Book Review

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Laszlo Braun, Istvan Csernicsko & Jozsef Molnar (2010). Hungarian Speaking Romani People in Subcarpathia. Uzhhorod: PoliPrint Ltd.

Reviewed by Katalin Cseke [44]

This Book, which was issued in 2010, is a unique one in this topic. The authors are the lecturers of the Subcarpathian Hungarian Institute: Laszlo Braun, Istvan Csernicsko, Jozsef Molnar.

The aim of the book, according to the authors, is to present the absolute numbers of the Subcarpathian gipsy/Romani Communities, as well as the Hungarian-speaking gipsy/Romani communities, their role in the long-term sustainability of the network of Hungarian speaking schools and the attitude of the Subcarpathian Hungarian communities to the Hungarian speaking Romani community.

The book consists of four major chapters. The first one discusses the demographic situation of the Subcarpathian Romani people. It analyses the data from the only census of the independent Ukraine so far, conducted in 2001. Here we can find out that 0.1% of the overall population of the country admitted themselves as being of Romani nationality. There are only two regions where the number of the Romani people exceeds 1% of the population - in Odessa region and in Subcarpathia. In this chapter, we can also find data from previous censuses, as well as some information on the Romani population in Europe and the Carpathian Basin. A significant part of the chapter discusses the territorial distribution of the Romani people. According to this, 29.4% of the Ukrainian Romani people live in Subcarpathia. Inside Subcarpathia, the majority of them live in the four districts where the majority of the Subcarpathian Hungarian population lives (Berehove, Uzhgorod, Mukachevo, Vynohradiv).

The authors point out that in several cases the census data does not reflect on the actual situation, so they made their own calculations as well.

The second major chapter concentrates on the education. A very important question is formulated here: whether the situation of the Romani people is a social or educational problem. The authors present the situation of the Romani people in the system of the

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Subcarpathian Hungarian schools, as well as the circumstances of their education. In the academic year 2008/2009, there were 693 active schools in the region, 21% of them had gipsy students too. According to the data of the 2001 census, more than 4% of the primary and secondary school students have a Romani origin. When it comes to the education of the Romani children, there is still no consensus about their education whether they should be educated in homogeneous or heterogeneous classes. According to many experts, the experience of the Romani educational program, which is carried out by the Reformed Church and the Hungarian speaking gipsy schools in Berehove and Mukachevo, emphasise the importance of the education in homogeneous classes. However, we are convinced that the children have to be provided with an opportunity to choose between the two options.

In the Subcarpathian schools, literally, no information is provided for the Romani children in their native language and about their native language and culture. This is also true for the Hungarian-speaking schools. The main reason is that who work in these Hungarian-speaking schools have no information, no knowledge of the languages, culture and social model of the gipsies. The drop-out rate among the Romani students is extremely high (51%). Also, this social group has the lowest number of people with a higher education (0,003%).

A brief chapter of the book is dedicated to the programs of the Subcarpathian Hungarian social organisations and churches. Both the Roman Catholic and the Reformed church have Romani programs, which are basically aimed at extra-curricular education. Apart from the churches, the Hungarian social, political and professional organizations, institutions do not have any programs aimed particularly at the Romani people.

The last part is dedicated to the attitude towards the gipsies: the Ukrainian and Subcarpathian society, including the Hungarian community, having a really negative attitude towards them. Unfavourable prejudice and negative stereotypes are very wide when it comes to the Romani population. According to the authors, these claims are based on the findings of their own and other Ukrainian researches. The first research presented on the topic was the survey conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Ukrainian National Scientific Academy and the Democratic Initiatives Foundation between 1994 and 2005, which shows the fact that the inhabitants of the country are eager to accept the gipsies only as tourists who visit Ukraine. However, 42.1% of the 1800 people who took part in the survey wouldn't even let the gipsies into the country. The survey conducted between 2001 and 2006 in Subcarpathia had very similar results.

The aim of the book is not to provide a detailed and complete description of the Romani situation in Subcarpathia, neither does it analyse the situation of the Hungarian speaking Romani people in the region. The main aim of the book is to draw attention to a question, which has not so far been discussed by Subcarpathian politicians, educational experts and researchers - the situation of the mostly Hungarian-speaking Romani community, which lives in the neighbourhood of the Hungarian communities and the various aspects of the

lives of these communities together. Also, the conclusion of the book is not formulated permanently. Instead of a conclusion the authors merely summarize all the findings, and if the questions raised by them will result in new research or interest from organizations and institutions, and then the book will have reached its objective. The names of the authors and the fact that they come from different scientific fields indicate the thoroughness of the research behind the book.