Inclusion Through Visualisation: participatory cinema as a tool addressing structural violence against Romani population in the EU

The main idea behind the research is to look beyond the established grand narratives about the Romani population in the EU. Those homogeneous narratives, portrays of the Romani population carefully shaped by the mainstream media and sustained by lack of will to challenge one’s own perception of the “reality” contribute to the everyday, interpersonal exclusion and marginalisation of the largest ethnic minority in Europe.

Documentary cinema which currently took its niche within the mainstream media landscape is extensively focusing on fade of Romani population. The incentives of documentary filmmakers are diverse as are their approaches. Some want to advocate for human rights, others — allegedly give the voice to “voiceless”; some are seeing cinema as venue for their artistic expression and others are trying to empower the subjects of the cinema. Within the scope of this research I was trying to see patterns used by documentary cinema in portraying Romani stories.

The research title suggests that participatory cinema is a valid alternative to the mainstream documentary scene. It is to be argued that participatory cinema is offering the freedom of narratives which are not bind together by the filmmaker’s sense of the story. However, in order to claim that participatory cinema is a better tool in addressing structural and cultural violence against Romani population, documentary cinema shall be analysed.

In this regard, OSA offers a great selection of documentary films on Romani issue. Though all of the films are focusing on fade of Romani people in the Eastern and Central Europe, the approaches used by filmmakers and consequently the impact on a viewer differ greatly. I was privileged to have an access to the films which I would probably have not been able to find otherwise.

During the two months of the fellowship I watched and analysed all Romani focused films at the OSA. This period represents a significant stage within my PhD studies. I have just recently started working on the project and I was ready to be challenged by video materials. This is indeed what happened during my research at the OSA. While I was developing the research project, I was confident that documentary cinema is an unethical and somewhat dangerous tool which can lead to further alienation and marginalisation of Romani population in the EU. Now, after being exposed to
numerous documentary films, I admit that there is vast field of possible manifestations of
documentary cinema and it would be limiting to assume that all documentary scene is sustaining
and reinforcing prejudice and stereotypes against Romani population. Therefore, as a result of the
fellowship I am reshaping/reassessing the focus of my research project. Even though I am willing to
stay with participatory cinema, documentary cinema and its assessment will be differentiated on its
possible societal impact. I will try to see beyond the documentary genre as such, which indeed can
disseminate stereotypical narratives, but rather focus on single stories of success, stories which
address the issue in alternative and somewhat innovative way. I am happy that this stage of
reassessment happened now, when I am still searching for right needed questions. Research is a
transformative process which can at times bring us to the places we have not anticipated to go and I
think that fellowship and exposure to different documentary projects allowed me to open the door to
new horizons of truths.

OSA stuff welcomed me as a member of the inspiring family of people who care about past and
present and who are willing to sustain the connection between both. I would like to thank separately
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The list of documentary films watched during the fellowship at OSA:


_Our School / Şcoala noastră._ Nicoara, Mona; Coca-Cozma, Miruna, United States, 2011, Romanian/Subtitles: English, 94 min, documentary film.


_My Home is My Castle._ Kleider, Alexander; Michel, Daniela; Müller, Marco, Germany, 2011, Hungarian/Subtitles: English, 75 min, documentary film.


The Last Camp – aka Gypsies / Последний табор. Evgenii Shneider, Moisei Gol'dblat director, Mezhrabpomfil'm producer; Soviet Shneider, Evgenii ; Gol'dblat, Moisei, Soviet Union, 1935, Russian, 78 min, fiction film.


Osada Bystrany. Bader, Marc ; Kuncikova, Petra, (n/a), 2006, Slovak, Romany/Subtitles: English, 32 min, documentary film.


No Place for You at This Workplace / Na ovom radnom mjestu nema mjesta za vas. Zimbrek, Slaven, Croatia, 2007, Croatian/Subtitles: English, 53 min, documentary film.


T’an Bakhtale!: "Good Fortune!". Lemon, Alaina, United States, 1994, Russian/Subtitles: English, 75 min, documentary film.

Djangos Erben. Sekerci, Suzan, Germany, 2008, German, 89 min, documentary film.