

THE PULL FACTOR / UNDER THE BRIDGE - HELSINKI

The majority of Roma populations in Europe have been living on the economic and social margins of society for centuries. Due to the cruel reality of repeated deportations, they recurrently find themselves placed in the position of refugees.

It is sufficient to look at the ways institutions deal with Roma, or the stereotyped representations of Roma in art and culture, to understand how strong anti-Roma sentiments remain today. It is a sad irony that the greatest collection of information on Roma history can be found in police archives. This is due to the fact that again and again, their everyday lives have been criminalized by the laws of mainstream society. In this we are confronted with one the deepest expressions of racial stereotyping in European culture, historically comparable with the anti-Semitism of the past and today's anti-Islamic prejudices.

The increasing number of attacks on Roma in our time is a consequence of the strengthening and consolidation of right-wing forces. These are using today's economic crisis for the populist promotion of their racist and anti-migrant agenda. The demolition of Roma and migrant settlements in France in 2010 is just one of the indicators that institutional and state measures themselves are becoming increasingly violent. In Hungary, the terror inflicted on the local Roma population by vigilante ultra-nationalist formations is often tolerated, if not encouraged, by state officials.

Over the last several years, Roma from the Balkans have been coming to Nordic countries in order to try to find work of any kind. They are faced with laws they are not familiar with. While in some countries begging is considered a legitimate means of survival, in Finland, for example, it is looked upon with awkwardness and wonder. Initially, part of Finnish society equated begging with crime. This stems from the fact that begging was prohibited by Finnish law in the past. In fact, there have been cases in which migrant children were confronted with the threat of being separated from their parents and put into children's homes under articles designed to guarantee child protection. Environmental protection regulations, furthermore, do not permit the use of old motors and vehicles of the kind which migrants usually bring along with them. However, minor offenses by migrants were tolerated to some extent. There was an unwritten consensus that it was an expression of generosity if legal procedures was not completely administered in the case of Roma.

Despite all that, in November 2010, the Roma camp outside the Satama Social Centre was removed before the onset of the Nordic winter. The Satama Social Centre was established by young activists from the Free Movement Organization. The Satama Social Centre building itself is classified as an office building, so that according to Finnish law it is not possible to sleep or reside in it. The Centre provided logistic support to the camp by supplying electricity and water from their building. However, an unexpected fire at the Social Center utilities providing the camp with electricity became the immediate cause for the enactment of new measures. With the migrants living outside in makeshift trailers and vehicles, the Municipal Social Office expressed concern that they would not survive the extreme winter. It was due to these circumstances that the Roma migrants camping there were offered travel costs to encourage their immediate return to Romania.

In the discussions witnessed by the workshop, the logistic support provided by the activists of the Satama Social Center was considered by some officials as a providing a "pull factor" for the migrants. Since then, activists from Satama have been notified that the Social Center may be torn down by the authorities. An announcement from Satama issued in March 2011 clearly outlines these serious threats and their connection to the Roma camp. As this case study shows, the threat of highly negative consequences has ensued due to Social Centre members exhibiting elementary forms of human solidarity.

It seems that much more should be done and learned in order to understand the complex conditions under which migrant Roma workers live. EU laws which guarantee the freedom of movement for all must finally be made to apply in everyday reality. Not only for wealthy, majority-ethnic group EU citizens, but for all, including migrant workers.

The situation witnessed by the workshop raises many questions. A core problem is whether it is reasonable to blame the so-called "pull factor" for the reality of migration in Europe. This type of thinking represents a serious paradox. The most important "pull factor" is, of course, that there are better economic opportunities for migrant workers in destination countries. Indeed, Nordic countries should be happy that they are relatively better off. The "pull factor" argument has two logical alternatives as its consequence, which the European Union has to face. Either the EU must entirely close its borders to economically poorer countries; or - and this is where we clearly take a stand - it must ensure equal opportunity and social justice for all citizens.

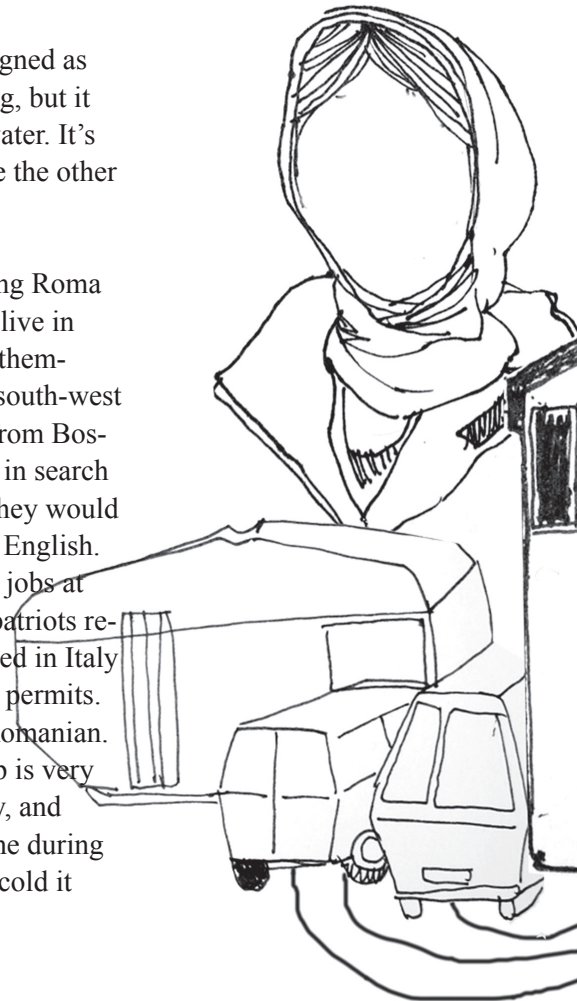
April 2011, Vladan Jeremić

FACTS SO FAR

Notes from a Meeting with Roma Migrants
and the Free Movement Network Activists
at the Satama Social Centre

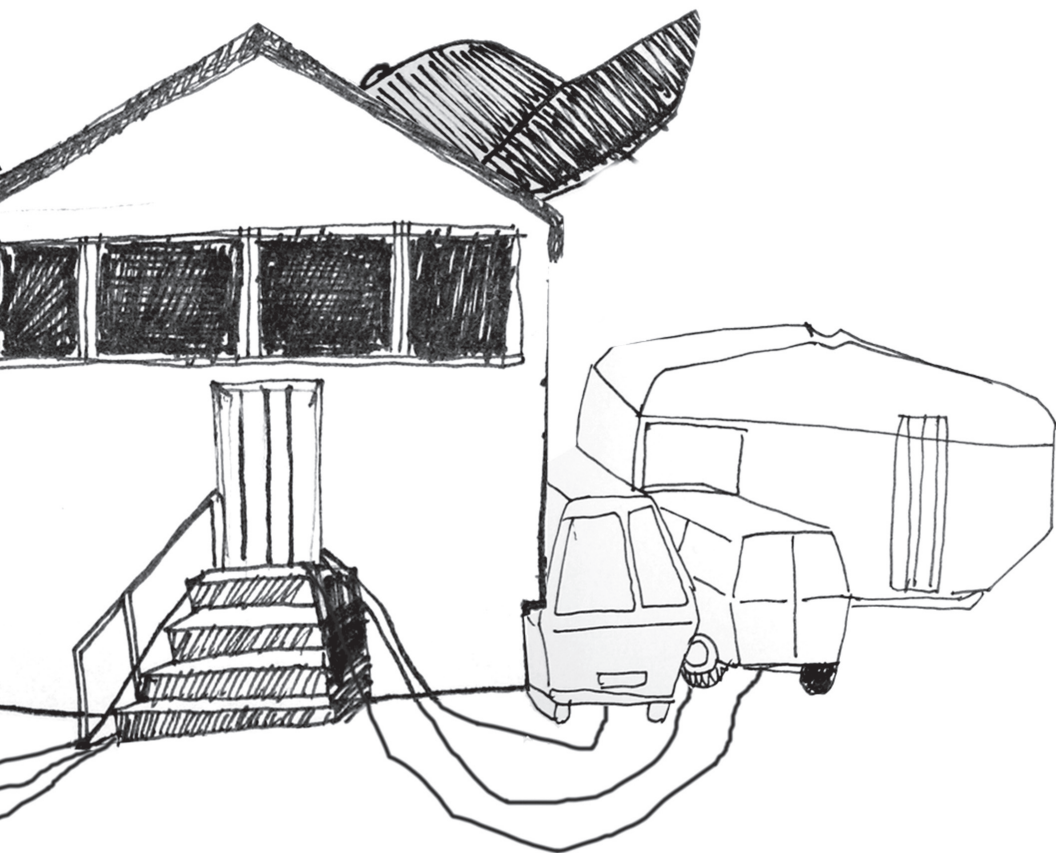
According to law, a building designed as an office can't be used for housing, but it can still provide electricity and water. It's not the best solution, but what are the other options?

The Satama Social Center is letting Roma migrants camp outside it. People live in their cars and huts they build for themselves. Most of them came from south-west Romania, but a few of them are from Bosnia and Bulgaria. They just came in search of a better job and a better life. They would like to find some job and to learn English. Most of them would love to have jobs at the Ski Centre such as their compatriots recently got. Most of them have lived in Italy before and have Italian residency permits. Most of them speak Italian and Romanian. The internal structure of the camp is very fragmented. They came randomly, and some of them are leaving for home during the Nordic winter. Let's see how cold it gets, they said.



The future of Satama is unsure as there was a proposal by the city administration of Helsinki to evict the Satama Social Centre. So far the proposal hasn't gone through. In 2008, at a former squat, they already had a camping place for Roma people. Asked what should be done? "They should have a proper permanent camping area with sufficient sanitary facilities. Also there should be social workers that come regularly to help the migrants with health care and legal paper issues."

Help towards the migrants is considered a pull factor and shouldn't be given, according to the officials.





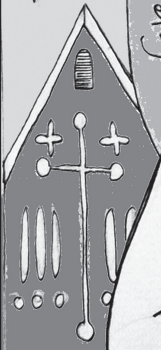
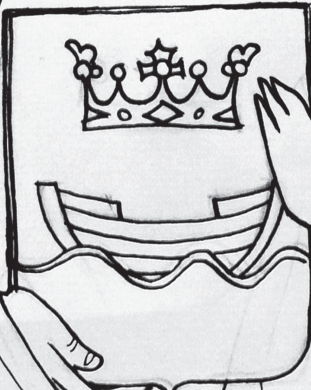
HELSINKI DEACONESS

INSTITUTE

Women, Children, Awa
& more

Grass root level

help



The Deaconess Institute is a 143-year-old public utility foundation that provides social and health-care services, as well as educational programs in these fields. Working with Roma is one of their practices and they are often seen as experts on matters pertaining to Romanian Roma in Helsinki.

We had a meeting at the Deaconess institute in November 2010, where Marjatta Vesalainen, a Roma project worker, presented their experiences working with the Roma in Helsinki. Their main interest is to work at a grass roots level, with everyday problems, helping those who are in need, especially women and children on the streets. They have organized women's support units, where women can wash up, do laundry and rest. A permanent day centre for "people on the move", mainly Romanian Roma, will be opened in March 2011 in Sörnäinen, Helsinki. The centre will provide information and facilities to wash up, but no accommodation. The Deaconess institute also provided an emergency shelter for the Roma during winter 2009, as well as before the deportation of Roma in 2010.

Roma are often seen only as beggars, people that demean themselves by begging on the streets. They are not seen and treated as human beings with rights equal to every other European citizen. (According to a recent survey 71% of the people in Helsinki would criminalize begging). Beggars have wishes and families like every normal people, they usually come to seek work as they don't have any possibilities to survive in their own countries. Begging is also considered work. There are several different Roma and Roma cultures, and they shouldn't be referred to as one group. The Deaconess Institutes workers were very concerned about the women, who are the ones usually seen on the streets. Children are often taken care of by the men. Women have been seen returning to the streets only a few days after giving birth.

The City of Helsinki, and the Jarmo Räihä's group commissioned The Helsinki Deaconess Institute to research Roma coming to Helsinki. The project was implemented in June 2, 2008 - May 31, 2010 as a joint project between the City of Helsinki and the Helsinki Deaconess Institute. The target group was Romas who had arrived in Helsinki from Romania, and from other Eastern European countries.

Rom po drom - The Roma on the road project was a part of the City of Helsinki's strategic preparation for coping with an increasing number of people begging for a living and also for improving the conditions that these people face in their own countries. The issue is part of a wider European discussion on equality and the status of Romas throughout Europe. Emphasis will also be placed on citizenship, equality and rights as well as on the issue of begging.

During the first stage of the project, project workers built confidential relationships with those on the streets earning money through begging, street performances and peddling. The project aimed to find out the Romas' motivation for coming to Finland, methods of making a living and their chances of returning to their own country. The project studied how willing those belonging to the group were to work in Finland and the possibilities of achieving this.

Basically, the project did not offer accommodation, food or other material aid to the Romas, with an exception of acute crisis accommodation in December 2009-January 2010. Child welfare and other social welfare and health care issues, or issues which required police intervention were left to the authorities. (1)

Although the emphasis on the report were on human rights, the Free Movement association (5) claims that the report has been used as a tool against begging by The City of Helsinki.(2)

Direct material assistance can be done only after serious consideration in order to avoid the development of dependency, only strengthening the current situation. Special emphasis should be given to educating children and young people, as well as improving vocational skills of the adults. Any activity should be planned and implemented together with people in question, respecting and keeping their culture as an essential fundament for all activities. (3)

According to Jarmo Rähkä, the city doesn't want to encourage the begging phenomena by offering help. Charity reinforces the current situation. The Free movement association says that the report tells people not to give help. Although there is some social work, health care and information provided to the Romas, everyday housing and cooking facilities are still lacking and the need is still there. (4)

Sources:

*1 Helsinki Deaconess Institute Website, www.hdl.fi/

*2 translated from www.vapaaliikkuvuus.net

*3 Rom på Drom -report

*4 article in fifi.fi

*5 Manifesto for Free Movement: While globalisation seeks to unleash the flow of capital and information and the movement of commodities the global migration control has grown more and more. Control mechanisms uphold dictatorships and zones of cheap production and seek to prevent people from moving and seeking a better life. Immigration laws that make people "illegal" create flexible and precarious labour force with weak bargaining power to the mercy of the employers. <http://vapaaliikkuvuus.net/>

Paula Lehtonen



Some Notes from the Meeting with the Representatives of the City Hall City of Helsinki that was on 11th of November 2010

By Saara Hannus

Here are some notes from the meeting at the City Hall:

Roma are different from other migrants because they won't be granted asylum, as their countries of origin (Romania and Bulgaria) are part of the EU. The work group for Roma consists of different representatives of the City of Helsinki and also Diakonissalaitos. It has 13 members and it was set up in April 2010. There are no Roma members in the work-group but they have consulted Roma representative Miranda Vuolasranta. This group is going to visit Romania next week.

The Officials mainly deal with Roma people staying in illegal camps in Helsinki. There's now only one camp, in Satama. Illegal camps create huge costs for Helsinki tax payers, because of the cleaning costs. A few years ago, citizens complained about beggars on the streets but now they complain about the camps and the garbage they produce, by, for example, collecting problematic waste. It's illegal for a Finn so it's also forbidden for a Roma. Illegal campers are notified that they have to leave. Roma can't afford legal camps, they cost around 5EUR per night. But free movement is based on responsibility for yourself, you have to be able to support yourself if you move to another country. That's also the three months rule. They have to follow the law and think about the tax payers.

Finland is known for its social system but the state doesn't have the money to take care of everybody, Finland is such a small country. The state doesn't want to grant money for that. Helsinki doesn't have a big problem yet, like other European cities do. They are also thinking of how to prevent such a problem. The number of Roma in the EU region is about 10 to 12 million. The EU and the state should do something.

There are no good solutions, just bad. Everybody's frustrated. Would garbage bins near the camp help? Probably not. And who would pay for the bins? They cost a lot. Marjatta Vesalainen from the Diakonissalaitos

has done a good job. The day center is good because the issue is not going anywhere. But as a city we have to recognize our limits.

The workgroup is a body that keeps everyone updated about the situation. They cannot make decisions but they have suggested that the city should have an emergency plan for the winter. Last winter there was this winter shelter in Munkkisaari. The costs were high.

It's difficult even for a Finn to get a job because education is so highly valued. So for Roma the situation is even worse, because of illiteracy and so on. Officially there's no discrimination but unofficially...

We should find solutions to help Roma in their home countries. In the end, nobody wants to leave their home country. Back in the old days, Finnish Roma could provide for themselves but now society has changed. You need education. How to get (Romanian) Roma into the education system? You can't see the importance of education until you experience it. Finnish Romas are well integrated, so maybe that's something rest of the EU could learn from us.

It's hard on a city level to do anything. Helsinki can handle the amount we've had but not if it expands. Children are the most sensitive issue. Children are always the responsibility of the state they are currently staying. Apparently the EU is taking a bigger role in the whole Roma issue There was an EU meeting in October about this.

The workgroup has also thought of how to give real information to Roma people about Finland because there seems to be a lot of false information going around. They have some brochures they are taking with them to Romania.

JOB
APARTMENTS
HEALTHCARE
EDUCATION
NO
DISCRIMINATION

Expectations

Pull factor
is any factor
that attracts
people to a new
location.

PULL FACTOR

Reality

Shekinai city
tries to minimize
pull factors for
Roma people to
make sure no
new Romas
will come.

BEGGING
LIVING IN A TRAILER
DOCTOR COSTS MORE THAN YOU GOT
NO ACCESS TO EDUCATION
BEING DISCRIMINATED
FEAR OF EVICTION
SOCIAL WORKERS TAKE YOUR CHILDREN

ZAMPA DI LEONE



PRESENTS:

UNDER THE HELPER

WE WILL PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS!

FREE
MOVEMENT



EUROPEAN CITIZENS HAVE
THE RIGHT TO LIVE AND TO WORK HERE!

THIS CITY IS FULL OF CONSERVATIVES
AND RIGHT WINGERS, YOU HAVE TO KNOW,
THERE ARE MANY PROBLEMS...



THE BRIDGE

HELSINKI

WE WOULD LIKE TO HELP YOU,
BUT WE ARE ONLY ARTISTS.



WHAT IS FORBIDDEN
FOR A FINN, IS
ALSO FORBIDDEN
FOR A ROMA



ILLEGAL CAMPS CREATE
HUGE CLEANING COSTS FOR
THE CITY'S TAXPAYERS!

OUR DUTY IS TO HELP
YOU, BUT YOU WOULD
HELP YOURSELVES
THE MOST IF YOU
RETURN HOME.
THE NORDIC WINTER
IS COMING...



70% OF CITIZEN
IN HELSINKI CONSIDER
BEGGING AS AN INFRACTION

22.11.2010.

Hi,
some news from Helsinki:

Fifi/Voima and OmaKaupunki/HS.fi had news about the Roma camp of Satama.

<http://fifi.voima.fi/uutinen/2010/marraskuu/sataman-romaneja-uhkaa-pika-haato>

http://omakaupunki.hs.fi/paakaupunkiseutu/uutiset/romanileirin_asukkaat_yopyivat_pakkasyon_sosiaalikeskus/

After a fire in Satama Camp on Sunday, in which luckily no-one was hurt, the electricity was cut off from the Roma. Satama activists have been providing emergency shelter from the building for two nights now.

Though the electricity lines to the cars and wagons from the building have been checked and found ok, there's no guarantee that the heaters and hobs inside the cars and trailers are safe. The weather report says it will be minus 1-12 degrees Celsius this week and there'll be heavy snow this evening. From past experience, we know that the city will forbid the use of the Satama building for accommodation purposes.

Activists say that the city is doing nothing at the moment for the Roma but just waiting for them to leave.

The City has promised to handle the Roma issue but also says there is no money allocated for this.

They said the shelter Deaconess provided last year cost too much. Activists assume that the city has a plan but it just doesn't want to announce it. There has been some suggestions to give emergency shelter in homeless shelters (which I think already cannot accommodate all the homeless) and asylum seeker centres that might have some room (there is one whole floor in the Kyläsaari camp).

From the politicians, Emma Kari is demanding that the city take responsibility for sheltering the Roma.

29. 11. 2010.

Hi,

There is news on Roma issues every day. So, after the city banned housing people inside Satama as a fire hazard, they provided emergency shelter from the Deaconess place in Munkkisaari (same as last year). They negotiated with the Roma for 3 hours, using an unnamed translator from the Deaconess institute. The City said they don't want anyone to freeze to death and offered the Roma 25€ ferry-ticket plus about 300€ per car, so they would go back to their home country. On the other hand they said the City won't organize any accommodation over the winter and that it is not possible to return to Satama either. Rähä said that he had shaken hands with the group leader and so agreed that in two days the Roma would leave and that the city would not have to ensure that it really happens. After the negotiations Rähä told the national TV/radio that now they should think of how to prevent people settling in Satama again (with some-kind of roadblocks or something).

According to Vapaa liikkuvuus the negotiations were unjust to the Roma. Some had wanted a translator from the network because they didn't trust the official one, but that this was denied them. Of course, not all the Roma were represented, since there are different groups in Satama. After the handshake it was still not clear to many in the camp what had been agreed. The activists say the city is blackmailing the Roma to leave, and are demanding Rähä resign from his job. By now most of the people have left and only 8 persons are still in Helsinki. According to The Deaconess representative, Pekka Tuomola, the ones who stayed said their car is broken and they cannot leave, so he directed them to the Social Emergency Duty Office. For some of them, going home for Christmas suited well, others would have liked to have stayed here to earn money, said Markus, a Satama activist, according to one magazine. He has commented to the press that there have been some Roma here every year in self-made huts. The aim of their network is not to maintain the camp, instead they expect a sustainable solution for the housing problems of these EU-citizens.

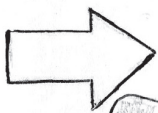
Rähä will answer questions about drinking on duty this Thursday. The drunken guy is from the Security and Alert Department. Also mentioned was the 250.000 € survey by the Deaconess Institute, which was ordered by the city and which was not awarded through public tender, and, if I understood correctly, this is also under some legal investigation.

Tomorrow I can ask more about this...

Johanna

RÄIHÄ
MUST
RESIGN !!

SOCIAL CENTER
ACTIVISTS



&



VAPAA LIIK



THE EASTERN
EUROPEAN ROMA
ARE EU-CITIZENS
AND MUST BE
TREATED EQUALLY

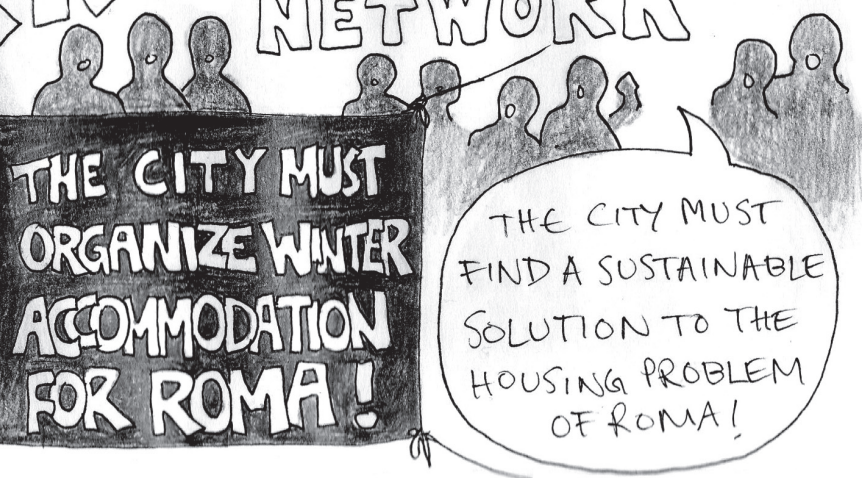
WE SUPPORT
ROMA .

THE
SOCIAL OFFICE
IS BLACKMAILING
PEOPLE TO LEAVE
BACK HOME





VAPAA KATTORRY.
KUVUUS -
NETWORK



THE CITY MUST ORGANIZE WINTER ACCOMMODATION FOR ROMA!

THE CITY MUST FIND A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION TO THE HOUSING PROBLEM OF ROMA!

ABOUT THE PROJECT

UNDER THE BRIDGE - HELSINKI

The collection that you hold in your hands is the result of the “Under the Bridge - Helsinki” workshop. Led by Vladan Jeremic, this project was realized during the X-OP Platform event in Helsinki in November 2010. Artists from the X-OP Study Group which participated in the workshop are Katri Kainulainen, Maija Mustonen, Sami Maalas, Johanna Raekallio, Paula Lehtonen and Saara Hannus.

The idea underlying the “Under the Bridge - Helsinki” workshop was to investigate public discourse about Roma migrant workers in Helsinki, and to develop artistic methods to represent it. The core approach involved entering into dialogue with actors in the field – those who have relevant knowledge or power over the situation, or are directly involved in the problems of migrant workers. The workshop made contact and held discussions with a number of individuals and institutions in Helsinki. These included Miranda Vuolasranta of the Fintiko Romano Forum; Henry Hedman; Kristina Westerholm of the Safety and Preparedness Coordinating Division, City of Helsinki; activists from the Satama Social Centre; Marjatta Vesalainen of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute (Diakonissalaitos); as well as Roma migrants and other migrant workers themselves.

Besides participants from the X-OP Study Group, several further artists, theorists and curators from Helsinki took part in the development of the project. Minna L. Henriksson, Sezgin Boynik, Tatu Engeström, Ivor Stodolsky and Marita Muukkonen contributed their knowledge, analysis and advice.

The current publication is a result of this work. “The Pull Factor / Under the Bridge – Helsinki” provides documentation of the events in the Roma camp near the Satama Social Center in Helsinki in November 2010, and investigates their causes and effects. It contains contributions and

artistic analyses by Johanna Raekallio, Paula Lehtonen, Saara Hannus and Vladan Jeremic. It also includes a comic-strip / info-chart by the Zampa di Leone collective, which we are publishing in English, Romanian and Serbian.

The publication documents the cause-and-effect connections concerning the destiny of the Roma camp near the Satama Social Center, during November 2010. The events unfold like this: 1. Roma and other migrant workers from the Balkans come to Helsinki to find work. 2. Reactions to their arrival vary, but eventually remain negative 3. They are sent home on the very eve of the Nordic winter. 4. The ones who try to help them to stay suffer repercussions later.

The current publication cannot be expected to have a precise factual approach. The whole of its work is based on impressions or “art reports” that emerged following the said encounters and dialogues. These conversations were intentionally not recorded on audio or video, nor were photographs taken. Such practices were avoided during the process, consciously not giving way to the phenomenological distancing of the camera and the dominant exoticization which such methods have caused in both journalism and art.

Under the Bridge - Helsinki project was realized as a part of the X-OP European Studies Programme.

X-OP – exchange of art operators and producers is a gradually growing network of artists, researchers, operators, producers and centers with the aim to establish European platform for creation of art and exchange.

One of Art School MAA:s main activities in the X-OP project is the X-OP European Studies Programme, which aims to offer the participants a theoretical as well as a practical platform and possibility to think about what Europe is and means, and what could be the role of internationally operating contemporary artist.

www.x-op.eu

www.taidekoulumaa.fi

The Pull Factor / Under the Bridge - Helsinki

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Vladan Jeremic

Artists:

Vladan Jeremić, Johanna Raekallio, Paula Lehtonen, Saara Hannus and Zampa di Leone

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