

Suggested Reading

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Eva DAVIDOVÁ

Romanies in Český Krumlov

Within the territory of the Czech Republic (as well as the former Czechoslovakia), the coexistence of Romanies (Gypsies) with other inhabitants has been the most successful in the town of Český Krumlov. The Romany community has lived for more than twenty years in Český Krumlov without any internal or external conflicts, enjoying good social standing, which, among other things, has resulted in a high proportion of Romany–Czech marriages.

Moreover, the vast majority of Roma profess gypsyhood (romipen) and do not find their origin shameful at all, which is good and right. Český Krumlov has then set an example: the positive coexistence of the bulk of population with the minority, Romanies, is indeed possible.

What has happened during the past decades to lead to such a result and confirmation of this possibility? Why was and is it possible in this historical town and why, on the contrary, has there been a significant increase in a number of problems with Romany communities, ethnic tension and mutual relations in many other towns and villages recently?

I. History of Roma Migration

For thirty years Romanies have represented the largest minority among all ethnic groups who live in the Český Krumlov region and in the town itself, directly after the Czech majority.

In the post-war years there were radical changes in the Romany population of Czechoslovakia, including changes in internal structure, number and territorial density. In addition, there was an intensification of internal differentiation according to levels of possible adaptation within groups, leading to lifestyle and culture

adaptations that changed the character of the group when compared with the previous situation.

This does not mean, however, that members of the group were no longer Roma, though some of them ceased to identify themselves with the Romany community as a result of pressure from society. It was particularly the environment of industrial and border towns that provoked radical and significant changes. In Český Krumlov, the current high proportion of Romanies are now of the third and fourth generations.

The end of the Second World War (1945) was a historical milestone in the development, position and living conditions of the Czechoslovakian Romanies. They were coming back home: Czech, Moravian, Slovak and German Roma and Sintis returned from concentration camps, if they survived (most of them were murdered by the National Socialists; only a few dozen families remained alive).

Vlachike Roma, who until 1959 represented a migratory group, in most cases returned to their migratory or nomadic life. Part of the settled or the so-called half-settled Romanies from the Romany settlements in Slovakia had therefore left – either immediately after 1945 or in the following years – for Bohemia not only to find jobs in the industrial and urban areas, but also to settle border areas: in Southern Bohemia mainly the Český Krumlov and Kaplice regions.

The exodus of Romanies to this region was spontaneous, uncontrolled and unorganized. After the Second World War, it was a part of a great migration of Romanies from Slovakia, especially from the Eastern part, to Bohemia in order to find jobs and ensure better housing and living conditions for their families.

In Slovakia most Romanies still live in villages or colonies, so-called *Romany Settlements* known as *Romane Gava* (though this proportion decreased over the years of 1970–1990). But in Bohemia and Moravia, the vast majority of Romanies live in towns. This proportion is three times higher than in Slovakia, and continuously increases both in general and in Český Krumlov.

In the post-war years, Romany families were influenced by their original localities (in most cases *Romany Settlements* and other similar types), namely by their *family groups (fajty)* who lived there and with whom they moved (at least part of them) to Bohemia. Such an influence was evident in all Romany settlers for a long time after their arrival in the new Czech environment; in some members of the oldest generation of migrants, the impact still is evident today.

Their group or *family* was a wider family, providing a real home,



and it was the family that gave them the feeling of safety. For a long time, those who moved were not able to get used to the new environment, namely to the town and the Český Krumlov region.

This was the reason for their behaviour towards the local majority and the origin of their feeling of having no roots, which, consequently, resulted in other migrations for some of them. Only the change in this feeling – acceptance of the environment as their new home – caused the process of gradual adaptation and enabled better coexistence between the minority Romany community with the bulk of the local population.

II. Places of Settlement

This turning point began during the 1960's, a watershed for the first generation, when intergenerational growth began. A new generation of Romanies, born in this environment, began to grow up.

The main reason and motivation for the migration of Romanies to the industrial and border towns in Bohemia was, apart from job-seeking and possibilities for better wages, especially the desire for life among the state population, where they would not be isolated and concentrated in *Romany Settlements* and where they expected to gain better social positions.

This reason for their largely spontaneous and voluntary migration played an even more important role than the social conditions. An important determinant of their habitation was undoubtedly the territorial lay-out, even within each town.

In addition to these reasons, through life in the new home, the Romany settlers had opportunities to establish contacts with the majority population; but, on the other hand, this type of habitation required Romanies to adapt at least limitedly to the given circumstances.

Until recently Romanies lived mainly in the historical centre of the ancient town of Český Krumlov, which was settled by mostly Romanies, new citizens, from 1945 until the beginning of the 1990's. The first place with the highest Roma concentration was *Rybářská* street, where they were allowed to reside in houses of great historic value, irrespective of levels of previous experience living in this type of habitation.

The Romany families, who came from primitive *chalets* without any knowledge of how to use modern sanitary installations (and who lived in the way they were used to) are not only to blame for the devastation of many of these houses during the first post-war years.

The blame for that situation is to be borne mainly by representatives of the first national committee (or Settlement Authority), who rashly assigned such houses to them. On top of all this, they were not able to teach Romany families, because of many other problems, how to live in the new conditions.

A large number of Romanies also lived in small houses situated in the street called *Pod kamenem* next to the entrance to Český Krumlov in the direction of České Budějovice.

These dwellings, however, were demolished at the end of the 1950's in order to enlarge the access road. Romany families who lived there were moved back to the historical core of the town: to streets *Kájovská* and *Široká*, to old *Plešivec* (where they live today), and to two houses in *Vyšné II.* above the town.

Romanies, however, have not lived here for a long time. At present only a small number of Romanies live in the historical centre, while most of them live in housing quarters in *Plešivec II.* During the last few years other families moved into the flats in housing quarters called *Mír* in *Domoradice* above the town.

III. Turning Point in the 1960's

It is widely known that people begin to feel at home in the location where their children were born and grow up and where the graves of their parents and relatives are. For Romanies in the Český Krumlov region, this feeling came to a large extent at the beginning of the 1960's.

Their identification with their own group, family or *fajta* and larger family has always been and still is, though in different dimensions, very strong and represents their natural environment, which is the reason for such firm ties.

During the last twenty or thirty years, when in their new home in the Český Krumlov region, the cohesion of these families as well as their interdependence gradually diminished. Romanies began to search for their own place, which was not easy to find.

Český Krumlov became famous because the Romany settlers gradually stabilized; most of them have felt at home in the town for a long time. Without conflicts, they lived with other citizens of the original settler families, and this population has increased in number in the last fifty years.

At present there are three hundred and three families or, in other words, around five hundred eighty to six hundred registered Romanies who were born in Český Krumlov as children and grandchildren of

the first settlers in KOTLAR, DUNKA, ČERVENÁK, RAKAŠ, BÍLÝ and other families. They represent almost four percent of the total number of the town population.

Among these main families, the *family* groups of KOTLAR and DUNKA are the most stabilized and settled. They were the first families who came from the East Slovakian district of Sabinov (later the Prešov district) and Stará Ľubovňa from 1945–1948.

Until 1990 most of them lived in the historical core of the town preserve. In the Český Krumlov district there live around one thousand sixty to one thousand three hundred Romanies in total in small towns and villages; half of these, however, live in Český Krumlov. The highest relative number of Romanies live in *Větrní*, making up six percent of the inhabitants of this industrial area.

During the post-war years the Romany community in Český Krumlov increased in number from one hundred fifty in 1947 to two hundred twenty-six in 1967. From three hundred sixty-two Romanies in 1970, it increased to five hundred fifteen in 1983, and to five hundred sixty five in 1987 (within the district to one thousand sixty). The current population, of about six hundred Romanies within Český Krumlov, has remained at approximately the same level for the last ten years.

IV. Mixed Marriages and Integrated Families

Another characteristic feature of Český Krumlov is the increasing proportion of mixed couples, the highest within the Czech Republic in the last twenty or twenty-five years, at thirty percent in 1988 and, presently, at almost a third. Such mixed marriages or unions were common from the 1970's on; before then, they were rather rare.

One of the partners is occasionally of Slovak or Magyar (Hungarian) nationality, in the 1970's and 1980's also of Polish or another nationality. The highest proportion of such marriages is in Český Krumlov.

The continuously increasing proportion of mixed marriages demonstrates stabilization and improvement in social position of the Romany community. It also reveals this ethnic groups greater openness in the environment of Český Krumlov.

Although a certain prejudice and bias, especially from the side of the Czech and other citizens against Romanies persists to a small extent, mixed marriages are proof of radical changes in public opinion and attitude towards Romanies.

Previous experience showed the difficulties of ceasing to belong to

an ethnic group as an individual in so-called *integrated* or adapted families living in Český Krumlov. The prestige of each individual can be earned through the increase of prestige of the whole group, through advancement of the ethnic society and through the establishment of its position in relation to the majority, leading to coexistence.

The so-called *Roma problem* does not concern only the majority society or the Roma themselves, but is a common problem. The situation can be solved neither through artificial increase and equality of the Romanies' socio-economic level, nor through the restraint of their specific lifestyle and culture, as the previous totalitarian Czechoslovakian society demonstrated.

On the contrary, it is necessary at this stage of development to take into account positive viable elements of the Romany community, to support their sound self-assurance resulting in ethnic integration and, therefore, without causing them to lose their ethnic conscience, to assist in positive mutual coexistence.

For most Romanies, there is a tendency and need to proceed from the present ethnic endogamy (though impaired) and through ethnic integration to aspire to equal coexistence: this has been recently proved by most of the Romany families in Český Krumlov.

The process of settlement, adaptation to new living conditions and establishment of social position of Romanies in Český Krumlov in the last fifty years was difficult and complicated, but the Roma community has been able to adapt to and with the other locals, while still retaining their Romany ethnic conscience.

V. Factors of Improvement

If we were to sum up the internal and external influences that resulted in this positive situation, among the most important factors would be the following:

Firstly, the influence and impact of the former government authorities and the municipal committee from the years 1960 to 1989 gave Romanies the *chance* and gradually began to trust and help them. This positive influence and good mutual relations were followed by the present Český Krumlov municipal authority.

Secondly, internal influences within the Romany community helped them to adapt to the new living conditions and did not provoke conflicts or crimes; they slowly learned how to live and coexist with the majority population. Over a number of years, this

led to the increasing social prestige of Romanies and won the hearts of more and more Czech citizens, instead of setting them against themselves.

Thirdly, internal influences in the Český Krumlov Romany community *looked after* their acquired prestige and did not let new migrants, moving from the 1950's to 1970's from different places in Bohemia and Moravia, damage it. They prevented them from coming and settling in the town, where several Romany families had already settled and lived. Extended families then increased in number in the following generations.

Finally, the good position of the Romany community in Český Krumlov is also reflected by the high proportion of mixed Romany–Czech marriages, which at present reaches up to one third (at the beginning of 1980's it was thirty percent) of all marriages. This constitutes the most convincing proof of the significant change in attitude of the Czech majority and the good public opinion of Romanies.

VI. Culture and Religion

The position of Romanies in Český Krumlov continues to improve, despite problems such as unemployment.

In past years, many successful Romanies in Český Krumlov offered jobs to unemployed members of their community, including, for example, the firm *Dunka*, the pub *Cikánská Jizba* and others.

The religious services in the Český Krumlov region are overseen by deacon and chaplain Vojtěch VÁGAI: a Romany, who works in the Saint Vitus Church in Český Krumlov or in the monastery and other parochial districts in Větrní, Kájov and around.

Local Romanies normally do not differ from others in housing culture, clothing or other material life styles. On the other hand, their family and social relations within their community have a distinct character, particularly as regards the preservation of their culture and folklore, music and dance.

Three bands (Cindži Renta, Mulatčag and Orient), a children choir Gilori (The Ditty) and other musicians and singers perform traditional Romany folklore, which they strive to preserve and develop. The specificity and originality of the Romany culture enriches the cultural life of the historical town of Český Krumlov.

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Český Krumlov and the Roma Population after 1989

Český Krumlov (in German Krum(m)au an der Moldau or Böhmisches Krum(m)au), in the Czech Republic, as part of the Sudetenland, was almost completely evacuated after the Second World War (1939–1945).

The Czechoslovakian state could not afford to leave the Sudeten areas empty, so repopulation programs were set up in order to refill the border areas. One segment of this population was Romanies (Gypsies), particularly in Český Krumlov.

I. History of the City

One must keep in mind that at that time of the repopulation of the town after World War II, Český Krumlov was more than simply the old town near the river: houses had been built around the town periphery on the hillsides in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; houses which enjoyed more sunshine, cleaner air, and a safe distance from the seasonal floods of the Vltava River.

The first re-settlers to the town were Czechs and Slovaks coming first from inland Bohemia and later from ethnic villages in the neighboring eastern countries, being invited from the State to come home to the motherland after the war. This fair-skinned population resettled the newer houses around the hillsides, while the darker-skinned folk settled into Krumlov later and moved into the old town near the river. Český Krumlov became known during the time of the socialist regime as a Romany town. But the new residents of the old town did not own their properties, as all former Sudeten properties went into the hands of the state.

They also did not have any money (or reason) to reconstruct the houses or carry out more than the most basic maintenance, such as replacing shingles or re-vamping the heating system. So most of the