list of countries where Gypsies emigrate is: Italy, France, Britain and Belgium. In the context of immigrants, most Roma are engaged in non-traditional trade (Fleck and Rughiniș, 2008: 169).

**2. Roma from Timișoara.** In the 2011 census, 2145 people declared that they belong to the Roma ethnic group. The large and compact communities of Timișoara are: Kunz community (here are 164 families), Ștrand colony community, Polona community (or Fraidorf near the sugar factory), Fratelia community. The rest of the Roma are scattered in all neighbourhoods of the city and they live in their own or rented houses.

The Roma people we found in Timișoara are: Căldărașii, Pițuleștii (from Hunedoara), Gaborii, Ghipterii (they are German Gypsies living in Circari on Slavic streets), Geambașii, Lăutarii and Băieșii. The Roma professions in Timișoara are traditional and non-traditional. The traditional profession is fiddling and making gutters. Some Roma is engaged in street trade and second-hand car trade. Roma are employees of health services, commercial workers, vendors, kitchen assistants or dishwashers.

### 3. Roma from Cluj-Napoca

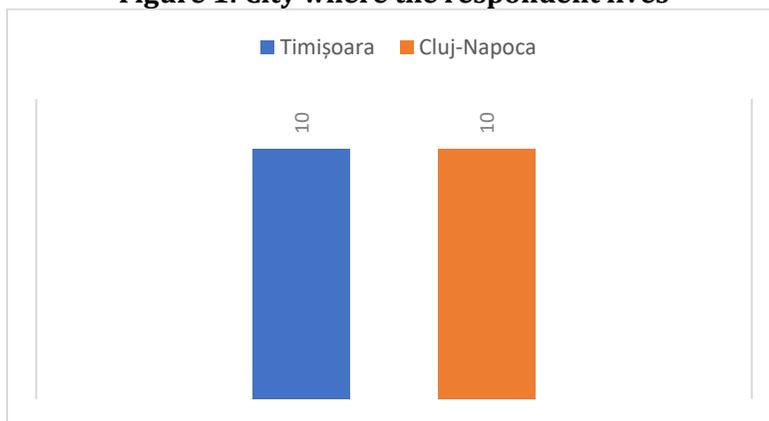
Official and informal Roma leaders announced that the number of Roma in Cluj-Napoca is approximately 6,000 to 6,500 people. From a geographical point of view, there are compact Roma communities in the suburbs of the city, namely: Community Pata Rât (4 different communities: Dallas Community, Canton Community, Coastal Community, Lampa Community), Community of Iris, The community in the Barbu Lăutaru Someșeni community, the Gabor community in the station area.

A large number of Gypsies are scattered in different neighbourhoods of the city, living in their own houses, renting or living in nationalized houses ( Dohotaru, Harbula and Vincze, 2016: 96 ). In general, the Roma occupations in Cluj-Napoca fall into the following categories: male are construction workers, female work in supermarkets and sanitation facilities, and other non-traditional industries required by the labour market. In a limited range, there are also some traditional occupations, such as: making sheet metal objects, playing the violin, making brooms and certain handmade objects (mills, spoons, corks, wooden objects and food, such as glazed apples). A small number of Roma are engaged in street trade and recycling (iron, cardboard, bottles, cans). The Roma found in Cluj-Napoca are: Lăutari, Romunguri, Gabori, Vătrași, Ciurari, Silk Romans, Florari , Lingurari.

### 4. Research methodology

In this research, we chose a qualitative method through interviews. As a tool, I used a semi-structured interview guide, which was applied to the Roma communities of Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca from March 2021 to April 2021, and the conversation was conducted by phone (Rotariu and Iluț, 2001: 63).

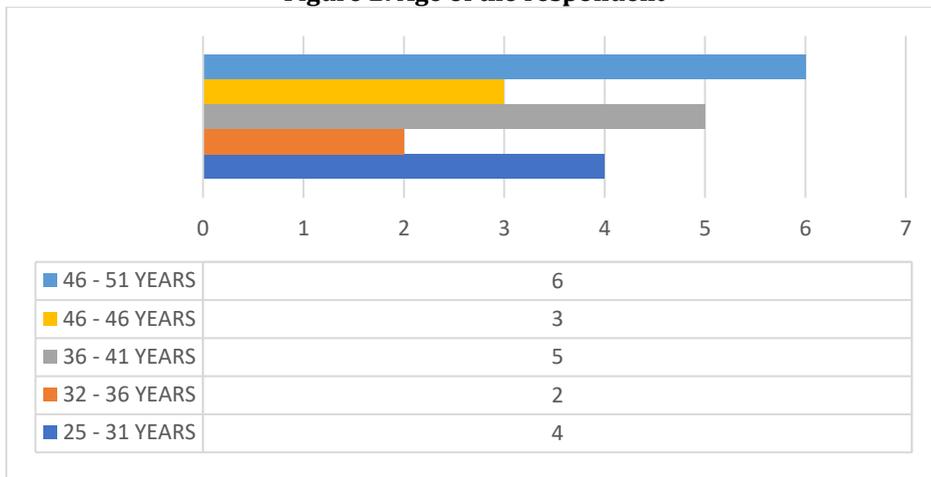
**Figure 1: City where the respondent lives**



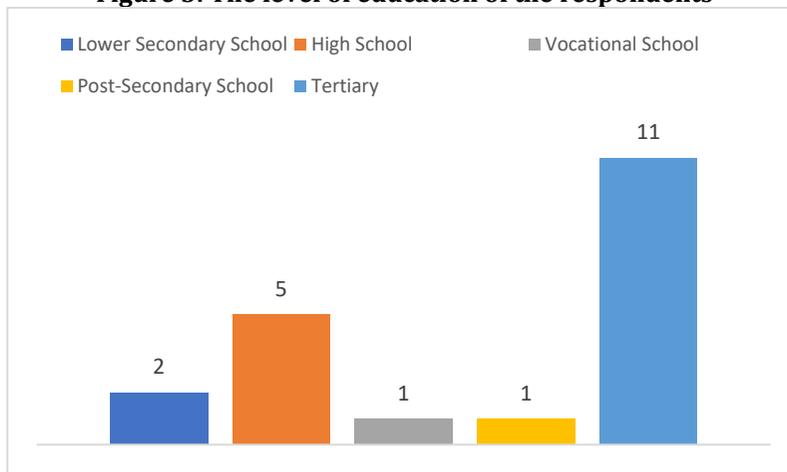
In the interview guide, we discussed the following topics related to traditional and non-traditional occupations of Roma. The first topic refers to the occupation and professional experience of the parents of the interviewed. The second topic refers to the occupational history of the family of origin and how the interviewed followed the traditional or non-traditional occupational practices of their grandparents or parents. The third topic refers to the interviewer’s views on immigration abroad, work and trade carried out abroad, and the benefits it brings to the family's economic situation, as well as the illegal activities carried out by some Roma. We chose these themes to analyse the desire of Gypsies to participate in economic life through traditional or non-traditional occupations.

When the interview guidelines were developed, these themes had already been manipulated into the core of the discourse. For the first topic, we identify the following core discourse: traditional activities today, non-traditional activities, current occupation / professionalism, professional experience so far, attitudes towards work and earnings. The core of the discourse on the second topic is: past traditional activities, past non-traditional activities and the value of non-traditional activities. For the third topic, the core of the discourse is: overseas immigration, Romania, other countries, foreign traditional activities, foreign non-traditional activities and illegal activities. The respondents were chosen with the snowball method. The first respondent indicated the next respondents.

**Figure 2: Age of the respondent**



In the context of quantitative research, 20 Roma from different cities, 10 people from Timișoara and 10 people from Cluj-Napoca were interviewed. Their levels of education are different, namely: 11 people have higher education and 1 person with post-secondary studies, 1 person has professional education., 5 people with secondary education, 2 people with secondary education. They also have different ages: 6 people are between 46 to 51 years old, 3 people are between 42 to 45 years old, 5 people are between 36 to 41 years old , 2 people are between 32 to 35 years old and 4 people are between 25 to 31 years old .

**Figure 3: The level of education of the respondents**

#### 4.1. Research objectives and questions

Research question: We believe that although members of the Roma community are engaged in traditional and non-traditional industries, there is no longer a close relationship between occupation and subgroup affiliation (ethnicity) defined as belonging to a subgroup. General objective: to identify and qualitatively analyse the traditional and non-traditional economic practices of the Roma communities of Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca.

Specific objective 1. To determine the traditional and non-traditional trade in which the Roma of Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca currently participate.

Specific objective 2. Identify traditional and non-traditional trade in the context of foreign immigration.

#### 4.2. Results

After processing the data obtained, applying the content analysis grid to the core of the discourse, as a quantitative processing technique of qualitative symbolic materials, and through the hermeneutical interpretation of the data, we obtained the following results.

The first topic refers to the interviewer's professional experience. I want to get an approximate idea of the first payment received by the participants, their professional experience (traditional and non-traditional activities) so far and their current occupation. For the first topic, the following question was developed: *How did you earn your first money? Where did you work? What did you and your family do? So far, from what areas of work have you supported your family financially?* The Roma ethnic group is made up of several Roma peoples. Most of the time, the name of this group is determined by the occupation that the group engages in. In some conservative groups, such as Gabori, Lăutari, Florari, Lingurari, these industries are still passed down from generation to generation. In these families, the first professional experience is the occupation in the family (Fleck and Rughiniș, 2008: 122). Non-traditional trade takes place in assimilated families.

Regarding the first money they made, most of the interviewees stated that they received rewards for helping their parents or grandparents in their traditional activities when they were children:

*I have worked with them since I was a child. That is, I help them get the tableware, sell it in the market, and so on. (S6, 35 years old, Timișoara, vocational school)*

*I went to the old CAPs for the first time to water, dig soil, harvest hay, and pick fruit from the orchard. This was my source of income for during my vacation. I had to try to buy him to go to school. Everything you need. In the end, I became an industrial painter in a company that produces all kinds of chandeliers, so I was able to get a more adequate salary. I also work the night shift to help out making aluminium parts. (S17, 38 years old, Cluj-Napoca, high school study)*

However, some interviewees admitted that they have been working to support their families since they were young so if they wanted to have a high enough income, they have to work with the Gypsies to which they belong, especially non-traditional activities.

*Since I came from an ordinary family, I must support myself since I was 17 years old. My family and I worked in a company during communism, and I worked in this company for 8 years after the revolution. I continued my studies at the university, I had to work another 3 years and then I had to give up. One year after I graduated, the Cluj County Council hired me as a specialist in Roma relations in the Office of Public Relations and Communication. (S14, 49 years old, Cluj-Napoca, higher education)*

The main discursive nuclei determined from the responses of the respondents are the following:

- ✓ Current traditional activities (4 positive, 1 neutral, 2 negative)
- ✓ Non-current traditional activities (8 positive, 0 neutral, 3 negative)
- ✓ Current occupation (8 positive, 2 neutral, 2 negative)
- ✓ Professional experience so far (5 positive, 3 neutral, 2 negative)
- ✓ For work (10 positive, 2 neutral, 4 negative)
- ✓ Income / earnings (6 positive, 1 neutral, 2 negative)

The second topic involves the respondent activities, crafts and occupations of their grandparents or parents in the past. I would also like to know if the participants in this study followed their parents' occupations and if they thought that they could continue to participate in traditional activities to adapt to the new living conditions. Questions related to the second topic of the interview guide are phrased as follows: *What are your grandparents and parents doing for the living? Do you follow your parents' work? Do you think it is possible to practice the profession of your grandparents or parents today?* There was a time when the Romans were dedicated to industries such as Fieraris' group -metallurgy, Argintaris' group- silverware, Lăutaris' group- singing at events, Linguraris' group- carpentry. With industrialization, many of these occupations no longer have a market, in this context, people find themselves in a situation where they are engaged in non-traditional industries. Interestingly, families who are still engaged in traditional industries and own the market have taught their children that they in turn must engage in the same industries (Surdu, 2011: 72). People currently engaged in traditional industries.

Depending on the group of Roma who belong, it is said that Roma people have activities similar to their grandparents / parents with cutlery and precious metal processing, metals, commerce, floods.

*My grandparents handled some traditional practices, some of the mother's grandparents made certain toys and handicrafts of crepe paper and sawdust, which they sold at fairs during the communist period. (S14, 49, Cluj-Napoca, higher research)*

*The father was craftsmanship. Grandparents also work with companies, gold extractors, mining workers and my grandmother was a housewife. (S11, 28, Cluj-Napoca, superior research)*

*Dad was an expert in tinware, and he was an artist. He was making gutters; it was all manual. However, in praise, his father was the best, for what he was professional. All kinds of flowers, all kinds of tables, copper, stainless steel. (S4, 31, Gymnures Research)*

The interviewees talk about grandparents and respect and pride their parents, but few of them follow the same jobs, so they turned to other non-traditional activities from the hospital field, health or various factories (Vincze, 2011: 23). In the original answer, one interviewee proudly states that he carries out his profession learned from his ancestors.

*Now I'm working here in Germany and I'm making roofs. Six years ago we did business, we usually live, we will grow with this business and we are tinsmiths from father to son. (S4, 31, Gymnasium studies)*

On the other hand, most of the interviewees believe that traditional activities have not been preserved until now due to the different living conditions than in the time of the grandparents and these are less likely to continue going to Romania (Stănică, 2014: 54). However, abroad, the products of these traditional handicrafts can be much more appreciated.

*I think that's a pity to go to the street, and I'm trying to fix pots, buckets and buckets of pleu.. Then he did not have the world, even if they had money or had no money like now. Find all the corners now, you understand me. Now it was a place where a man broke a bucket, and it was a place where the vegetables and chickens were washed at that time in the vegetables. Now I feel better than buying new things instead of repairing. (S4, 31, Timișoara, Gymnasium studies)*

*After the communist period, non-traditional trades were lost by subsequent policies for these occupations or stopped. Currently, people could practice this work, but competitive markets from the perspective of these products are not understood for several reasons. In a much better design for qualitative and "attracts his eyes", the similar toy market, is competing with the current market and must fight against the prejudice of people, will be purchased by foreigners who appreciate art, culture, and mastery of Roma people. (S14, 49, Cluj-Napoca, early studies)*

The main discursive nuclei, identified according to the response received from the subject of the interview is as follows:

- past non-traditional activities (9 positive, 2 neutral, 0 negative)
- past traditional activities (5 positive, 1 neutral, 2 negative)
- evaluation of traditional activities (11 positive, 3 neutral, 1 negative)

The third issue is external migration and it follows the information and the data on the method. The interviewees are related to traditional and non-traditional activities abroad. I also want to find the recognition of their illegal activities (beggars, fraud, prostitution, or theft). The questions in the interview guide are formulated as

follows: *For how long did you work abroad? What did you do there? Did you have your family with yourself? In what country do you want to live? What do you want to work there? Why do you like to live in that country? Do you think your family will live a better life in that country? Do you know people of Roma who have begged? What do you think of begging?*

Small parts of Rome in the Banat area have migrated during communism. In addition, some of Rome moved after 90 years. Along with the migrations of the majority, there was also a migration among the Roma to the West (Fleck and Rughinis, 2008: 169). Most Rome worked in seasonal agriculture or practiced traditional handicrafts, for example the Gaboris' group and Lăutaris' group. They are Romans who have been migrated or established with the family practicing traditional handicrafts. There is also a tendency to external migration (Fleck and Rughiniş, 2008: 169). The testimonies of Rome and the press indicate that certain segments in this country practice illegal activities, such as begging and prostitution. A Rome person, which has a personal property house and a stable work, does not migrate, wants to migrate (Salat, 2008: 60).

For external migration, most of them have the desire to leave the country from the point of view of the possibility of providing for their children and family members a better living, in countries such as Denmark, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Cyprus. In the same line, there are many possibilities of development abroad, but the recognition of homeless people is the main reason for that they are not ready to receive such a decision.

*The longest one was in Norway, in a vulcanization. It is very difficult to go with the family, especially in terms of income. Every time I go somewhere, I can't find my place, it's not like home. The ideal workplace is the community coordinator I still have. I meditate on the relationship between the community and the organization, and I turn them into the organization that the people in the community need. (S12, 37 years old, Cluj-Napoca, secondary school study)*

*In Scandinavian countries, I am only in Denmark, so I am further north. Yes, I know, they are more developed. I would like to work in the social field there. Yes, my wife will also be a nurse. The family will definitely live a better life there. As a more developed country, wages are higher. The main defect is that you are not in your country, and you are not at home. (S1, 41 years old, Timișoara, higher education)*

However, I also found an original answer: the interviewee mentioned that he would not go abroad and that he would never want to live abroad.

*I have been to 14 countries. I am not going to provide Romania for any country, I start from 0, "shot" to do some things for the children, my wife and I also went. I've been a driver and a construction crew leader. My wife picked oranges at a pallet factory in the UK. I never thought to settle there, a stranger took advantage of you, and then kicked you out. (S17, 38 years old, Cluj-Napoca, high school)*

No respondent supported illegal activities, whether at home or abroad. The practice of begging is the most discussed. The interviewees either negatively condemned it and pointed out that it was a despicable behaviour or chose a neutral report. In a sense, it did not even condemn the gypsy who resorted to this practice.

*Begging, I think it is something like a work, because it requires the courage of that person. I understand them. They expose themselves a lot to make money. Maybe many times the money does not belong to them. They are taken away by certain groups.*

*Lack of education leads to begging, and then lack of decent housing leads to poverty. I will do a housing project like in Finland. Through this project I will provide people with a house. I will make sure that the person realizes the importance of maintaining the house and he will lead a normal life. (S12, 37 years old, Cluj-Napoca, high school education)*

In principle, I do not agree because it is not good to beg when you can work. (S11, 28 years old, Cluj-Napoca, higher education)

*Begging? Honestly, I have a bad opinion about it, because I know young people who have the ability to work, create the future, sit on the street like that, and treat people well. (S2, 31 years old, Timișoara, secondary school)*

*I don't know her in a personal way, I know a girl who is begging, but she is not Roma, she comes from my grandparents' village, her parents are Romanian, but no, that is a family in a difficult situation. She left home. This was the only way she could support herself. I don't think he even went to school. Yes I understand. But to me it seems very miserable that people end up in this type of begging situation, on the other hand, I know that there is a small mafia, no, there are others that use the disabled. Yes, I get it, do I get it? I know there is such a situation. This is a tragedy. (S3, 43 years old, Timișoara, higher education)*

The main discursive nuclei determined from the responses of the respondents are the following:

- ✓ External migration (12 positive, 0 neutral, 6 negative)
- ✓ Romania (9 positive, 5 neutral), 4 negative)
- ✓ Other countries
  - Germany (5 positive, 0 neutral, 0 negative)
  - Denmark (1 positive, 0 neutral, 0 negative)
  - Italy (3 positive, 0 neutral, 0 negative)
  - Greece (1 positive, 0 neutral, 0 negative)
  - England (3 positive, 1 neutral, 1 negative)
  - Cyprus (1 positive, 0 neutral, 0 negative)
  - Belgium (1 positive, 1 middle sex, 0 negative))
  - France (1 positive, 0 neutral, 1 negative)
- ✓ Traditional activities abroad (5 positive, 4 medium, 0 negative)
- ✓ Non-traditional activities abroad (9 positive, 2 neutral, 1 Negative)
- ✓ Illegal activities- begging, cheating, prostitution, robbery (0 positive, 4 neutral, 15 negative)

## 5. Conclusion

Research question: We believe that although members of the Roma community are engaged in traditional and non-traditional occupations, there is no longer a close connection between the occupation and the subgroup (ethnicity) that defines the culture of the Roma because they belong to the overall goal of the group: the identification and qualitative analysis of traditional and non-traditional economic practices in the Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca Roma communities resulted in two specific goals, which we believe have been achieved.

Specific objectives 1. Determine the traditional and non-traditional trade currently engaged in by Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca Gypsies. We believe that a specific goal is to be achieved. In the Roma community, there are occupational diversity ranging





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