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Roma Museum

The topic of my doctoral research is minority representation in cultural institutions, and the focus of my project is the question of the Roma museum in Hungary. The need for a representative national and cultural institution was expressed more than 40 years ago. Over the past period, Roma and non-Roma experts have worked together to prepare nearly 30 drafts, but only a few of them have been implemented, and they were only able to survive for a while.

The attempts to establish a Roma museum in Hungary and the unrealized concepts represent a kind of lack, and I am building my research on the absence of this desired institution. In my thesis, I attempt to explore the causes and consequences of the shortage as well as the possibilities for filling it.

Starting from this statement, I examine the question of the Roma museum in Hungary:

Why is this institutional demand so persistent, and why is the sense of lack increasing? Why have the former national museum efforts failed to achieve their goals, and why can many of the smaller local initiatives only survive for a while? One of the main questions of my research is how it is possible to move forward from the current, ever-reducing Roma cultural and institutional situation.

Would the missing national institution be the right direction, or could a transnational, European-level organization be the goal, in addition to leaving the national framework? But beyond policy papers and diplomacy, can transnational organizations bring real value and knowledge back to local communities?

What plans were made to create a museum in Hungary? Who were the key figures pushing for the establishment of a Roma museum in Hungary, how were they able to enter the institutional discourse, and how were they able to boost the process?

What were the milestones in the cultural and artistic field of the Roma emancipation movement in Hungary? Which were the exhibitions through which the process can be analyzed?

How are the Roma represented in the historical narratives of the permanent exhibitions of the national museums in Hungary? How does the majority museum tell the story of its largest minority?

What is the operating strategy of small, local institutions presenting Roma culture, and how can they survive in Hungary today?

One of the key concepts in the institutionalisation of Roma culture is Roma visual art. Who has been involved in the development of the concept of Roma art? What events can be considered as precursors? What is the institutional background of Roma art in Hungary today?

Using a multi-disciplinary approach — museum studies, cultural studies, art theory, and art history — I explore the research questions. For the research, in addition to processing the literature, I also carry out archival research. I also interview local experts on the subject: museum directors, curators, art historians, ethnographers, and artists. I will extend my Hungarian research with case studies of European institutions (the Czech Republic, Germany, Norway, and Romania), with the aim of presenting and analyzing minority representation practices and mapping good practices in the neighboring countries.