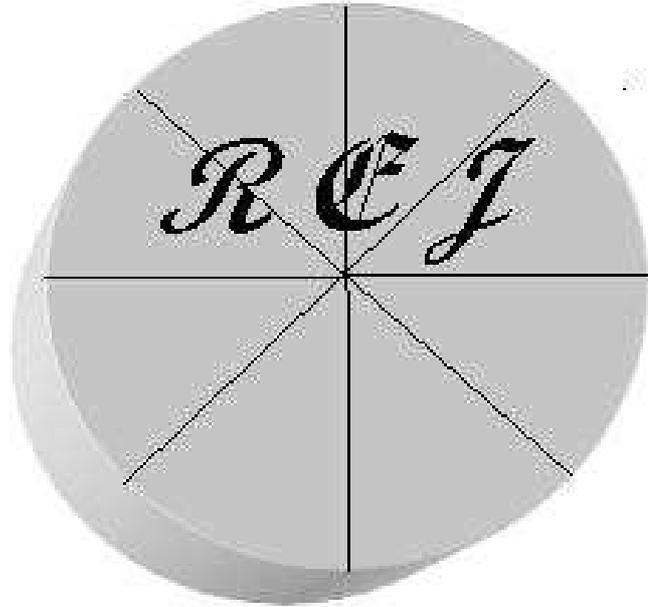


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Ansvarige utgivare: Gregor Kwiek
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The Past, the Present and the
Future

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Editorial and Summary of Contributions

Romani E Journal, which has now existed for three years, hereby presents its tenth issue. It contains two articles focusing on matters concerning the past, the present and the future of the Romani people in Sweden.

First there is a short account on Romani history written by Robert Brisenstam. After having given the reader some basic facts about the Romani minority of present day Sweden, the author brings up both positive and negative sides of Romani history in Sweden, beginning with the first recorded appearance of Romani people on Swedish soil. Finally he gives some examples of how the Romani minority has reacted to antiziganism.

In his article on bridge builders and the Swedish governments twenty year strategy for Romani inclusion, Gregor Dufunia Kwiek focuses on a contemporary issue of great importance for the future. The government sees bridge builders as one of several means of achieving the goals of the strategy. The article brings up various aspects concerning bridge builders, such as the definition of the concepts of bridge builders and mediators, experiences from bridge building activities already in place and the views and experiences of some people working as bridge builders.

While Brisenstam gives a summary of history, Kwiek investigates matters taking place now. What the future holds is of course hard to predict. However, trying to learn from what we know of our history and by examining our contemporary situation, we might have a chance of improving the world. Education is one way of improving the world and it is the way in which Romani E Journal tries to make a contribution.

A Brief Summary of the History of the Romani Minority in Sweden

by

Robert Brisenstam

Introduction

This text was originally written and used as a handout paper at a presentation held by the author in October 2011. The subject of the presentation was the history of the Romani population of Sweden with emphasis on discrimination and the title of the handout was “A brief history of the Romani population of Sweden – Summary of a presentation held at the premises of Sensus in Stockholm 2011-10-08”. The audience consisted mainly of Romani activists from Serbia who visited Sweden in October 2011. The text has been revised by the author before publication in Romani E Journal.

The main purpose of the article is to contribute to the common knowledge of the broad public in a simple and easy accessible manner. Therefore I have omitted to include both footnotes and bibliography.¹ Much of the contents of the article may already be known to the broad public. However, for people who have little or no knowledge of Romani history the text may serve as an introduction.

Basic facts about the Romani minority in Sweden

Today there are several estimations regarding the number of Romanies in Sweden. Some claim that there are as few as 35 000 while others claim the number of Romanies to exceed 100 000 individuals. The most often mentioned number is however 50 000-60 000. To this number one must add a possibly shifting number of several thousands of Romani individuals

¹ For further reading on the subject of this article, see for example the bibliography in Brisenstam, Robert, *What is a “Gypsy”? On some differences between the legal prerequisite “Gypsy” and some Romani self-denominations*, The Name Game, Romani E Journal Fall/Höst No 6. 2011 <http://romaniejournal.com.donatello.binero.se/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=YsfnxMa4xhY%3d&tabid=81&mid=475>. Several of the sources of this article can be found in the mentioned bibliography.

living underground due to lack of identity papers or because they lack permission to stay in the country.

The Romani minority in Sweden consists of various groups, between which there exist both cultural and linguistic differences. Some speak Romani as their mother tongue while others only know a number of words. When Sweden in 1999 and 2000 recognized the Romani people as a national minority according to the Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities (FCNM), it divided the Romani population into five groups – Resande, Swedish Roma (Kelderash), Finnish Roma (Kale), non-Nordic Roma (immigrating during the 1960's and 1970's) and newly arrived Roma (mainly from the Balkan peninsula). However, the ethno-cultural reality of the Romani population of Sweden is that there are estimates of between ten and twenty groups, of which some have been present in Sweden since the sixteenth century or perhaps even earlier, while others have immigrated more recently during the past few years. This and the cultural and linguistic diversity among the Romanies of Sweden lead to different needs – while some demand mother tongue instruction others are searching for linguistic revitalization. However, despite all the differences there are also many things that the various Romani groups have in common and although the risk of being discriminated against might vary on the individual level, all Romani groups face the same situation concerning discrimination.

The first Romanies in Sweden

As far as known, the first recorded appearance of Romanies in Sweden took place in Stockholm on the 29th September 1512. A group of 30 couples with children led by a man called count Antonius then arrived to the city. They were recorded to belong to the people from Little Egypt who goes from country to country but the Swedes, just as some people in northern Germany, called them Tatars. Up until this day some Romanies are still called "tattare" by their neighbours, despite this word being seen as pejorative both by Romanies and by the non-Romani majority population. As far as I know, no source mentions how or from where count Antonius and his followers came. Thus it is not known if they came to Stockholm by land or by sea. Nor is it known if they came from abroad when they arrived to Stockholm or if they came to the capital from somewhere within the country. It is however believed by some that people with dark physical features working as tinkers had been present in Sweden already before the beginning of the sixteenth century. Being dark and working as a tinker does not automatically mean that one is Romani. Furthermore the definition of "dark

physical features” may vary widely depending on whom one asks. On the other hand, as the trade of the tinker has been common among Romanies in northern Europe for centuries and as many Romanies have had and still have relatively darker hair and skin than their average non-Romani environment, the dark complexion in combination with working as tinkers may be an indication that the people in question were Romanies. However, we cannot be sure.

Regarding from where count Antonius and his followers came, one ought to have in mind the three following things. First, in 1505 a man called count Antonius Gagino boarded a ship in Scotland and sailed to Denmark, which then covered all of present day Norway and large parts of what is today southern Sweden. Count Antonius Gagino was recorded as being of Little Egypt, i. e. he was a “Gypsy”. It is not known where he actually landed nor if he arrived in Denmark at all, but it is tempting to assume that count Antonius Gagino, who left Scotland in 1505, was the same person as count Antonius, who arrived in Stockholm in 1512. Second, in northern England and southern Scotland there have been a Romani family with the name of Faa. At one occasion in the 1570’s an “Egyptian” (in Swedish sources it says “egifter”) named Anders Faa was granted a passport by Swedish authorities for domestic travelling within Sweden. Third, there is a Romani group in Scandinavia called Resande. These are the ones traditionally referred to as “tattare” by the Swedish non-Romani majority and also, to some extent, by individuals of other Romani groups. The Resande have been present in Scandinavia since at least the seventeenth century and are by many assumed to be some of the descendants of count Antonius and his followers. Among the Resande there are today very few who fluently speak Scandoromani, i. e. their dialect of the Romani language. However, the vocabulary which has been preserved is in several aspects very similar to the vocabulary of Angloromani, the dialect of the Romani language of the Romanichal, i. e. one of the Romani groups having been the longest on the British Isles. Thus, if count Antonius and his followers really were the first Romanies in Sweden, there are some facts that, put together, loosely indicate that the Romani immigration into Sweden started from the West. If, on the other hand, count Antonius Gagino in Scotland and count Antonius in Stockholm were two different persons and if there are more dialects of the Romani language than Angloromani being equally similar to Scandoromani, this theory of immigration from the West is just a theory. Furthermore many Resande have an oral tradition according to which their ancestors came to Sweden as mercenaries from Germany and Russia during the seventeenth century and during the reign of Charles XII in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Genealogical research conducted by Resande Romani individuals have provided information pointing at the same directions as the oral tradition. Other ancestors of

Resande families are known to have come later on, running circuses etc. Of course this does not mean that the Resande are not descendants of count Antonius and his followers. However, it is one example of the fact that the history of the Romani minority in Sweden is more complicated than as to just pointing out one region of origin, one date of immigration or one place of arrival. After all, as shown by the timeline of Romani history on The Patrín Web Journal and several other written sources, little is known about the history of the Romani minority in Europe during the sixteenth century. From what is known, or assumed, it is hard to draw conclusions.

Negative aspects of Romani history in Sweden

The history of the Romani minority of Sweden is, just as in other parts of the world, marked by persecution, discrimination and harassment. The reasons for this treatment have been various, including socioeconomic reasons as well as pure racism and xenophobia. Not long after count Antonius set foot in Sweden the persecutions started.

Collective expulsions, deportations, religious and social exclusion, prohibitions against immigration and settlement, violent persecutions, forced sterilizations, taking the children from their parents and putting them in institutions or in foster homes and internalizations of individuals and whole families are all things that have struck the Romani minority in the Nordic countries during the centuries. Several laws and regulations with the intention to drive the Romani minority out of Sweden or to force them to assimilation were passed. Some regulations also ordered punishment of people giving Romani individuals a helping hand. For example, in 1560 the clergy of the Swedish Evangelical Church were forbidden to baptize Romani children, unite Romani couples in marriage or bury deceased Romanies. The prohibition may have been in force until 1686 and priests who acted against it were immediately banned from the clergy. The prohibition against Romani settlement is another example. Peasants and people running guest houses could be liable to pay fines if they gave shelter to Romani individuals. During the twentieth century several hundreds of Romanies are estimated to have been sterilized without necessary consent, while others were lobotomized or had their children taken away from them just because of them being Romani. The last prohibition against Romani settlement was completely abolished in the 1970's. Until then many Romani families had been forced to live in temporary camps before having to move on after just a few days or weeks, this having the consequence that their children were unable to attend school. Those Romanies who had succeeded in settling down before the

1970's and whose children attended school were often exposed to severe discrimination, harassment and interethnic conflicts resulting in them being driven from their homes.

Another example of antiziganism which must not be forgotten is the categorization of various Romani groups made by the state and some scholars during the last century. According to this view some Romanies were considered less Romani, or even as non-Romani. This, together with the almost complete lack of information in for example schools, has contributed to the already immense ignorance surrounding all Romani related matters in Sweden. Discrimination remains a large problem still today and Romanies still cannot take for granted that they will have access to housing, to the labour market and to public spaces such as restaurants under the same conditions as everyone else. Neither is mother tongue instruction in school to be taken for granted despite it being a legislated right for Romani children.

Positive aspects of Romani history in Sweden and the reaction of the Romani minority to antiziganism

The history of the Romani minority in Sweden is not only filled with negative facts. It also contains many positive aspects. Romanies have always had a role to play in Swedish society. Not only as merchants, selling goods, animals and handicraft (often made by themselves), but also as providers of services, shoeing and castrating horses, maintaining buildings, as coppersmiths and as tinkers, people needed them and continuously requested what they had to offer. Even when it came to things such as telling fortunes and healing animals there was a market in Sweden for services provided by Romanies. Romani individuals and families also performed by playing music. Some ran circuses. And just as in other parts of the world Romanies in Sweden, whether they liked it or not, served as inspirational sources of literature, music and film. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many Romani men served both as regular soldiers and as mercenaries in the Swedish army. Still today many run their own companies, thus continuing a centuries old Romani professional tradition.

However, antiziganism has had and still has as a consequence that many Romanies hide their identity, change their surnames and put aside some traditions. Many people lead a double life – at home they are Romani and at work or in school they are something else. Yet, for most Romanies it is important to preserve their identity, to cultivate their culture and to keep the language.

Exclusion from the labour market and difficulties in accessing housing lead to social and economic problems for many individuals and families while discrimination in the educational system and on the labour market discourage Romani children and youth to educate themselves. This leads to many Romanians being unable to compete on the labour market. Difficulties in getting employed lead many to seek alternative sources of income, such as working in the grey economy. Social exclusion also carries with it severe health problems within the Romani minority and not so few elderly Romanians suffer from diseases and other health problems connected to the harsh conditions of life endured in the beginning and in the middle of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, Romani activists and organizations in Sweden combat antiziganism by running projects, writing articles for newspapers, periodicals and scientific journals, documenting and building archives, holding demonstrations, producing and broadcasting television programs, debating, information spreading, giving concerts and lectures, organizing conferences and seminars etc. An important feature of the struggle for better conditions for the Romani minority has been the small, but slowly growing number of books written by Romani authors about the life of various Romani groups or families in the Nordic countries as well as works written by scholars and others who are not Romani themselves, but who have tried to give a balanced and nuanced image of the Romani minority in Sweden. Last but certainly not the least, Romani individuals educating themselves and/or engaging in research and in politics play a vital role in changing negative attitudes and they contribute to developing a society more open and accessible to a people which has been living in it, participating in it and contributing to it for at least five centuries.

Bridge Builders and the 20 Year Strategy

by

Gregor Dufunia Kwiek

Background

On the 14th of September, 2006, the Swedish government decided to start a Delegation for Romani issues, to analyze, gather data, on problems Romani people face in Sweden, and provide recommendations to address those problems so that the Romani population in Sweden would have access to their human rights.² The Delegation for Romani issues was to carry out its investigation from 2007 to 2010 and at the end of its phase was to produce a report covering problem areas and recommendations on how to solve those problems. Once the report was completed, it consisted of some 581 pages. According to the report, approximately 80% of the Roma in Sweden are unemployed. There is no way to be certain of how many Roma are actually unemployed in Sweden, since many that are hide their identity in order not to lose their jobs, and also because there are no records on statistics for employment based on ethnicity in Sweden. However, what we can be certain of is that discrimination has and does largely contribute to unemployment among Roma, and because many Roma are identifiable via their last name or choice of attire, we can conclude that many Roma are unemployed. But then again, this is an educated guess and does not give us any true understanding for the employment situation of Roma in Sweden. Because we do have many Roma attending schools, churches, and other social environments, where most complain about discrimination and unemployment, we can assume the unemployment rate to be high.

The Delegation for Roma issues covered five social areas, namely employment, housing, education, health, and social wellbeing; this of course is not to say that it neglected other areas such as history and culture. The report names several troubled social areas that Roma face on a daily basis. Throughout the report, the Delegation for Romani issues continually speaks of mediators and how important their role is in challenging these problems.

² <http://www.levandehistoria.se/files/66e467ad.pdf>

Once the report was distributed amongst various governmental bodies, county administrative boards, municipalities, and organizations, a parliamentary decision was made to launch a twenty-year Romani Strategy (En samordnad och långsiktig strategi för romsk inkludering 2012-2032). Hereby, Sweden also realized its responsibility as all EU member states were to submit national Roma strategies by the end of 2011 (the Swedish government presented its strategy on 16 February 2012). The overarching goal with this strategy is that a child who is born in 2012 should have the same opportunities by the time he/she is 20 years old as would any child of the same age of a non-Romani ethnic background. One of the ways that this is hoped to be accomplished is via mediators who have also come to be known as *bridge builders* (brobyggare). The major reason that the term *bridge builders* has been applied to mediators is because there were numerous good examples of mediators who were called bridge builders by others. One of the ways in which the government hopes it can involve bridge builders in these various social areas is by there being a course to train Roma to be bridge builders. However, as this is a plan under construction, certain institutions have begun their own form of recruiting of bridge builders to deal with present problems. In many cases, in meetings with schools, governmental bodies, and various institutions, the question has come up as to what the definition is of a bridge builder. In some of these cases, those very bridge builders who were seen as positive examples are not referred to as bridge builders any longer since there is no clear definition of it. This article does not seek to criticize the state or anyone for suggesting that bridge builders play a more active role in social problem that Roma face in Sweden, but rather seeks to present the various problems faced by bridge builders, to present the various definitions for what a bridge builder is, and what a bridge builder not only has to know but also how he/she works with the community. By answering these questions, this article's overall aim is to assist with the Romani Strategy via its definition of what a bridge builder is.

On September the 7th, 2012, the Swedish government organized a meeting that was attended by about 80 people from various governmental bodies. Prior to the meeting five municipalities were selected as pilot municipalities that will conduct development work between 2012 and 2015 in cooperation with relevant public authorities and Roma. The idea is "to develop good examples of working methods that can be disseminated across the country".

³Largely, the four-year pilot project is for the municipalities to work closely with other bodies

³ <http://www.government.se/sb/d/16234/a/193877>

to tackle the social areas that present problems for the Romani community, and it is recommended that they work with bridge builders that can assist them in that goal. ⁴

The five pilot municipalities that are to implement the strategy are Gothenburg, Helsingborg, Luleå, Linköping and Malmö.⁵ These pilot municipalities are to identify the needs of the Roma in cooperation with relevant governmental bodies, engage in method development in various social areas, to document all steps and measures taken in relation to the strategy, and to have Romani involvement within the method development. This pilot project is to take place over a four year period, and once the four years will have passed, the experiences of these municipalities shall then play a role in implementing the 20 year strategy at a national level.

Examples of Bridge Building Initiatives

During 2012, five Romani persons had been employed at the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen), that are to act as mediators between Roma that live in the five pilot municipalities as employees of the Job Centre in each respective municipality. These Romani persons have officially obtained the title of bridge builders unlike many others who are employed as mother tongue instructors, teachers, activists, etc., that either call themselves bridge builders or are referred as such by others. Even these bridge builders have pointed out that there is no clear definition of what a bridge builder, but as bridge builders at the Employment Service, they are to study and learn the rules and laws of the Employment Service and then are to combine what mediators' skills they have with that.

The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) has been given the assignment by the Swedish government to procure a course for bridge builders to work in preschools and grade schools. ⁶ Based on this initiative we can be left to assume that the bridge builders are understood to be mediators that go between parents, Romani children and the schools, to ensure that the children receive a proper education. Indeed, there are examples of Romani children who do not attend school, and there are even parents who know not how to address this problem or simply don't. Numerous examples have existed in Sweden for decades where some Roma had taken it upon themselves to pick up Romani children, bring them to school,

⁴ <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/13817/a/198466>

⁵ <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/15564/a/191214>

⁶ <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/15562/a/186402>

assist them in school, and even help them with their homework. However, this example cannot possibly be the defining marker of what a bridge builder is since the Employment Service hired Roma, gave them the official title of bridge builders to work in an area not concerned with grade school or preschool.

In 2009 the Romani Information and Knowledge Center (Romskt informations- och kunskapscenter) opened its doors in Malmö, Sweden. This institution, also known as the RIKC abbreviated, differed from most other Romani institutions previously existed in Sweden. Unlike other institutions that either came in the form of an association or organization, the RIKC was established as a part of the municipality. In other words, the RIKC is a municipal body that addresses Romani issues. The RIKC acts as a mediator between schools, the Employment Service, hospitals, other social bodies and the Romani community in Malmö. The RIKC has six regular employees that work on the challenges faced by Malmö's approximately 8,000 Roma. Marian Wydow is one of those employees and one can even say that he is the father of the RIKC. Wydow has been a bridge builder for over 20 years, and Wydow, in an earlier interview, has given me examples of the kind of problems he had tackled as a bridge builder. Wydow explained that the Romani community in Europe has faced a history of exclusion and were targeted by state bodies for discrimination. As a result of this many Roma distrust non-Romani institutions, and because there was little contact with non-Romani society, misrepresentation of Romani society was rarely addressed. Wydow pointed out that this has led some Roma to distrust teachers, doctors and other authoritative figures, while at the same time; these authoritative figures had their own ignorance about the Roma. He went onto say that things have gone better over the years but not enough. As a bridge builder, Wydow worked with both "simple" things, such as reading a letter to an illiterate Romani person, as well as things as complex as dealing with child welfare (including cases where Romani children were to be taken away from their families). Wydow went onto say that as a bridge builder things were not easy, but as part of a municipal body composed of bridge builders, he has been able act with more authority and get far more done.

Thus the question that remains is if the RIKC was such a good example that Malmö was willing to invest in it since 2009, why has it not played a bigger role in the strategy instead of the bridge building concept? One cannot answer this question with any certainty, but later viewpoints from bridge builders will be presented to illuminate us on this matter more amongst others.

The ESF project known as “Romane Buca” tackles the problem social area of Romani employment. The project explains that social exclusion has led the Roma to lacking both knowledge to properly integrate into mainstream society as well as that they lack the needed contact networks to access employment. The project seeks to address these problems by providing Romani individuals this knowledge via various schools for adult education and by attaining employment for some of those students.⁷ One particular school and even city borough that stands out is Skarpnäcks folkhögskola and Stockholm’s city borough Skarpnäck. Skarpnäck folkhögskola has employed me, a Romani ethnologist (a long time bridge builder) as a part time teacher within the course. What is relevant about the teacher’s (my) identity is not that he is Romani alone but that he is a part of the community that he teaches, which presents him as a role model in his own community as a teacher. At the course I teach about Swedish society in a manner that is culturally intelligible to the students. More relevant than this, and unlike the other courses at the other schools within the project “Romane Buca”, I teaches about Romani history, the culture and language. The idea behind this is to provide Roma not only with knowledge about mainstream society but also for them to know about their own identity and educate mainstream society about it. In other words, this part of “Romane Buca” is a bridge building course. Another aspect of the project is that the city borough Skarpnäck has employed a bridge builder to work with other local bodies and course participants. Thus far eight Romani persons have been employed in Skarpnäck alone, working with schools and leisure time activities for youths.

Experienced Bridge Builders

Five telephone interviews and two contact interviews have been carried out with Romani persons who have been bridge builders for several years. Out of these seven interviews, four have been selected to be presented in this article. The majority of the interviewees answered the questions that were posed to them largely in the same way, those interviews that were selected to be represented in this article were selected because they somewhat differed one another in the answers they responded with although they still remain similar to one another. Another reason these four interviews were selected is that they are geographically dispersed. Also, these four interviewees act as bridge builders through various fields such as bridge builders in ESF projects, are mother tongue instructors, or employees of the state. The identity of each bridge builder is concealed not because they requested such themselves but for the

⁷ <http://www.esf.se/sv/Projektbank/Behallare-for-projekt/Stockholm/Romane-buca/>

sake of this article's possibility to criticize and analyze their responses without causing an effect of repercussion that possibly would occur had their identities been revealed. Below, in the interviews my questions to the bridge builders is represented by GK and the bridge builders are represented as BB1, BB2, BB3 and BB4.

GK: Could you define what a bridge builder is?

BB1: A bridge builder is someone who understands Romani culture well enough to go between Romani and non-Romani society to solve problems that may come up between Romani and non-Romani society.

GK: In other words you are saying that a bridge builder is a cultural mediator?

BB1: Yes, but also should understand the culture of mainstream society.

GK: What particular problem or problems does a bridge builder address?

BB1: Education for one. We were not permitted to attend school until the late 1960's, and as a result we do not have a "tradition" of schooling. Add to this the fact that we have been excluded from mainstream society, discrimination, and the many atrocities faced by Roma through the centuries, Roma fear and distrust non-Roma. Hence a bridge builder needs to go in and address those problems, and ensure that a Romani child receives his/her education.

GK: So you are saying that a bridge builder needs to have the trust of Roma?

BB1: Without a question trust is vital, and it takes years upon years to develop such a trust.

GK: How does one develop such a trust?

BB1: First of all you need to be a part of the community, so that people know you, and your abilities. You need to have a good reputation in the community as someone who is resourceful and helpful.

GK: Let us say there is an experienced bridge builder in Stockholm, well recognized and resourceful, and moves to Malmo, where the Roma know not this bridge builder, can this person a bridge builder there?

BB1: The answer is no, the bridge builder needs to be a part of the local community.

GK: You said that bridge builders need to focus on Education, is that the only area that bridge builders should address?

BB1: No! My apologies I should have clarified. I should have said that education needs special attention, but all social areas need focus, such as employment, health, housing and so on.

GK: I am sure that you have heard that the Skolverket has been give the task of finding a means for having a course in Bridge Building and it has been suggested that Södertorns Högskola (a university/college in the Stockholm region) be the one to hold these courses. What is your opinion on that?

BB1: Well first of all we need to look at motivation first. Usually it is older Roma who themselves have gone through the process of not having a complete education and the difficulties faced as a result who tend to see this as a problem area and what to address it. This is not to say that younger Roma might not share this opinion, but it is commonly Romani in their thirties and up that are very verbal about it and play an active role in this issue. Youth tend to be more occupied with self interests. Because it is older Roma that tend be more active in this matter and feel they have a responsibility towards our future, I am not certain if this education should be at university. First of all, at university level, CSN (the institution that provides funding and loans for student education and living expenses) provides funding to a student at about 2,500 SEK (Swedish krona) a month without a loan; where as at non-university level in adult education a student can receive around 7,000 SEK, and more, dependent on how many children they have without taking a loan. Because I suspect that the majority of those interested would already be person with their own children and even teenage children, I think finance would play a major role in all this.

End of interview

GK: Could you define what a bridge builder is?

BB2: A bridge builder is nothing new for Romani society. It is how we have survived for centuries...we call it *vajda* in Romani. You see, the *vajda* was someone who knew how non-Romani society functioned, and was able to go between Romani and non-Romani society in addressing economic and social problems. A modern day bridge builder is no different; they roughly do the same thing except that this is becoming more and more institutionalized.

GK: Would you then say that a bridge builder is a mediator?

BB2: No! We have another word for a mediator, which is *umpachitori*, a peacemaker. A peacemaker goes in between two parties that are in disagreement or do not quite understand one another. A bridge builder on the other hand solves social problems. A bridge builder is a sort of manual labor, the bridge builder not only acts as someone that goes in between Romani and non-Romani society but also helps people write letters, CV's, job applications, school applications, the bridge builder may even have to do manual work if needed.

GK: What particular problem or problems does a bridge builder address?

BB2: The work of the bridge builder has no limits. Look, Roma have been excluded from all aspects of mainstream society. Just a few weeks we had a fire in the neighborhood that has left some Roma homeless. The authorities assumed that if they received the information in Romani, that this would solve the problem of passing information to Roma affected by the fire. This is a misguided assumption, yes, translation can help, but certain concepts just don't exist in Romani society that do in mainstream society and these need to be explained. The Roma that were affected by the fire understood via the translation that they could go into the apartments for five minutes to pick up some belongings like clothes that were not damaged by the fire, what they did not understand was what was going to be done with their possessions that were affected by the fire. You see, they did not understand that smoke damaged goods were to be thrown out. Another thing they did not understand was where they were to live or how to fill in insurance forms. This meant that bridge builders needed to help them move their stuff, organize living spaces for them, and help them with insurance forms.

GK: How does one become a bridge builder?

BB2: I think I answered that. One needs to be in the community, be resourceful, and at the same time understands how Swedish society functions.

GK: So you are saying that a bridge builder needs to have the trust of Roma?

BB2: Trust yes, but they don't need to be liked. The most important thing is that they are resourceful and are trusted by the community to solve their problems.

GK: How does one develop such a trust?

BB2: By doing things. If you can help a family or someone that is having problems, news travels fast in the community and then you are called by others with similar problems. Before you know it, you develop a relationship with authorities as a bridge builder and the community.

GK: Another bridge builder I interviewed felt that commonly it is Roma who are over thirty that become bridge builders and less often those who are younger.

BB2: That makes sense because of our own cultural norms. I mean, a younger person lacks the authority that an older person has because the older is expected to be more mature, understand and has a greater wealth of knowledge.

GK: Let us say there is an experienced bridge builder in Stockholm, well recognized and resourceful, and moves to Malmo, where the Roma know not this bridge builder, can this person a bridge builder there?

BB2: I don't think so. I live where I am a bridge builder and know all about the internal conflicts that take place between the various Roma that live there. As an outsider, I more than likely will not know about these conflicts and might just add fuel to the fire.

GK: What social problems should bridge builders focus on?

BB2: All!

GK: I am sure that you have heard that the Skolverket has been give the task of finding a means for having a course in Bridge Building and it has been suggested that Södertorns Högskola (a university/college in the Stockholm region) be the one to hold these courses. What is your opinion on that?

BB2: I can understand that one can teach others about mainstream society; I learn about it all the time, but I don't think you can teach people how to develop a relationship that takes years and how to gain a self experience of what most Roma go through daily. I suppose that we can share our experiences in a class room with students, and maybe they will learn through practice. But why a university? This I don't get. I mean the average salary for a bridge builder is around 16,000 SEK to 20,000 SEK. So why bother with a university education. If I were to go to university, I would not go to become a bridge builder. Why not a teacher, or lawyer, then you do not have to deal with this headache? Look, being a Romani bridge builder is a headache. This is something you do because you hate the problem not because you love the job.

End of interview

GK: Could you define what a bridge builder is?

BB3: A bridge builder is something that is very broad. You cannot simply say that a bridge builder is someone that picks kids up from home and brings them to school. A bridge builder may even develop a course or start a school to meet a particular educational need.

GK: Is a bridge builder is a cultural mediator?

BB3: No, naturally they should know about Romani culture and such, but they are not cultural mediators, they are people that go between Romani and non-Romani society solving problems relative to integration.

GK: What particular problem or problems does a bridge builder address?

BB3: Education is a vital aspect to the work of a bridge builder, but they are not educators. They should be the contact point between all governmental institutions and Roma where the

need may occur. Let me give you an example, Romani women have faced forced sterilization in Sweden up until the 1970's, thus many older Romani women distrust doctors. I have seen Romani persons that work in some shape or form in healthcare being called and asked for their opinions on health issues regularly. In other words, if one Romani person works say at the Job Centre or a school, the Roma will see this person as a resource in this area, and will turn to them instead of the normal route.

GK: So you are saying that a bridge builder needs to have the trust of Roma?

BB3: Trust and competence.

GK: How does one develop such a trust?

BB3: If one is helpful to Roma then one is helpful, and builds a reputation based on that.

GK: Let us say there is an experienced bridge builder in Stockholm, well recognized and resourceful, and moves to Malmo, where the Roma know not this bridge builder, can this person a bridge builder there?

BB3: I am a bit confused by the question. I mean a bridge builder is a bridge builder not because of his/her competence alone but because of the ties she/he has with the community. I don't get it, who is sending this bridge builder to Malmö.....The government?

GK: Let us say the bridge builder is a teacher in Stockholm and has job opportunity in Malmö, and moves there, can this person do what he/she did in Stockholm?

BB3: That depends, is this bridge builder recognized by the community at local, national or international level. Take yourself as an example, you are recognized by many throughout the country and in other parts of the world. I do not see this in being such a problem for you, but for another at the local level, unknown in Malmo, I don't think this would be easy. And even in your case, you maybe trusted by one community in Stockholm, but not in another in Stockholm. Of course I am not saying that this is the case, I am just giving an example of a possibility.

GK: I am sure that you have heard that the Skolverket has been give the task of finding a means for having a course in Bridge Building and it has been suggested that Södertorns Högskola (a university/college in the Stockholm region) be the one to hold these courses. What is your opinion on that?

BB3: A bridge builder should not need to have a university education; a bridge builder should have general education. If a bridge builder is going to deal with the education of Romani children alone, then I can understand that they may need some knowledge in pedagogics that can be obtained via a university course. However, that bridge builder will need an education in Romani history, culture and language to understand the problem first of all, and second, that person will also need to deal with the parents and the community, and its other problems. Look at it this way, say a family has economic problems; this will of course affect the child, or imagine that the family is in conflict with another. We know far too well that these conflicts can become physical and even children at times are thrown into the mess, the bridge builder will need to know about this conflict, and how to assist the child during this conflict and the family. Can a university education address this? Of course not! We bridge builders need to educate these non-Romani institutions before they create an even bigger mess.

End of interview

GK: Could you define what a bridge builder is?

BB4: The bridge builder is a person who has to endure and face obstacles daily. He does not work 9-5, but around the clock. He has a responsibility to the community whether he likes it or not. The bridge builder takes Roma by the hand and walks with them through their problems. The authorities rarely understand the problems, and it takes someone who knows those problems, knows how to present them to authorities in order to solve them.

GK: A bridge builder is a mediator?

BB4: In a way yes, but more than that. Its all hands on work! At times the bridge builder needs to say things to Roma in some cases that they don't like. The bridge builder can end up in heated discussions with members of the community. Its not like he explains something and then simply walks away. He goes through the entire process with them.

GK: What particular problem or problems does a bridge builder address?

BB4: All social problems.

GK: What qualifications should a bridge builder have?

BB4: Trust for one, a good understanding of how Swedish society works, and the ability to solve problems.

GK: So you are saying that a bridge builder needs to have the trust of Roma?

BB4: Of course. After all, they don't trust authorities most often and at times don't trust other Roma, so it's commonly some Romani person that has developed trust in the community over the years.

GK: How does one develop such a trust?

BB4: That is difficult. When I was younger, I did many stupid things; I built myself a bad reputation in the community. Then about fifteen years ago I started a company and started to hire some Roma. Soon more and more began asking me for a job. Of course I had none for them, but helped them find other jobs. I gained a reputation in the community as someone who can help Roma get jobs. I developed a relationship with authorities during this process, and later started a project that teaches Roma how to apply for a job.

GK: Let us say there is an experienced bridge builder in Stockholm, well recognized and resourceful, and moves to Malmo, where the Roma know not this bridge builder, can this person a bridge builder there?

BB4: I don't think that will be easy. If someone is unknown to the community, that person will need to first develop a relationship with the community, and start helping it. I don't think a person can walk into a community and say "hi, I am a bridge builder and am here to solve your problems".

GK: I am sure that you have heard that the Skolverket has been give the task of finding a means for having a course in Bridge Building and it has been suggested that Södertörns Högskola (a university/college in the Stockholm region) be the one to hold these courses. What is your opinion on that?

BB4: One of my colleagues attended a meeting where this was discussed. It seems that they want to teach these prospective bridge builders to teach. This seems very simple minded to me. Should someone become a teacher, only to be called a bridge builder? If you are a teacher, why not teach, have a salary of 26,000 SEK a month, and not bother in dealing with Romani problems. It's not like I look forward to all the problems I have to deal with daily. There is always some Romani person that obstructs the work and is jealous because they don't have the position of bridge builder. They think they can do better, and I say let them. Then the issue comes up why not take existing bridge builders, develop a course not at university level, that will enhance what they already know about mainstream society, maybe add psychology, and other subjects relevant to this field.

End of interview

Remarks

Based on the testimony above, we can conclude that the definition of a bridge builder is someone that is selected by his/her community informally because of their ability to deal with social problems faced by the Romani community. The bridge builders do not have the most desirable of careers and in fact many are employed in other fields and at times are bridge builders through those fields. The Swedish government regards the Bridge Building concept as a means to implement the 20 year strategy towards Romani inclusion, and yet, no report, meeting or conference has gone into understanding what the role of a Romani bridge builder is. The idea of having university education for bridge builders will not solve the problem that needs to be addressed for the strategy to work. Existing bridge builders and new bridge builders need to come together to discuss problems, solutions and exchange ideas. The stronger voice in the strategy needs to be that of experienced bridge builders, because they have run into problems that are yet to be experienced by new bridge builders. The issue here should not be a certificate that recognizes one as a bridge builder but that existing bridge builders make a major contribution in the strategy. Without question, the RIKC example in Malmö has influenced Gothenburg and Stockholm to follow the same path. It is more than

likely that Gothenburg will have an RIKC prior to Stockholm, while an RIKC is more than likely to make in appearance in city borough of Stockholm, in Skarpnäck. The Romani community in Sweden cannot afford to wait for the pilot municipalities to conclude their project so that the rest of the nation can then follow suit. The Romani community needs to act now and hold discussions with authorities in order to make sure that the 20 year strategy will bring positive change.

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Interviews

Name: BB1

Occupation: Bridge builder within the county

Age: (Approximately) 52

Sex: Male

Interview date: 121215 10:00-11:00

Interview Length: 60 minutes

Interview conducted via telephone by researcher

Name: BB2

Occupation: Borough employee

Age: (Approximately) 40

Sex: Male

Interview date: 121222 12:00-15:00

Interview Length: 180 minutes

Interview conducted via Dictaphone by researcher

Name: BB3

Occupation: Mother tongue instructor

Age: (Approximately) 35

Sex: Male

Interview date: 121217 11:00-12:00

Interview Length: 60 minutes

Interview conducted via telephone by researcher

Name: BB4

Occupation: Project leader

Age: (Approximately) 40

Sex: Male

Interview date: 121223 18:00-19:00

Interview Length: 60 minutes

Interview conducted via telephone by researcher