



# The Transeuropa Caravans

Connecting Local Alternative Voices

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Edited by

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## 1 - A Narrative of Empowerment

*Daphne Büllesbach*

In a democracy, we constantly need to be concerned about two things, the critical assessment of government and the nourishment of critical minds. Neither of the two can be achieved without the other. Citizens need to be aware of their civil rights in order to defend them, need to understand systems and institutions to assess them and need to have access to forms of democratic representation to express these. It is our constant task to continue thinking about the latter in order to empower citizens to voice concerns and input ideas. Critical minds are nourished through immediate action, empathy and individual empowerment. For citizens to actually construct “pragmatic utopias”<sup>1</sup> that aren’t simply empty words, they need to recognise their daily lives inside them.

A ‘citoyen’ per definition is someone, in the spirit of the age of enlightenment, who cares for his or her community, respecting the common good. It is someone who takes charge of finding solutions (local to global) independently and puts them into practice. Naturally, he or she inspires others to do the same and plants the seeds for larger societal change.

This process is at the basis of social movements or citizens’ initiatives. However it is overlooked by current political parties and institutions. Ahead of the European elections in May 2014, we set out to make this process more visible and travel to where people around Europe enact their citizenship on a daily basis.

### Impressions from along the routes of Transeuropa Caravans

European Alternatives is based in many cities across Europe. We have offices in Rome, Paris and Berlin and local groups active around the

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<sup>1</sup> Tania Bruguera, Transeuropa Festival 2013 ([www.taniabruquera.com](http://www.taniabruquera.com))

continent in a network of individuals, organisations and initiatives. Taking this as a starting point, we collaboratively mapped initiatives, ideas and local struggles to understand the bigger picture of what we call civil society. Arriving at a comprehensive map of the tremendous richness of activities across Europe is no easy feat, especially considering how many of these activities and initiatives are far from the spotlight. So we chose to visit places of action where we felt that a different conversation was taking place: from the migrant squats of Calais to the student markets of Canterbury, or the Roma camps of Pata Rât.

We endeavoured to engage in that conversation by travelling across eighteen countries during ten days on six simultaneous tours, talking to over 2000 people across the continent, just a month before the largest elections the EU has seen so far.

We deepened the interaction with the Citizens Manifesto<sup>2</sup> and its policy proposals, discussing and finding concrete ways of putting proposals into action. Along the route we engaged Members of Parliament and candidates into this process to bridge the connection to decision-makers and those closer to policy-making in Brussels. We will continue the conversations that have started and we will continue to understand how local solutions can be enacted on a larger, European scale.

What we saw along the journey was both astonishing and well-known. Voices which are not being heard by politicians, needs which are not being met by states, solutions which are not being supported by institutions. The articles in this publication continue the conversation, they synthesise the ideas and portray the initiatives we met along the routes, interweaving stories from England with Southern Italy, Eastern Poland with Southern Greece. The result is a narrative of citizens’ participation and action in places where solutions do not seem available and are far from ready-made. It is a narrative of empowerment.

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<sup>2</sup> Read the Citizens Manifesto (available in 17 languages) on [citizenspact.eu/citizens-manifesto](http://citizenspact.eu/citizens-manifesto)

## 2 - Who are We, the Citizens?

Saskia Sassen

Columbia University

[www.saskiasassen.com](http://www.saskiasassen.com)

I think of citizenship as an incompletely theorised contract between the rights-bearing individual and his or her state. It is in this incompleteness of citizenship that lies the possibility for its long and mutating life. There is room for making and remaking 'the' citizen, including for those 'who do not belong' – whether the foreigner outside or the foreigner inside a country<sup>3</sup>.

Today citizenship is in crisis: but we can and must find yet another version of the meaning of citizenship from throughout its long history and our present conditions. It will require work because we are living through massive restructurings that go well beyond social exclusions and amount to sharp expulsions – you are either in, or you are out. Who is gaining rights in today's world? Over the last thirty years, it is mostly corporations, and the new global elites do not even need to be formal citizens to go where they want and to obtain what they want. Yet we, the regular citizens, have been losing rights, with a few partial exceptions. On the other hand, while most immigrants are citizens of some country (about 3% are stateless<sup>4</sup>), they are treated as if they were aliens without rights. Further, many migrants are actually being expelled from their life spaces, notably due to the vast land grabs in their countries by firms from the US, Europe and Asia – that is the countries where they often wind up<sup>5</sup>.

3 This is a complex subject, which I develop fully in *Guests and Aliens*. (New York: New Press 1999) and *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 2014).

4 According to the UN Refugee Agency, there are at least 10 million of stateless people in the world ([www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org))

5 [www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/may/29/migration-expulsion-foreign-land-deals](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/may/29/migration-expulsion-foreign-land-deals)

In short, there is work to be done. In fact, more and more initiatives are being launched across the world: we all know that we will have to fight to make it a better one.

Looking at Western history, it is the outsiders who have often succeeded in expanding our rights. They subjected the institution of citizenship to new types of claims across time and place – whether it is non-property owners in England's early 19th century, claiming rights to citizenship, or LGBT people in 2000 claiming the same rights as other citizens. Women, minorities, asylum seekers, migrants, have all contributed to expanding the rights of all citizens in often multi-generational trajectories. 'Making' by the powerless has a far slower temporality than that of 'making' by the powerful, who can grab and destroy quickly. Yet when the demands of 'outsiders' for expanded inclusions succeed, they strengthen the overall institution of citizenship. They may not have gained much power in this process, but their powerlessness became complex – they made a history, a politics<sup>6</sup>.

Today the meaning itself of the national state and national membership is becoming unstable, and either neutralises nationhood or distorts it into a visceral pre-political passion – pre-political because politics is meant to overcome and intermediate the visceral. The traditional borders of the modern inter-state system became and continue to be a critical and marking feature for membership and a key to the debate about migration. What is not sufficiently worked into the debate is that the traditional inter-state border, with all its practical and formal variability, is increasingly just one element in a larger emergent operational space for human mobilities that took off in the 1980's. This is a space marked by growing divergence between poor and high-level migrants.

One innovation is the proliferation of specialised visas enabling firms to hire a particular kind of migrant worker – "foreign professionals" – even as it built new types of walls for most migrants.

6 [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14747731.2011.622458](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14747731.2011.622458)



A. Zanolì, "Who does Europe Belong to?",  
Ljubljana, Slovenia

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) Mode 4<sup>7</sup> stipulation gives workers a range of formal portable rights that are recognised in all signatory countries when a firm hires them. This is the making of a privileged subject with portable rights. We can learn from this. It is a possibility not envisaged in most discussions on migration. The starting point should be that most migrants are citizens of some country, a fact forgotten in the language of illegality – **there is no such thing as an illegal human being**. The challenge then becomes how to make some of the basic rights portable, as we have done for professionals.

More informally, for today's mobile global class of the very rich, citizenship or formal state-authorized membership has little meaning – they do not need it to gain access to foreign national territories. Nor does it matter that much anymore for the immobile global class of dispossessed for whom citizenship is beginning to matter less and less – it gives them few rights and barely a platform for making claims. Does the fact that hatred towards foreigners can coexist with the partial denationalising of political membership for the rich tell us something about the arbitrary quality of our policies? We should map this arbitrariness: it is valuable information.

In the past, the reasons and origins of migration differed from today's. But the fact is that all current major European countries have been receiving migrants for centuries. Historical demography shows that most European nation-states have 'integrated' foreigners over the centuries. Can we learn something from this history of multiple micro-integrations alongside often murderous hatreds of the outsider?

Anti-immigrant sentiment and attacks took place in each of the major immigration phases in all the countries in Western Europe (Sassen 1999). No labour-receiving country survives close investigation with a spotless record. French workers killed Italian workers in the salt mines

<sup>7</sup> www.wto.org: "The movement of natural persons is one of the four ways through which services can be supplied internationally. Otherwise known as "Mode 4", it covers natural persons who are either service suppliers (such as independent professionals) or who work for a service supplier and who are present in another WTO member to supply a service."

in the 1800's and objected to German and Belgian workers hired for Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris, in both cases invoking they were 'the wrong types of Catholics'.

History and demography suggests that those fighting for integration in the long run have won, even though only partly. The 'wrong Catholic' of yesterday's Europe still lives on, dressed in a variety of new identities – black, Muslim, and so on. But what the past does tell us is that we fool ourselves if we think that differences of phenotype, religion and culture are obstacles built in stone, insurmountable. Are the Belgian and German migrant workers seen in 1800's Paris as the "wrong Catholics" today's African and Muslim migrants?

Social membership takes time, and struggle, and does not necessarily give formal rights. But it can eventually feed into more formal meanings of membership. At its best, our diversities, our foreignness, feed into dynamics that value this complexity of membership and its inevitable incompleteness.

From top to bottom:

A. Juhász, "Every Little Step Makes a Difference"; Hungary

C. Schwausch, "Transeuropa Caravans"; Czech Republic



# 3

## Democracy



E. Dalibot,  
"Where do We Go?",  
Toulouse, France





## Real Democracy in Europe

Author: Elena Dalibot

From Puerta del Sol in Madrid to Pungești in Romania and from the Icelandic constitutional assembly to mass protests in Athens, people in Europe have been going out on the streets, occupying squares, organising, resisting and creating around one common idea(1): democracy. Many (if not all) of the initiatives that the six Transeuropa Caravans met on their roads were all about reclaiming citizens' power to shape their cities, environment, societies and lives. How can we indeed speak about democracy when power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of institutions unaccountable to citizens, such as the European Central Bank, behind austerity policies affecting millions in Europe, or in corporations powerful enough to impose what is in their interest, in disregard of democratic decisions?

Unlike these top-down power relations, many initiatives and struggles start from the local level, experiment with new forms of decision-making processes, are horizontal, inclusive and self-organised. From resistance against undemocratic powers to organisational experiments, they put in practice real democracy in Europe.

### Resisting – Fighting Corporate Powers to Reclaim Democracy

*“The twentieth century has been characterised by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy”.*

**Alex Carey**, *Taking the Risk out of Democracy: Propaganda in the US and Australia*

We could add a fourth dimension to Alex Carey's analysis for the twenty-first century, with the rise of democratic movements resisting corporate power and protecting democracy.

**Roșia Montana** is a case in point of such struggles. In this small village in the Transylvanian mountains, locals have been fighting for their right to live on their lands for more than fifteen years, since gold mining company Gabriel Resources made plans to build Europe's largest gold mine there. Grounds to oppose the projects are many: quantities of heavy metals and cyanide (13 times more than what's currently being used in Europe) would be used to extract gold, destroying the area and endangering many people in the neighbouring villages; the community would be forced to relocate; no fair and democratic debate was held on the costs and benefits of the project and on its long-term effects. The campaign to save Rosia Montana<sup>8</sup>, going far beyond Romanian borders, has become the largest social movement in the country and managed to put a halt to the project and to set an example for many other European movements (who met recently during the 4th forum of Useless Imposed Mega-Projects<sup>9</sup> or the FânFest<sup>10</sup>) of how citizens can successfully oppose big economic interests in defense of common goods.

In the East of the country, a struggle parallel to Roșia Montana on many aspects has started last year. **Pungești** locals fight against American oil company Chevron which plans to exploit shale gas in the village and in neighbouring localities. This could be extremely harmful to the ground and have disastrous social and human consequences in this poor area living off the soil. Like in Roșia Montana, citizens were not involved nor consulted in any way about the project and no democratic debate was

**“I would like people to be consulted. That issues, where they exist, are discussed from the bottom up”**

Greta Claudia  
Pata Rât,  
Cluj-Napoca,  
Romania

<sup>8</sup> [rosiamontana.org](http://rosiamontana.org)

<sup>9</sup> [rosiamontana.org/faiimp4](http://rosiamontana.org/faiimp4)

<sup>10</sup> [www.fanfest.ro/en](http://www.fanfest.ro/en)

From top to bottom:

E. Dalibot, "Consumers", Berlin, Germany

E. Dalibot, "Real Democracy Now", Cluj-Napoca, Romania

E. Dalibot, "Market Above All", Berlin, Germany



held. The riot police guarding the ‘national security zone’ seem to defend Chevron and its political allies’ interests much more than those of the people, and several inhabitants told the Caravan team about harassment and threats.

But the struggle is not over, and people have started to organise in Pungești, Bucharest and beyond in order to prevent Pungești’s future from being sold to corporate power.

Different place, same story. In Rohne (Germany), people protest against Vattenfall’s plans to build a new coal mine which

**“If I could demand one thing from Europe, it’s listening more to what citizens are saying, what the normal working class people want with the world, and not only what the big companies and the big chefs want.”**

Sebastian van Neijnsberge  
Utrecht, the Netherlands

would destroy natural areas and more than 80 villages. Beyond an ecological struggle for more sustainable and environment-friendly sources of energy, what is at stake here is people’s ability to decide on the future they want for the space they live in. Everywhere, corporations use similar tactics: skirting around fair, open and democratic debates, trying to divide the community, using promises of growth and jobs (often temporary and short-term) as bait and as blackmail tools against the resisting groups. Everywhere, one of the keys to successful projects is the organisation of open, informed discussions (isn’t access to information one of the pillars of a truly democratic system?) – the **PUM collective**<sup>11</sup> in Brussels is a good example of how local dialogue can help ensure more sustainable projects in a neighbourhood – but also the ability for these voices to be heard and to connect with others, in which media and solidarity movements have a great role to play.

<sup>11</sup> [citizenspact.eu/blog/253](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/253) and [www.pumcollectif.org](http://www.pumcollectif.org)

E. Dalibot  
 "Crossroads of choices",  
 Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France



## Organising – Re-Inventing Democratic Practices for Meaningful Participation

Unlike other forms of government, democracy, be it direct or representative, implies participation. One of the most central participation tools in representative democracies is of course voting. A couple of weeks before the European elections, the Transeuropa Caravan teams asked many people they met to share their views on voting. “It is the only power we have”, according to Filiz<sup>12</sup>. “I don’t vote anyways”, Claire stated, “I don’t know enough about this European thing [...] and I could possibly be speaking for a lot of people”. In the “heart” of the European Union, Brussels, Marco noted that he would vote for the European elections, but that for the first time in his life he really wondered whether he should and how he could send a message through his vote.

As the results of the European elections have shown with the lowest-ever turnout<sup>13</sup> (42,54%), many certainly thought along similar lines. Real democracy requires adequate processes and practices and participation

is only meaningful if it can lead to change.

**“I would like to see people’s involvement in decision making processes, not only to be treated as a mere formality, but their voices to be really heard”**

Thomas Vokun  
 Prague,  
 Czech Republic

New practices of democratic participation are notably being explored and experimented by the **Circulos podemos**<sup>14</sup> (“We can” Circles) in Spain. The party was founded a couple of months before the European elections to propose real alternative politics at the European level. After holding open primary elections, the programme was defined during more than four hundred circles or assemblies (which can be both territorial or sec-

<sup>12</sup> [citizenspact.eu/blog/227](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/227)

<sup>13</sup> [www.results-elections2014.eu/en/turnout.html](http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/turnout.html)

<sup>14</sup> [podemos.info/circulos](http://podemos.info/circulos) and [citizenspact.eu/blog/44](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/44)

toral), through consensus. The movement was funded only thanks to crowdfunding and public donations and expenses were all published online in a very transparent manner. In a couple of months, Podemos became the fourth party in the European elections and received five seats in the European Parliament. Elected representatives will be revocable and have limited mandates, privileges and salaries. A similar movement was also created in Portugal, the **Congresso Democrático das Alternativas (CDA)**<sup>15</sup>, as a platform against austerity, not to form a party themselves but give content to the opposition. It ran series of workshops – the first conference was met with more than 1500 participants – to develop proposals and recommendations.

Horizontality and self-organisation are also experimented outside of the political system (in a strict sense), as for instance in the workplace. The **Vio. Me factory**<sup>16</sup> in Thessaloniki is now run collectively by its workers, who meet in production assemblies each morning and in general assemblies every other week to discuss strategy and more general issues.

They occupied the factory in 2011 after it had been abandoned by its owners and re-opened it as a cooperative in 2013. Workers are paid the same and no position is fixed: everyone takes turn in different positions. On the other side of the border in Bulgaria, self-organised social centres have been mushrooming in the last years, such as the **Adelante** (forward) social centre<sup>17</sup>. The centre was created in 2010 and hosts discussions, screenings, readings, a ‘free market’, language lessons, etc. All the activities are for free and there is no hierarchy in the decision-making processes, based on the principles of self-organisation and direct democracy.

<sup>15</sup> [citizenspact.eu/blog/323](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/323) and [www.congressoalternativas.org](http://www.congressoalternativas.org)

<sup>16</sup> [www.viome.org](http://www.viome.org)

<sup>17</sup> [www.facebook.com/socialcenter.adelante](http://www.facebook.com/socialcenter.adelante)

**“More companies should establish democratic decision making [processes] instead of hierarchical ones taken only by the management or the shareholders.”**

*Nina Treu  
Konzeptwerk Neue  
Ökonomie, Leipzig,  
Germany*

Fair and inclusive processes and mechanisms are a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. It must rest on access to information, which requires free and independent media, cooperation of institutions in sharing knowledge, transparency. There is sadly some way to go for many European countries. On World Press Freedom Day, the Eastern Caravan was in Greece, where **public television ERT** was infamously shut down by the government<sup>18</sup>, following the troika’s demands to cut down the number of public servants and in a context of strong interconnection between the government, big companies and private media. It is also critical on the other hand that personal data<sup>19</sup> is protected both from online and offline surveillance and from commercial use. Collectives such as **Vrijbit** in the Netherlands or the **Open Rights Group** in the UK offer different tools to use for data protection.

*Gabriel Lachmann  
OzUtopia, Open  
Data.sk, Bratislava,  
Slovakia*

**“It is very important to counterbalance the influential corporate lobbying in the legislative process by strengthening the civil aspects in the process [...] for all participants forming visions or specific policies to have adequate information. One of the most important aspect of cooperation is sharing knowledge. So besides cooperation, we have techniques commonly referred to as “open data” which I understand broadly as knowledge sharing in research, exchange of information between people, groups and communities or or even sharing government data”**

### Enacting – Taking the Power Back Into People’s Hands

As far back as the concept of democracy goes, it has always been accompanied for some by the fear of what people would do with that power if they were actually given it. Edward Bernays, unaware perhaps of the

<sup>18</sup> [citizenspact.eu/blog/248](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/248)

<sup>19</sup> [citizenspact.eu/blog/263](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/263)

From top to bottom:  
 E. Dalibot, "May the Force Be with Everyone"; Paris, France  
 E. Dalibot, "You Can Make a Difference"; Athens, Greece



blatant paradox, wrote in *Propaganda*<sup>20</sup> that “the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society” and promoted the idea of an ‘invisible government’, the ‘true ruling power’, the small hands manipulating the puppets. What happens then when people really take (some) power?

Common choices to build the societies we want to live in, aside from requiring political will or courage in some cases, often translate into financial decisions. But these decisions, meant to reflect public interest, often serve other purposes. The Iberian Caravan travelled on the “*ruta del despilfarro*”<sup>21</sup> (the road of waste [of public money]) in Valencia. Through the examples of the City of Arts and Science, uninvestigated metro accidents or the construction of substandard schools, they were told stories of corruption and unaccountability, in which citizens were left powerless and stripped from their rights.

If financial powers and the race for profit want to govern our societies, then money can be an efficient starting point to take back ownership of what is in the public interest. More and more communities have started to develop their own local currencies, sometimes securing mechanisms against speculation (with value decreasing over time for instance). Others engage in participatory budgeting, following the 1988 Porto Alegre experience, to not only decide on budget allocation but also closely follow public spending and project implementation. The movement towards participatory budgeting started only in the 2000’s in Europe, and about two hundred initiatives are estimated to be present in Europe<sup>22</sup>, most of which are initiated in a top-down manner by governments, municipalities or parties. In Slovakia however, it was initiated by civil society organisations, like **Utopia.sk**<sup>23</sup>, which started to run a participatory budgeting process in Bratislava in

<sup>20</sup> Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, 1928, Horace Liveright

<sup>21</sup> [citizenspact.eu/blog/74](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/74)

<sup>22</sup> Anna Forkovicova, *Understanding Participatory Budgeting: Lessons Learnt from Bratislava*, Central European University, Budapest, 2013; [www.etd.ceu.hu/2013/forkovicova\\_anna.pdf](http://www.etd.ceu.hu/2013/forkovicova_anna.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> [utopia.sk](http://utopia.sk)

2011 and managed to implement it in other cities across the country. The aim is to directly involve people into decision-making processes related to municipal budgets, using a set of structures (the ‘participatory communities’, ‘coordination committee’, ‘public forum’ and a ‘public deliberation’) to select the final project through consensus, after a process involving setting up priorities, e-voting and deliberation. It inspired **Alternativa Zdola**<sup>24</sup> (bottom-up alternative) in Prague, for which 1 million CZK were green-lit by the City Council<sup>25</sup> for 2014 and 2015, a couple of days after they met the Central Caravan.

But when elected representatives disrespect their mandates or deceive the electorate, when participation is only a façade and doesn’t lead to change, or when no space exists to practice democracy, then this space has to be taken back. The Transeuropa Caravans met many of these people, struggling to defend basic rights, policy by policy. In Spain, the **PAH**<sup>26</sup> (Plataforma de Afectados por las Hipotecas, “Platform of People Affected by Mortgages”) fighting against evictions, the **Marea Verde** (Green Tide) and the **Marea Blanca**<sup>27</sup> (“White Tide”) defending public education and health system, join in a common and concrete struggle for the right not only to live in the city, but to take part in it – access to basic rights is a necessary condition for this. In Bologna (Italy), the **Làbas** occupied caserns aspire to give space back to the city and to its citizens by creating a place that welcomes discussions and events, linking up collectives and individuals, enabling the birth of bottom-up movements in the city and calling us to “occupy and self-manage for a new urban democracy”.

Democracy in Europe is under threat, as the rise of the extreme-right in the last EU elections is a clear and harsh reminder (be it a cause or a consequence of it – surely both). The dominance of finance over politics has led to austerity policies imposed by non-accountable in-

24 [citizenspact.eu/blog/75](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/75)

25 [www.praha7.cz/16884\\_Navrhnete-jak-vyuzit-milion-z-rozpoctu-Prahy-7](http://www.praha7.cz/16884_Navrhnete-jak-vyuzit-milion-z-rozpoctu-Prahy-7)

26 [afectadosporlahipoteca.com](http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com)

27 [mareaverdemadrid.blogspot.com](http://mareaverdemadrid.blogspot.com) and [www.mareablanca.es](http://www.mareablanca.es)

stitutions like the ECB or the Troika, in a blind fascination for neo-liberalism, despite (proven) harmful consequences for populations in Europe and beyond. Corporations impose their plans for more liberalisation, privatisation and commodification either directly, without fair and democratic public participation, or indirectly, through lobbying actions. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and other trade agreements that are currently in the pipeline at the EU level call for a common front of resistance, since what is at stake is not only trade, but an increased power of private interests over the public common good – with for instance the investor-state dispute settlement tribunal in which companies would sue states if their present or the future profits are affected by legislation.

In a number of cases, struggles for democracy look like David’s fight against Goliath. This however gives us no right to despair, but a duty to act. The energy, the perseverance, the creativity and sometimes also the victories that were witnessed in the initiatives visited provide ground for optimism and are all living proof that democracy is well alive. “The other Europe” is already there and real European democracy is in the making: not in Brussels or Frankfurt, but at the local level.



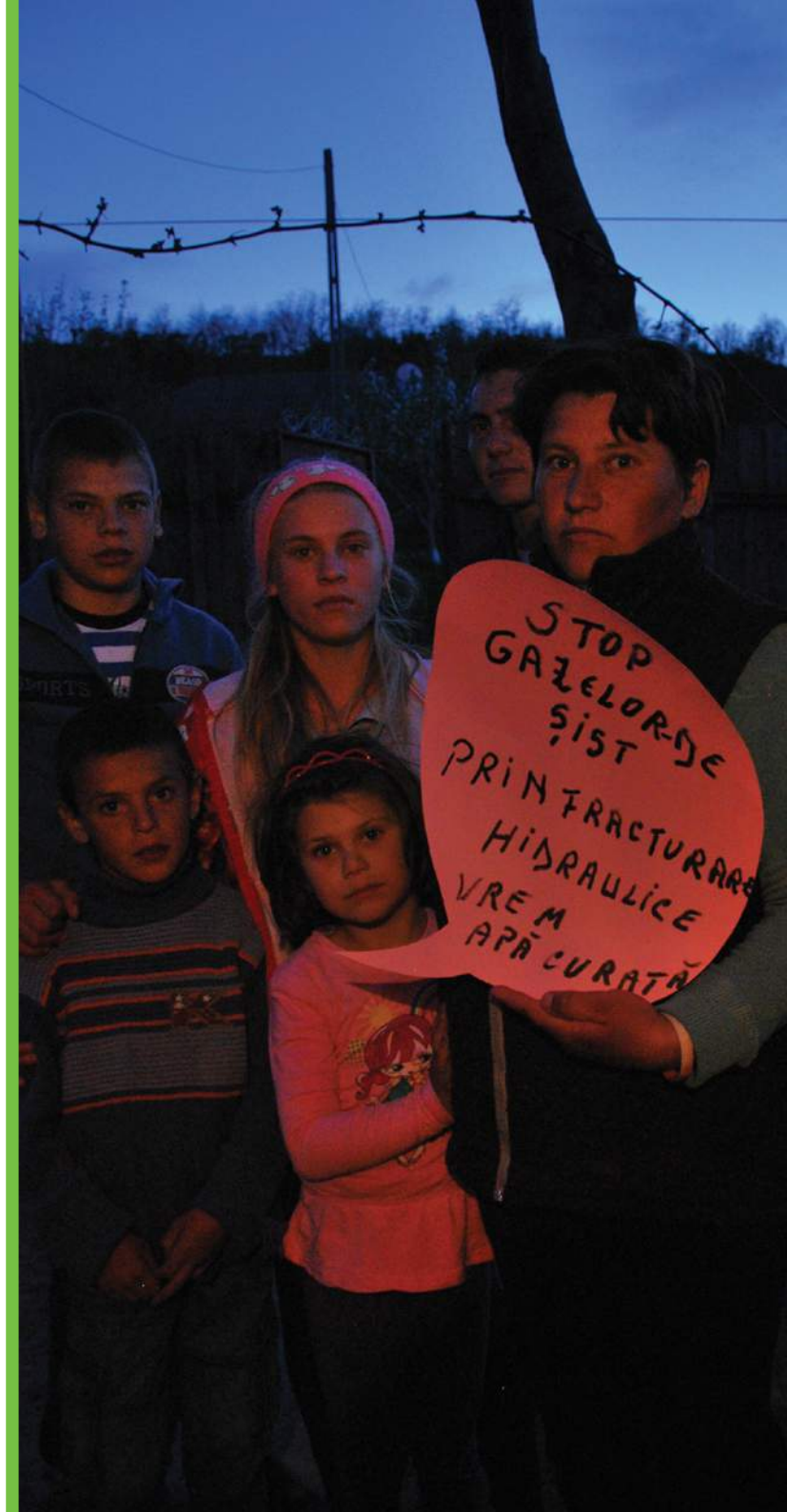
E. Dalibot,  
“Change is Around  
the Corner”, Athens,  
Greece

# 4

## Environment and Common Goods



*E. Dalibot,  
"Stop Shale  
Gas Extraction  
Through Hydraulic  
Fracturing, We  
Want Clean Water",  
Pungești, Romania*



## Common Environmental Struggles: European Stories on Community-Building and Resistance

*Author: Vanessa Buth*

*“People should look not at the differences,  
But at what they have in common”*

**Svan Neijnsbergen, Utrecht, the Netherlands**

What do water, privatisation, land rights, mining, renewables, fracking and climate change have in common? They all relate to common struggles of the citizens of Europe. In the context of austerity politics and an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth, the response has been a turn towards community centred approaches. The many initiatives that the Transeuropa Caravans visited tell the stories of common struggles and victories. These initiatives share a sense of community spirit and a conviction that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. It is that growing network of interactions across borders, which is motivating people to find alternative ways for building a just and sustainable future for Europe. Initiatives are often about providing a space for public dialogue, skill trades and shares, sustainable grassroots approaches, resistance, degrowth and the flourishing of cultural diversity. More and more community initiatives create spaces that make people feel at home, nurture skills and provide a sense of community, developing the confidence we all need to realise what we want from life – and discovering what we can give. Looking across the many different initiatives visited by the Transeuropa Caravans, there is a clear drive to create spaces together that respond to people’s needs, give freedom to the imagination, and enable new ways to prosper despite cuts to the social system and the third sector. Whether the initiatives are in Spain, the UK or Greece, they are designed by and for the people of their community. Time banking and trade schools, alternative currencies, crowdfunding and crowdsourcing, not only money, but also time, skills and items are just examples of the new tools emerging across Europe. In these initiatives, education revolves

around the realisation that one size does not fit all. These spaces provide important opportunities to talk about what does not work or how social systems need improvement, topics that are often ignored in the day-to-day business of work and life.

This ‘community turn’ is set against a background of profound changes in political, social and ecological systems across European countries. Climate change has increased the frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as heat waves, fires, floods and droughts in recent years<sup>28</sup>. Land grabbing, the concentration of land in the hands of a few foreign and domestic investors, is happening across Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe where small farmers have been pressed to sell their land in the face of heavily subsidised agricultural goods after the fall of the Berlin wall – and many of these investors are helped by large sums of public funds<sup>29</sup>. Energy security is driving highly unsustainable forms of energy production; importantly hydraulic fracturing of shale gas is leading to the devastation and pollution of vast areas of land<sup>30</sup>. In some EU countries fracking has been prohibited by national authorities (France, Bulgaria) as a result of public protests, but in others, companies are receiving permits to continue with prospecting and commercial mining (amongst others Germany, the UK, Denmark, Northern Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania)<sup>31</sup>. Lastly, commercial agriculture and farming have led to the cultivation of large monocultures across Europe, leading to more greenhouse gas emissions, soil degradation and loss of biodiversity. These issues are not just isolated incidents of privatisation of land and resources but part of a general trend, which demands a general response.

<sup>28</sup> [www.eea.europa.eu/media/newsreleases/climate-change-evident-across-europe](http://www.eea.europa.eu/media/newsreleases/climate-change-evident-across-europe), see also [www.caneurope.org/resources/latest-publications/636-this-is-climate-change-in-europe](http://www.caneurope.org/resources/latest-publications/636-this-is-climate-change-in-europe).

<sup>29</sup> [www.eurovia.org/IMG/pdf/Land\\_in\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.eurovia.org/IMG/pdf/Land_in_Europe.pdf), pp.6f. More info on global land grabbing: [www.tni.org/files/download/landgrabbingprimer-feb2013.pdf](http://www.tni.org/files/download/landgrabbingprimer-feb2013.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Hydraulic fracturing, the process to extract the gas from shale, a very fine-grained sedimentary rock, requires drilling about 2.5-3 km deep into the earth, injecting huge amounts of water, sand and chemicals into the shale under extremely high pressure to retrieve the gas. Find further info about the way fracking works here [www.dur.ac.uk/refine/about/fracking](http://www.dur.ac.uk/refine/about/fracking).

<sup>31</sup> Data from [Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydraulic\\_fracturing\\_by\\_country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydraulic_fracturing_by_country).





Robert Matei

E. Dalibot,  
"Unite!",  
Athens, Greece



So how do you connect localised struggles to this bigger picture and engage people in issues which go beyond their own communities? How and where do connections between initiatives in the same city or region happen, and where do they happen across Europe? The Transeuropa Caravans visited the many little or grand stories of the people of Europe. They showed that although local, these struggles have the same roots and people respond with similar community-centred alternatives. Some of these stories are told below.

### Mining and Fracking: Corporate Profits vs. Local Land Rights

The Eastern Caravan went to visit **Alburnus Maior**<sup>32</sup> in Roşia Montana, one of the main associations fighting against Gabriel Resources, a Canadian company looking to mine for gold in the Transylvanian mountains. Thanks to the people's determination and creativity during the more than ten year long struggle, they have had big successes. The Roşia Montana region has the largest undeveloped gold deposit in Europe and, recently, the Canadian resource company Gabriel Resources decided to build an open pit next to Roşia Montana and extract the gold. The company argues that this "project for Romania"<sup>33</sup> would directly or indirectly benefit Romanians through a potential GDP growth to the sum of \$24 billion (about €18 billion). They also claim to be "committed to restore, preserve and honour Roşia Montana's valuable cultural heritage". This PR is covering up the fact that Gabriel Resources is using a dangerous and controversial technique called cyanide mining, which risks polluting the whole vicinity and locals may have no other option than to relocate somewhere else. However, upon entering the village, one is immediately greeted by a company advert which states: "Roşia Montana exists thanks to its minerals". There is a sign on almost every house. It doesn't stop there though; locals testify that the company's methods include bribery, intimidation and blackmail. The talk of gold and millions of investment

<sup>32</sup> For more info see [www.rosiamontana.org](http://www.rosiamontana.org).

<sup>33</sup> See the Gabriel Resources website [gabrielresources.com](http://gabrielresources.com).

stands in stark contrast to the simple demand that the people of Roşia Montana have: to be left to live on their own property and work their own land. One of the local activists, Eugen David, explained that for him, a basic life, living off his own ancestral land, is the perfect life. What the mining company stands for is the complete opposite. After more than a decade of resistance, Roşia Montana has almost won the fight to keep their rights to the land. This clash between two completely

different worldviews and approaches shows that local communities can indeed resist large corporate powers and the logic of short-term profit. Even though people are careful not to cry victory too soon, this has already become an exemplary struggle for Romania and beyond.

Romania has also seen a series of protests against several sites of shale gas exploitation since 2012. What fuelled protesters was the fact that their Prime Minister, who before the elections opposed shell gas drilling, suddenly changed his viewpoint

after being elected. In **Pungesti**, demonstrations erupted in October 2013, after the American energy corporation Chevron obtained the right to set up its first derrick for drilling and got state approval to explore soil in Siliştea. The Eastern caravan went to visit **Vira**, the main association formed around the protest, to learn about their struggle<sup>34</sup>. The zone has been declared a “zone of national security” and is guarded by the domestic police, which has effectively become Chevron’s private security force. People’s livelihoods mostly depend on the things they cultivate on the land and facing such a powerful and financially strong conglomerate, the villagers are getting more and more disconcerted, feeling powerless and scared, not only for their own but also for their children’s future. And so, they are organising a protest movement with help from activists in Bucharest. Many people involved as activists in the struggle around Roşia Montana, which mo-

“We could be a world leading continent, where everybody looks to Europe for the solutions to solve our sustainability crises.”

Stuart Bowles  
Northfield  
Ecocentre,  
Birmingham, the  
UK

<sup>34</sup> Read more about them here [www.vira.ro/en](http://www.vira.ro/en).



E. Dalibot,  
“Forbid Fracking in  
Europe!”, Pungesti,  
Romania

bilised a huge amount of people in Romania, have now turned to help Pungesti.

Germany is often considered a role model for sustainable energy policies aiming to achieve energy security whilst making energy production more environmentally friendly and thus available for

future generations. But since the country’s exit from nuclear energy, subsidies for renewables have been cut and the price for electricity has risen, partly because companies that use a lot of energy have been exempt from the German Renewable Energy Act surcharge. At the same time, large corporations are increasing the sourcing of gas and mining of coal. The North-Eastern Caravan joined a protest march criticising in particular the mining of the dirty brown coal, organised by the coalition **Keine Nochten II**, who are demanding changes in the energy infrastructure, supported by other organisations and parties such as the German Friends of the Earth group BUND, the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union, Greenpeace, as well as the German Green and the Left Party. The protest was directed at plans by the Swedish energy corporation Vattenfall to extend the existing mining area around Nochten to Rhone, one area among many where brown coal is mined or is in the planning process in the Lausitz region. Vattenfall already owns the open pit and the regional government agreed to a brown coal plan with the company. Six villages will be demolished and about two thousand people are affected, amongst these many Sorbs<sup>35</sup>, who are struggling to protect their cultural heritage. In an area where unemployment is around 20%, the PR orchestrated by Vattenfall centering on job creation is tempting and convincing<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, Vattenfall pays for the relocation into new homes for those

<sup>35</sup> The Sorbs are a minority group living in the Lusatia region in Germany.

<sup>36</sup> According to LobbyControl, the study Vattenfall bases its numbers on was commissioned by Vattenfall itself and the numbers are highly questionable (see link below).

that agree to evacuation, and invests in local sport and social infrastructures to gain support for their mining. The company also pays for peoples' support in newspaper articles and advertising banners<sup>37</sup> to promote a positive image of the mining project. Similar to Chevron in Romania, Vattenfall has offered locals large sums of money to encourage them to move and resettle more quickly. The problem is that this prospect is short-term, and once the coal is mined, the environment is polluted and the land destroyed, making previous ways of living by cultivating the land impossible. And as Keine Nochten II points out, coal mining has been going on for decades in the Lausitz, yet it is one of the poorest districts in Germany. The group instead suggests structural changes towards decentralised green energies, which would facilitate local jobs and secure a healthy environment for future generations<sup>38</sup>.

**“If I could change something in Europe, I would hope that this run after more and more growth comes to an end and that people can be happy with what they have. [...] I would be very happy if Europe in the future could have various and diverse landscapes with a lot of small farms and that many people can afford for their own needs.”**

Adrian  
Eias-Rinnert  
Rohne, Germany

### Renewables and Permaculture: Sustainable Living and Relocalisation of the Economy

**La Jeresa** is a cooperative of small-scale photovoltaic investors<sup>39</sup>. Their huge solar farm consists of four hundred eighteen panels with every member a producer and owner. The revenue is the same for all members of the cooperative and expenses for administration, energy

37 [www.lobbycontrol.de/2014/04/vattenfall-meinungsmache-fuer-braunkohle-in-der-lausitz](http://www.lobbycontrol.de/2014/04/vattenfall-meinungsmache-fuer-braunkohle-in-der-lausitz).

38 See the debate on the positions around coal mining and Nochten II [www.mdr.de/mediathek/fernsehen/a-z/sendung390434\\_letter-F\\_zc-33698ed5\\_zs-dea15b49.html](http://www.mdr.de/mediathek/fernsehen/a-z/sendung390434_letter-F_zc-33698ed5_zs-dea15b49.html).

39 See their website [www.lajeresa.com](http://www.lajeresa.com).

and maintenance are shared. La Jeresa was created in response to the campaign by the Spanish government promoting the investment in renewable energy in 2005<sup>40</sup>. A law was passed which introduced state subsidies for the construction of photovoltaic panels and for feed in tariffs and more than 50 000 people and their families in Spain followed the call. After the economic crisis, and due to the extremely powerful conventional electricity companies, changes to the law were introduced from 2010. A tax for renewable energy fed to the national grid was implemented, the total amount was limited, and subsidies cut. Suddenly, the money these families had invested – their pensions, their future, their finance for their children's education and future – was gone. Instead, they now have a huge debt and no way to pay for it. The obstacles introduced to producing renewable energy are now so ridiculous that the investors even have to pay for the conventional energy they do *not* consume. Further, people who wish to put up solar panels on their homes are no longer allowed. La Jeresa is part of the struggle that brought this case to the Spanish national court – and failing this, their aspiration is to appeal to the European Court of Justice. These investors in renewable energy criticise that European norms are not obligatory for Member States, and hence the goal of 20% renewable energy by 2020 is nothing but a guideline. Stronger competencies at the EU level would help the investors in their situation. “I’m a Europeanist”, one investor emphasizes, “but what does it help to promote a project that in my lifetime does not help me? I cannot pay for my three kids”.

**Carricola** is a tiny village of eighty-five inhabitants<sup>41</sup>. Promoted by its local council, Carricola has devoted itself to biodiversity, permaculture and sustainable living: crop rotation, organic fertiliser from their own pigs and donkeys and the abstinence from pesticides and herbicides secure a nutritious and healthy soil. Indeed, the old ways the community has recovered are as amazing as simple: they keep donkeys that maintain the land and thereby protect it from fires spread-

40 [citizenspact.eu/blog/11](http://citizenspact.eu/blog/11)

41 See their website [www.facebook.com/carricola.carricola](http://www.facebook.com/carricola.carricola)

ing. About two hundred years ago, Carricola had two hundred fifty inhabitants, but with the boom in textile fabrication during the 1960's and 1970's many people moved to the cities and lots of the surrounding agricultural land lied fallow. However, about fifteen years ago, Carricola made an effort to turn itself into a village promoting sustainable agriculture. It sold land to very affordable prices to city people who wanted to move to the countryside, started organic farming and managed to lower the average age from about fifty-five to thirty-five. Part of the Carricola philosophy is to use ancient and natural methods of farming. For example, they restored the old Islamic aqueduct, and added remote controls to the pipes for each field so farmers could adjust water usage to their need reducing consumption. They also built a green filter for wastewater using water reed and other plants to dis-

integrate organic material. In Carricola, the organic cultivation is also deeply connected with cooperation: on their way to the school in the neighbouring village the children take turns in carrying a container to collect leftovers from school dinners to be fed to the village pigs. Interestingly, Carricola has no political parties and all decisions are taken together by the community – a tradition that is still surviving from the times when all decisions were taken by “consejos abiertos”, open councils.

**Alternatiba** originated in Bayonne, France, and is a movement of initiatives fighting for climate justice and striving for alternative sustainable ways of living. It showcases concrete means and solutions for reducing emissions, such as small-scale agriculture,

re-localisation of the economy, appropriate urban and rural planning, regulation of financial markets, and the protection of common goods such as water, soil, forests, air<sup>42</sup>. Alternatiba Bayonne's call for more Alternatiba villages is being heard, and since 2013 'Alternatiba villa-

**“Climate change is the biggest challenge we have to face. We absolutely have to get away from burning fossil fuels and transform our economies to renewable energy.”**

*Jon Worth  
blogger, writer,  
speaker and  
trainer,  
Berlin, Germany*

<sup>42</sup> See their website for more info [alternatiba.eu](http://alternatiba.eu).

ges' have sprung up or are in planning in dozens of cities across Belgium, France and Germany, including Lille, Paris and Brussels. Alternatiba Lille for example is planning its 'village' around alternatives to current daily needs, such as housing, clothing, food and transport. One of their core mottos is to “fight resignation”, by demonstrating the availability of alternatives.

### Common Land and Shared spaces: Building Community and Resistance

The Iberian Caravan met with the Platform for the Rehabilitation of the **Casa Grande del Pumarejo**, a community centre in the Pumarejo neighbourhood of Sevilla<sup>43</sup>. The centre is situated in an old palace built in 1770. The trouble with the beautiful building is that it is falling apart and although in 2003, the regional government of Andalucía certified the building as a monument in need of protection for the next fifteen years, the authorities show little interest in restoring this historical treasure. Thus in 2000 the local residents took it upon themselves and joined forces in order to restore the Casa Grande del Pumarejo and its intercultural and ethnological



*E. Dalibot,  
“Sky 0€”, Athens,  
Greece*

<sup>43</sup> [www.lohacemosnosotras.org](http://www.lohacemosnosotras.org)

values. But the economic pressure of the property crisis is challenging the right of the people to public space and there have been several threats to buy up the building. However, the centre says that you cannot monopolise the ownership or usage of the public heritage: “they talk about the public and the private, we talk about the common. We want a participatory project of recuperation, rehabilitation, and revitalisation. We may not all be educated citizens in the traditional concept, but we know how to take care of the space.” Among other things, Pumarejo introduced its own social currency used at their Saturday markets, called ‘the Puma’. The philosophy behind it is to remember the value of people’s times and skills and it is based on trust. People wanting to buy things have to first trade in their Euros for Pumas in order to buy anything, thus helping the community to pay bills they cannot pay in Pumas, for example the electricity bill. Interesting is also the concept of governance: there is no consensus, no assembly, but there is creativity that guides the activities. Arts play a great role, in the forms of flamenco, theatre, dance, yoga and a summer cinema, and the space is open to other neighbourhood groups. People donated six thousand books to Pumarejo’s neighbourhood library, which a librarian is taking care of in her spare time. Pumarejo also makes use of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing, asking not only for money, but also for items, time and skills. Currently, Pumarejo is looking to establish a network of groups to help with applications for funding and to learn from other initiatives.

The North-Western Caravan visited a number of common spaces used by and for the community. For example the **Futureshift festival** is a changemaker networking event, where spokespersons representing organisations or movements delivered talks about their lessons learned in the process of establishing and growing a project<sup>44</sup>. The Tomorrow Today team for instance put together a collection of best practices guiding transformative projects<sup>45</sup>. Futureshift is all about greener, sustainable approaches, about letting people lead their con-

44 [www.futureshift.cc/futureshiftfestival](http://www.futureshift.cc/futureshiftfestival)

45 [www.tomorrowtoday.is](http://www.tomorrowtoday.is)

versations and activities, working within communities and schools. These projects combine reclaiming urban spaces and spreading a sense of community.

**“The way I imagine Europe in ten years time? A lot more community-based living, [...] streams of sustainable lives being integrated with local communities.”**

*Helen Holmes  
Cropshare,  
Cambridge, the UK*

**The Waiting Room**<sup>46</sup> is located in the former bus station of Colchester. Once bustling with people, the area has become somewhat desolated and poor. In response, the new gallery Firstsite was designed to provide a platform for cultural regeneration. Whilst it is important to create a new dynamic that others can build upon and gravitate around, it is critical that this is complemented by a supportive home-grown civic infrastructure, which can jump-start the latent energies of the neighbourhood and blend in practices from other places – such as hacker and maker spaces. This is particularly important in suburban areas. One of the ambitions of the Waiting Room is to develop civic literacy by creating a ‘give-get library’, part of a movement to transform the way people see libraries. This entails engaging with the opportunities that digital technology can bring to spread local know-how in the community. The objective of the library is not just to lend books, but also to provide a social meeting space and a refuge. Developing ‘civic literacy’ means discovering and embodying the different cultures and stories of the people that make up the community. The Waiting Room hosts physical spaces where these (hi)stories can be shared and (re) made.

The North-Western Caravan also visited **the Common Room Norwich**, run by a group of individuals in the St Lawrence Church right in the centre of the city with the support of the Church Conservation Trust<sup>47</sup>. It is a beautiful shared space, made and shaped collectively by the

46 [st-botolphs.org](http://st-botolphs.org)

47 [www.thecommonroom.so](http://www.thecommonroom.so) and [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk)

community, and run on the principles of collaboration, connection and resourcefulness. Their cooperative membership model suggests that every member helps out a minimum of four hours per month in the way that suits them most, and in turn they have access to the space, meet people, experiment with ideas and start new projects. Two of their flagship projects are the Common Soup and the Trade School. The Common Soup is based on Sunday Soup, combining communal meals with crowdfunding for projects – as well as creating a great opportunity to bring people together<sup>48</sup>. Share a meal and all income from tickets is given as a grant to support a project the participants vote on. Trade School Norwich has been part of the Common Room since its very beginning in 2012. Trade School is an open learning space that runs on barter. Anyone can teach something they are skilled at, or passionate about. Attendees pay for class with a barter item (like food, supplies, or advice) that the instructor requests through the online form.

### The Environment and Common Goods – a Story of the People

These stories are examples of how people in different parts of Europe are faced with similar local struggles in response to environmental degradation, austerity and the privatisation of the commons. The aim of the Transeuropa Caravans was to visit these different struggles and raise awareness about the fact that they are not just isolated and local, but common European struggles, requiring communal responses. The Transeuropa Caravans met some of these alternative responses by people across Europe and a few of their beautiful stories of inspiration and enthusiasm were told here. These stories show that a growing awareness of the connectedness of today's struggles, rather than causing despair, is leading to community, grassroots alternatives, solidarity and social, cultural and environmental prosperity.

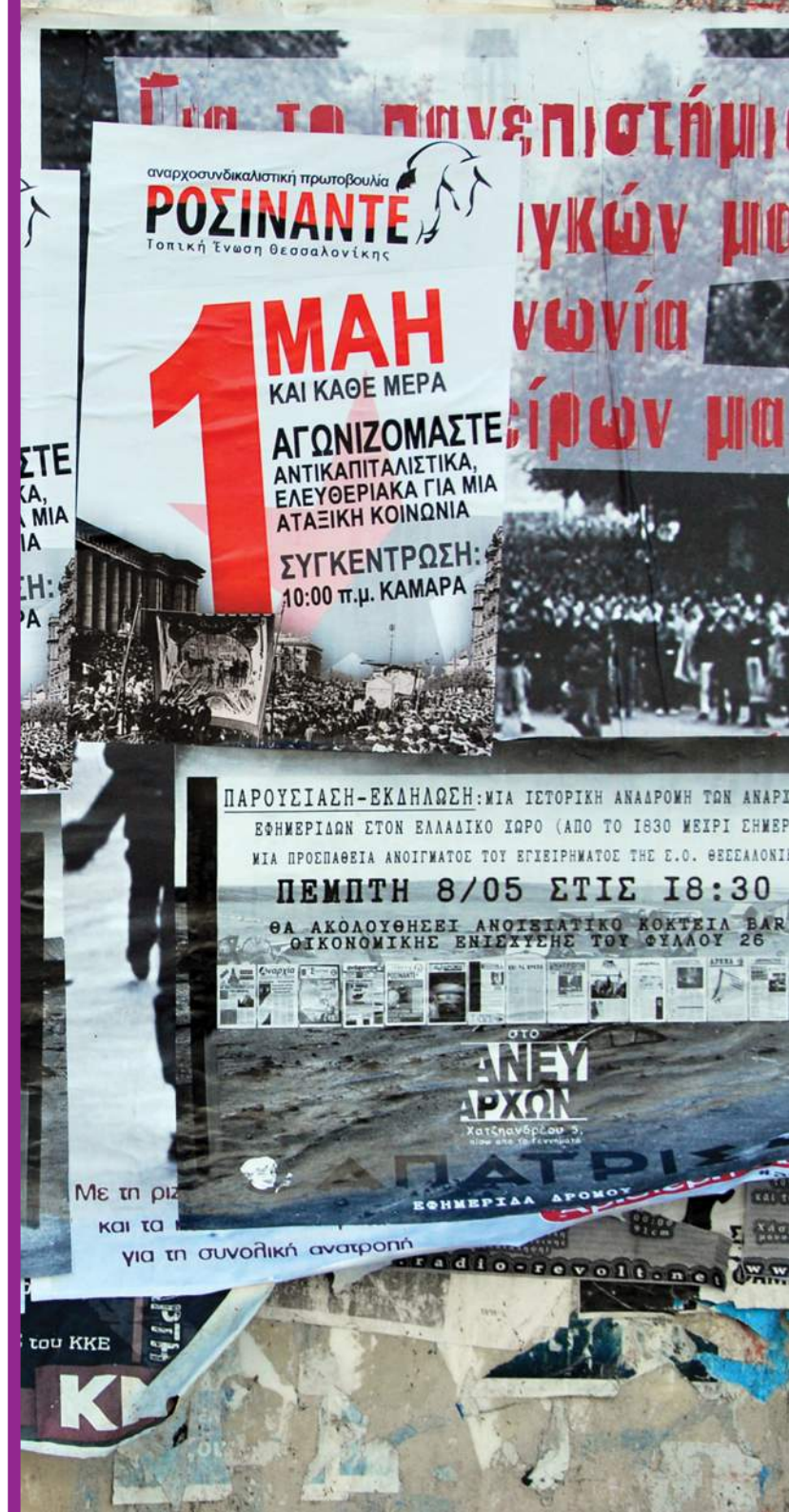
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48 [sundaysoup.org](http://sundaysoup.org)

The Transeuropa Caravans connected these local stories to the bigger picture, enabling a sense of identity and solidarity with local struggles in other parts of Europe. It was surprising to see just how many initiatives and creative networks are thriving even in the most marginalised parts of Europe. What the Caravans found is that sustainable connections are not artificially imposed top-down, but they emerge from within communities, with their courage, inspiration and creativity, adapted to local or regional needs. At the same time, the principles and ways of working in these community initiatives all share similar characteristics of community spirit, trust, building confidence and resistance. The 'community turn' shows the creativity and energy that emerges when people break out of isolation and begin making connections across local contexts and beyond borders. Faced with a future where the long-term trends of climate change, land grabbing and unsustainable energy and agricultural policies continue, communities are showing an alternative way of living for future generations.

# 5

## Work and Welfare



E. Dalibot,  
"May 1<sup>st</sup> posters",  
Thessaloniki,  
Greece

## Survival and Resistance in the Age of Austerity

Authors: Olga Vukovic, Noel Hatch

Contributors: Elena Dalibot, Vanessa Buth, Christiane Schwausch

The bitter impact of austerity on people's everyday lives was witnessed during the journeys of the Transeuropa Caravans across Europe. Austerity has affected many areas important to any welfare state, ranging from work, to housing, education, basic benefits and healthcare. This in turn has led many people to experience the injustices of the welfare system for the first time – their factory has closed or they can't pay the rent. But for many other, already marginalised members of society – like Roma, homeless or asylum seekers – their daily fight to be recognised simply as human beings has become even harder. In the face of this, individuals and communities across Europe are taking welfare into their hands, creating new ways to cope with the impact of austerity measures on their lives, and as a consequence, exploring new forms of direct democracy. The Transeuropa Caravans visited some of these initiatives and witnessed their attempts to give people back their dignity, autonomy and solidarity, showing all of us what the future looks like.

### Urban Welfare, Urban Democracy

With varying levels of minimum wage throughout Europe and basic income still on the table for discussion, state mechanisms throughout Europe destined to help individuals cover basic living costs are still lacking. As people fall through the gaps in the system, they are left to fend for themselves to resolve unmet needs. Where states are turning their backs to the well-being of citizens, it is not only welfare which becomes an issue but the entire democratic structures on which Europe rests. It is precisely this reality which is pushing people to create not only their own welfare but also their own democratic processes. This is



Laura Sorvala

why the most successful initiatives start with the most basic human needs – such as food, shelter or clothing – and then transform into an opportunity to come together to provide for each other.

The Transeuropa Caravans met several initiatives which do just that. The **Wi-Ma**<sup>49</sup> in Lodz transformed a former cotton factory into a cooperative of more than forty different projects, home to film and photographic studios, a theatre, a printing workshop, a co-working office, a music incubator and many other initiatives, all located in a space of 600m<sup>2</sup>. What's more, Lodz is a city with high unemployment levels, and many of its inhabitants are leaving for the larger cities in search of work. The Wi-Ma project took not only an unused space, putting it to good use for creative entrepreneurs, but is contributing to the revitalisation of the city, ensuring it will not die out.

49 [www.citizenspact.eu/blog/164](http://www.citizenspact.eu/blog/164) and [wi-ma.org](http://wi-ma.org)



“I hope to see a more social Europe, which takes young people’s needs more into consideration.”

Pierre-Julien  
Bossert  
Brussels, Belgium

B. Alfano,  
“Income for All”, Làbas,  
Bologna, Italy



In Bologna, **Làbas**<sup>50</sup>, an occupied military barracks, and **TPO**<sup>51</sup>, an occupied former factory, respond to the needs of the local community in many different ways. Both of these projects transformed unused spaces in the heart of the city into living organisms providing fundamental services to Bologna’s inhabitants. Together they are part of the **Crowdhousing project**, a bottom-up initiative which occupies abandoned spaces throughout Italy and transforms them into housing for the thousands of people who do not have a sufficient income to secure a roof over their heads. In Làbas, volunteers from the local community helped to renovate the inside of the barracks, making it a habitable home for twenty people. The Làbas space has many micro activities run by their community, and a particularly interesting one is their work relating to children and childcare. They provide a space for families to bring their children to engage in with the space, which boasts a small community garden among other things, encouraging an education in environmental and food issues from a young age. Parents organise clothes and toy swaps and are currently experimenting with developing a **Social Kindergarten**, vital especially for single working parents with little money to spend on childcare. Furthermore, every Wednesday, when Làbas hosts a market with local farmers selling their produce and promoting the consumption of ‘0km<sup>52</sup> goods’, an interactive recycling lab is held for the children. It is no secret that funding to the cultural sector was among the top of the list of cuts in the majority of European countries, causing many cultural spaces in cities to close down. The occupying of the large unused military barracks by Làbas was an initial reaction to this, but developed into much more, an experiment in self-run ‘urban democracy’, responding to the basic needs of their community.

The **Solidarity Kitchen**<sup>53</sup> in Katerini (Greece) started in 2013 as Greece was falling deeper and deeper into recession, throwing fami-

50 [labasoccupato.wordpress.com](http://labasoccupato.wordpress.com)

51 [www.tpo.bo.it](http://www.tpo.bo.it)

52 Goods which have been produced locally, travelled ‘0 km’ to reach the buyers.

53 [www.citizenspact.eu/blog/329](http://www.citizenspact.eu/blog/329)

lies into poverty. Solidarity networks, based on family and on neighbourhood, were no longer able to function due to the rise of poverty and many people did not dare speak about their daily struggles, wrongly feeling responsible for being unemployed. Under the motto “solidarity for all”, the Solidarity Kitchen runs the collection of food given by shoppers in supermarkets and by market sellers to help people in need. What is particularly interesting is that beneficiaries of the Solidarity Kitchen are also those who organise and run the collection. They also take part in the decision-making processes, thanks to a weekly open assembly to decide on organising the work. The Solidarity



E. Dalibot,  
“No Job”, Italy

Kitchen also collects books and distributes them in schools, provides assistance to apply for pensions, helps people who can't pay for electricity (which is then turned off), etc. Beyond providing a new form of welfare to those in need, the Solidarity Kitchen aims to empower people into realising that the crisis should be a concern everyone should take action on.

### Building Solidarity from the Centre to the Edge

While the crisis has had different levels of impact throughout society, the stories less often told are of the groups in society who have often found themselves at its margins, who have always been sent to the back of the queue.

The community project **Cozinha Comunitária**<sup>54</sup> in Terras da Costa, Portugal, is but one example. Terras da Costa is a migrant and Portuguese Gitanos<sup>55</sup> settlement on agricultural land owned by the lo-

54 [www.facebook.com/cozinhacomunitariadasterrasdacosta](http://www.facebook.com/cozinhacomunitariadasterrasdacosta)

55 The term “Gitanos” is generally used over “Roma” in Portugal and in Spain.

cal farmers. With cuts to social benefits affecting support to migrants and asylum seekers, conditions are particularly tough: many residents have no papers nor the right to work, people live in small sheds and there is no running water. To help improve living conditions, residents and a number of people from various associations built a community kitchen, soon to be expanded to incorporate a washing room, game room, as well as a protected courtyard where the kids can play safely. Moreover, the locals and individuals from the groups involved share their knowledge in workshops, whether this is teaching French, poetry, or Cape Verdean dance and drums. The beauty of this project is that it is a common effort of the diverse local residents, made up of migrants from former Portuguese colonies, such as Cape Verde, and Portuguese Gitanos. Together with members of the neighbouring fishing village Costa do Vapor, Portuguese and European associations and individuals, they are creating the space they need. The confidence, trust, and motivation this creates are infectious. Some of the people helping out have already been involved in community projects in

Guimarães, European Capital of Culture 2012, and Casa do Vapor, and the combination of their skills and enthusiasm with the knowledge and cultural wealth of the locals is building more than a community kitchen – it is creating lasting bonds spreading across European borders.

However despite best efforts to bring a community away from the margins, sometimes there are too many opposing factors. A vivid example of this is the sudden expulsion of over seventy Roma families in Cluj-Napoca<sup>56</sup>, a breach of international ob-

ligations guaranteeing the right to housing without discrimination. Originally living in Coastei Street, their forced eviction in the middle of winter (December 2010) brought them very close to a garbage dump in Pata Rât (9 km away from the centre). Not all families were ‘offered’

**“I would like for everyone to have the chance, no matter what ethnic group they belong to, to have access to jobs.”**

Greta Claudia,  
Pata Rât, Romania

56 [www.citizenspace.eu/blog/288](http://www.citizenspace.eu/blog/288)



From top to bottom:  
 P. Espinosa, "Don't Touch Education, No to Cuts",  
 Seville, Spain  
 E. Dalibot, "Pata Rât", Cluj-Napoca, Romania



replacement housing and thirty-six families had to build new shacks from scratch. For those relocated to the ten modular houses (about 3m<sup>2</sup> per person, one bathroom for forty people), it was a matter of weeks before they started deteriorating. Many people (in particular children) fell ill and they had to face increased difficulties to access employment (due to strong discrimination against Roma, and in particular against Roma living in Pata Rât), health, education. These families were left to fend for themselves, with the state quite literally pushing them out of sight and consequently, out of mind. From the day of the expulsion, they started to organise themselves, notably in the form of the **Pata Cluj-Napoca Rât association** and the **Roma community association of Coastei Street** (Asociația Comunitară a Romilor din Coastei, ACRC<sup>57</sup>). They formed the **Common Front for Housing Rights**<sup>58</sup> in March 2014 to fight for their human right to housing, and against segregation and housing rights violations. They continue to call for international support and solidarity to pressure local and national authorities.

In the Czech Republic the Roma face social exclusion and Roma children are segregated from other children and put in 'special needs' schools. They are aware that they can expect little to no support from municipal and governmental institutions and so in 1997 the initiative **IQ Roma Servis** was created. Founded with the initial aim of ensuring Roma children would finish secondary school, thus raising a new, dignified generation, the founders realised the problem was much deeper rooted and a more holistic approach was necessary, as was tackling the kind of problems Roma children struggle with on a daily basis: family issues, housing, debt. Knowing there would be little or no government support for prompting this much needed change in the Czech education system (and society as a whole), IQ Roma Servis took this burden on themselves. The campaign **V jedné lavici**<sup>59</sup> (at one school desk), advocates for Roma children to be enrolled in the 'nor-

57 [www.facebook.com/pages/Asociația-Comunitară-a-Romilor-din-Coastei/572715146094237](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Asociația-Comunitară-a-Romilor-din-Coastei/572715146094237)

58 [fcdl.ro/common-front-right-housing](https://fcdl.ro/common-front-right-housing)

59 [iqrs.cz/cs/projekty/v-jedne-lavici](https://iqrs.cz/cs/projekty/v-jedne-lavici)

mal' schools rather than in those for children with mental disabilities (in some places Roma children make up more than 80% of the students of these schools). Education is not their only concern however and they closely follow the government's agenda looking for openings to approach them as a wider network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This is currently the case for housing, a topic high on the agenda of the country's government and one which affects many Roma families. Despite attempts to influence change at a national level, the representatives of IQ Roma Servis note that "regarding the Roma question, positive developments were easier and faster brought about on the European level," noting that they would welcome easier access to EU funds in general, because "the people that really need it, often do not have the capacity to deal with elaborate application procedures". More than money, however, they "need change in the minds of people".

**Augustin** in Vienna aims to be a catalyst for a similar change but regarding a different issue altogether. Employing locals, African asylum seekers, Georgian intellectuals, the local Roma, the aim is very simple: providing homeless people with a small income by selling a magazine which aims to make visible "how the world would look like if we treated each other respectfully". What started out as a humble project with only five vendors, quickly grew into a bi-weekly paper being printed in 25 000 copies and sold by 500 vendors. Eva Rohrmoser, one of four social workers at Augustin, explained that only 20% of the vendors are female, noting: "we know that there must be much more women in need. We find it particularly difficult to make female homelessness visible". Now that the organisation has grown, accompanying the newspaper are the Augustin theatre group, table tennis club, the famous choir and of course football teams. "Augustin's main goal is to render itself obsolete", said Eva. So what can Europe do to help Augustin in this mission? According to Eva, an unconditional basic income is one option but, while money itself is alright, it is not the key: "I can see everyday, how Augustin helps people to set up a social structure for their day. Many vendors are very lonely. If there was an unconditional basic income, it would be worth thinking of providing such a kind of accompanying social structure".

## Workers Fight Back

In a capitalist system where only the toughest can stay in the race to the top, we are brought back to the dilemma of those who fall between the gaps. Increasing production and cutting costs is the mantra for most businesses, and the casualties of this game are often the employees.

**"I would like a Europe based not only on the free exchange of goods and services, but also on the ability of workers to have a pension and a guaranteed future."**

*Lorenzo Allegrini  
Ljubljana, Slovenia*

Entering the industrial outskirts of Alicante is striking, despite being populated by many large building complexes – or maybe because of that – the area exudes a feeling of loneliness, a feeling of being lost in the middle of nowhere. 1250 workers, some of whom had been working at the Alicante Coca-Cola factory for over fifty years found themselves without a livelihood from one month to the next, and had learned of this over the morning news. Seven Coca Cola factories were merged, and four shut, including Madrid, Asturias, Mallorca and Alicante, which led to the dismissals. As the workers explained, the merger into one company, Iberian partners, meant that the multinational corporation would only have to negotiate with one entity instead of seven, putting the workers in a disadvantaged position as their ability to influence decisions at the corporate level diminished. Worst of all, employees had not been part of any discussion about the closure of the profit-making factory, let alone being given a chance to discuss options to continue working under different conditions, a practice which is illegal. But the workers started a nationwide campaign **No al ERE** (No to the dismissal) and fought back. given the commercial nature of the company, the employees had all their hope on the justice system to which they appealed. In fact, courts in Spain ruled that the dismissal of these workers was indeed unlawful and that Iberian Partners would need to rehire and

reimburse employees for the months they were unemployed<sup>60</sup>.

In Thessaloniki the workers of a closed factory came up with a different solution. **Vio.Me**<sup>61</sup> – Viomichaniki Metalleutiki (Industrial Mineral) – used to be a factory producing construction material and was abandoned by its bankrupt owner, leaving workers without wages or benefits. In July 2011, workers (organised notably thanks to the union present in the factory) decided with a very large majority (97.5% approved at the General Assembly) to occupy the factory. The workers reopened it in February 2013 as a social cooperative, under the name of Vio.Me. This is the first self-managed cooperative in Greece. Everyone is paid the same, the cooperative is organised horizontally and is operated collectively. Workers' assemblies are held each morning to organise the day's production. Another type of assembly takes place every other week to collectively discuss the general strategy of the factory, without any leader or representative. For instance, the workers decided to move away from the production of chemicals for construction materials to use the machines to produce organic hygiene products, as it corresponded more to a need of society.



E. Dalibot,  
"Self-Management  
of the Workplace  
is Possible", Sofia,  
Bulgaria

Vio.Me functions according to principles that differ fundamentally from capitalist structures. When it comes to production or distribution, the cooperative doesn't think in terms of 'marketing', 'competition' or 'profit'. Products are moved through close networks to which they have time to tell their story. A very high value is given to la-

bour costs and a low one to capital. One of Vio.Me's aims is to share profits with those in need, in particular with unemployed people. Furthermore, they have already started to put the company back on

60 [www.thelocal.es/20140613/coke-forced-to-rehire-wronged-workers](http://www.thelocal.es/20140613/coke-forced-to-rehire-wronged-workers)

61 [www.viome.org](http://www.viome.org)

its feet, but more importantly, they have opened the way for a radical change not only in Greece, but in Europe and in the world, by setting a powerful precedent for workers against any type of exploitation and for new, more democratic and fair work structures.

### Giving Substance to Alternatives

These examples of civic initiatives, while greatly diverse among each other are common in their search for alternatives, alternatives to the crisis, to austerity, to exclusion. It is precisely the work of the third sector which with the recent economic crisis has proven to be the most important, providing support to different groups of society, where governments will not. Yet it is also this sector which has experienced significant cuts itself, rendering the continuation of their services difficult. Despite this, the number of initiatives, as we have seen, are endless and their effects on people's lives immeasurable.

The best civic initiatives are 'human scale' – with people feeling ownership over the impact that they create. What many activist groups bring is a source of energy and hope, as well as practical ways to take action against the injustices they face. The paradox is that if the projects can begin to transform people's lives without money, the opportunities of what they could do with funding are endless. But if they do not receive support, while some may self-organise to stay as self-sufficient as possible, others may burn out, leaving communities without any form of support. So whether it's an unconditional basic income for individuals to support themselves or an EU Financial Transaction Tax to finance initiatives helping others, radical transnational action is needed to invest in the solidarity that communities across Europe are developing.

# 6

## Roma



*E. Dalibot, "You Didn't Want to See Us Here Anymore? You Isolated and Segregated Us in Pata Rât. We Are Also Citizens of Cluj", Cluj-Napoca, Romania*



## A Visit to the Most European of Minorities

Author: Christiane Schwausch

The Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority. According to the European Commission some six million Roma live in the EU, most of them EU citizens. Many of them are victims of prejudice and social exclusion, a fact which became evident during the Transeuropa Caravans tour; Spanish reality TV portrays 'gitanos' as poor, uneducated criminals; the Czech education system is segregated, with Roma children being placed in schools for the mentally disabled; forced evictions and resettlements to the outskirts of Slovakian towns or Romanian garbage dump sites are frequent occurrences, as are forced sterilisation of Roma women, racially motivated violence, lack of protection by the police and lack of access to justice. The Transeuropa Caravans Europe-wide tour came up with the same conclusions: EU governments are failing to respect binding international human rights standards and are failing to enforce EU anti-discrimination law, and worst of all, these cases are not isolated; the similarity of Roma discrimination and exclusion patterns across EU Member States is rather striking.

However, the Transeuropa Caravans encountered exceptionally engaged individuals and groups – Roma as well as non-Roma – who unremittently fight to improve the minority's access to education, employment, housing and health. And just as there are distinct parallels between the issues the Roma face all across Europe, there are also a number of similarities between the projects we visited on our way that work towards alleviating the Roma's situation.

### Roma Women on the Battlefield

The most visible recurring theme is the role that women play in these initiatives. From the Slovakian **Union of Roma Mothers Centres**



E. Dalibot, "Stop Forced Evictions. A Decent Life for All Roma", Cluj-Napoca, Romania

to AMURADI<sup>62</sup>, the **Association of Academic Gitana Women in Andalusia** – it is very often Roma women who set up low-threshold<sup>63</sup> kindergartens, run gender campaigns in schools, write funding proposals to fix community buildings, link up active individuals in their area or undertake research to ensure better medical services. Their work as agents of change is especially remarkable in light of the position Roma women tend to have within their communities: "particularly but not only in Eastern Europe, Roma women are often regarded as their husband's property," Slovakian activist Marie Olahova says.

Needless to say that after overcoming such internal obstacles, the conversations with these engaged women are soaked in a very strong spirit of empowerment and feminism – a development, which could fundamentally alter the way Roma communities work.

<sup>62</sup> [www.amuradi.org](http://www.amuradi.org)

<sup>63</sup> Low-threshold schools and programmes are devised to be as accessible as possible to all children and young people (e.g. thanks to all day opening hours, easily accessible location or even a mobile help centre service).



From top to bottom:  
 E. Dalibot, "Roma Rights are Human Rights", Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
 E. Dalibot, "A Decent Life for all Roma", Cluj-Napoca, Romania

If this first, internal hurdle is cleared, the second issue is already waiting. According to the initiatives visited, much work remains to be done when it comes to the cooperation between governmental structures and Roma non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

### Institutions: Obstacles or Support to Roma Rights?

On corruption within governmental structures, which prevents cooperation, Greta Claudia, an activist in **Pata Cluj-Napoca Rât** in Romania explains: "I don't want to use unpleasant words, but it is a huge mafia. [...] You know the saying 'one hand washes the other'? There are a lot of illegal activities". Some see the Roma's negative public image as one of the reasons: "you just can't win elections with the Roma question", Šárka Pólová of the Czech NGO **IQ Roma Servis**<sup>64</sup> points out. Or as Marie Olahova puts it: "being a Roma and being a woman on top of it... I don't even get into the lobby of the mayor's office". Others refer to the political traditions in their countries: "people sitting in municipalities represent a generation favouring repressive over preventive approaches", Ivana Pitková, a project manager at Bratislava's low-threshold children's centre **Mixklub**<sup>65</sup> says. "But preventive work and education are crucial when it comes to the realities the Roma live in".

Given this level of mistrust, the European Union often seems to be a better partner to turn to. "Sometimes we have the feeling that the Commission understands the content of our work better than our government", Jan Milota of IQ Roma Servis argues. According to many of the initiatives, the EU should keep a closer eye on how EU funding is spent in the Member States – demand outcomes, carry out proper evaluations and check if Member States actually implement the kind of projects they are getting money for. But most importantly in the framework of Roma rights, the process of receiving EU funds in general needs to be facilitated.

64 iqrs.cz

65 mixklub.sk





Robert Matei

As the last elections saw an influx of extremist politicians into the new European Parliament, Roma civil society may wonder whether the EU's focus on addressing their needs will persist. It may, thus, be a good point in time for the next step in political emancipation. If organised as a nation state, Europe's 6 million Roma would qualify for thirteen seats in the European Parliament. The current legislative period, however, only sees two: Damian Drăghici from Romania and Soraya Post from Sweden. But as the Transeuropa Caravans had the opportunity to learn, there are many more out there who are eager to be heard.

**“It is necessary that governments condemn [...] racist and discriminatory policies towards the Roma”**

*Tamara Amador,  
Andalusian  
Federation of Roma  
Women, Seville,  
Spain*



*From top to bottom:  
J. Salaj, “Dr. Ambedkar School”,  
Sajokaza, Hungary  
E. Dalibot, “International Roma Day”,  
Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

7

LGBT



*E. Dalibot,  
"Yes to Equality",  
Paris, France*

## Solidarity for a Rainbow Europe

*Author: Elena Dalibot*

*Contributor: Natalia Szlachowska*

If, as an EU citizen, I move to Cyprus, I may not be recognised as my child's parent. If I look for a job in Latvia, I may have troubles finding one. If I live in Italy, I won't be able to marry my partner. If I organise events in Lithuania to fight for my rights, I may face obstruction from the state...

Who am I? I am an LGBT<sup>66</sup> person living in the EU... in 2014<sup>67</sup>.

These are unfortunately some examples of obstacles to fundamental rights in still many EU countries, from equality and non-discrimination to freedom of expression, via family rights, asylum, and many more. While the human rights situation of LGBT people has progressed in some countries, in particular in the West, it has worryingly decreased in others, according to ILGA Europe<sup>68</sup>. The Rainbow Map they produce shows a big West-East divide, with more progressive legislation and more tolerance towards LGBT people in the West, with the remarkable exceptions of Ireland and Italy.

### Art as a Weapon for Progress

Poland and Romania, which the Transeuropa Caravans visited, belong at the back of the EU class on LGBT rights, together with the countries quoted above and with Cyprus.

<sup>66</sup> European Alternatives understands the term "LGBT" as a generic word to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, but also intersex and queer people as well as other forms of sexual orientation and sex and gender identity.

<sup>67</sup> Cyprus doesn't automatically recognise co-parenting, Latvia has no legislation against discrimination on gender identity, Italy doesn't allow same-sex marriage, and Lithuania banned the Baltic Pride from taking place in June 2013 (ILGA Europe Rainbow Map and ILGA Annual Review 2014)

<sup>68</sup> [ilga-europe.org](http://ilga-europe.org)

The journey of the Eastern Caravan began in Cluj-Napoca (Romania), in **Fabrica de Pensule**, an old paintbrush factory turned into a cultural and artistic centre, with an extremely beautiful show, a cross between dance and theatre: "Parallel"<sup>69</sup>, directed by Ferenc Sinkó and Leta Popescu. It played on bodies, sexual identity, self-acceptance or rejection. The show reminded the audience that art has an important role to play in advancing human rights and anti-discrimination, and should come 'parallel' to progressive legislative changes, if not lead the way.

A couple hundred kilometers North, just like in Romania it is not easy being an LGBT person in Poland, a country where president Lech Wałęsa declared in March 2013 that "homosexual people should sit at the back of the parliament's chamber, or even behind its walls". Artistic actions such as the "Ars Homo Erotica" exhibition held in the Warsaw museum in 2010 or the rainbow installation in front of the European Parliament during the Polish presidency, have been key moments in Poland to discuss LGBT issues. In Lublin, the North-Eastern Caravan screened a film to discuss the rights of transgender people. The evening, held together with **Queerowe Ambulatorium**<sup>70</sup>, focused on a very special person, Ewa Hołuszko, whose life inspired the film *I Still Believe*<sup>71</sup> (screened that evening), and a play, "Foreign Bodies", awarded the Gdynia Prize in 2010. Ewa was born as a man named Marek Hołuszko and underwent gender reassignment to become (or be able

*Elizbieta Zazinska,  
Social Cooperative  
Issa, Lodz, Poland*

**"I would like  
for same sex  
marriage to  
become possible  
in all Europe."**

to be) Ewa. She was very active in the Solidarność movement in the 1980's and was recognised in the academic field. However, her gender reassignment was accompanied by the loss of her job and of her flat, her social exclusion and her rejection by part of her family. But it didn't prevent Ewa from going on, and she notably stayed very active in politics. She became a candidate to the 2014 EU elections, and

<sup>69</sup> [www.fabricadepensule.ro/en/2013/11/26/parallel](http://www.fabricadepensule.ro/en/2013/11/26/parallel)

<sup>70</sup> [queeroweambulatorium.wordpress.com](http://queeroweambulatorium.wordpress.com)

<sup>71</sup> "I still believe", directed by Magda Mosiewicz, 2011, Follow Me Film Production

fighters daily for a more tolerant Poland. Despite hardships, Ewa still believes that change is possible.

### “Change is Possible”

Because artistic actions are also a way to act when other means, such as mass protests or flash mobs can potentially be dangerous, the Eastern Caravan organised in Bucharest, together with the association ACCEPT<sup>72</sup> (the first Romanian LGBT association) a common symbolic painting for LGBT rights in Europe. It was attended by many enthusiastic people, eager to show solidarity for LGBT rights, but also to raise their voices on the difficulties they face and send out a message to Europe. The painting then travelled to Bulgaria and Greece and was shown in different places along the route.

*E. Dalibot,  
“Solidarity for  
LGBT rights”,  
Bucharest, Romania*



<sup>72</sup> [accept-romania.ro/en](http://accept-romania.ro/en)

From the beginning of the journey in Romania, this event raised big concerns on the part of anti-LGBT groups and media<sup>73</sup>, claiming that the Caravan’s aim was “the destruction of marriage” and “the legalisa-

**“I would like to see people, authorities and citizens working together to make sure existing anti-discrimination laws are put into practice.”**

*Daniela Prisacariu,  
ACCEPT, Bucharest,  
Romania*

tion of polygamy”<sup>74</sup> and that it represented “a new provocation and a new attack to Christianity and to the values of the Romanian people”<sup>75</sup>. The police was on their guard and called the Caravan team daily to have more information on when they would arrive and where they would park. This is only a weak feel of what it is

like not even to be LGBT, but to try to discuss LGBT issues. The historical context can help understand the lack of visibility of this minority and the widespread discrimination towards them. A penally-sanctioned vice from 1936, homosexuality was forbidden under communism and punishable by years in jail. Recently, attempts to add sexual orientation to the list of grounds protected from discrimination in the Constitution were rejected by the Parliament after strong pressures from Conservative forces.

While actions and campaigns to raise awareness on LGBT issues and fight discrimination are of the utmost importance, legislation – and its implementation – is an equally critical battleground for the advancement of LGBT rights, as other civil rights. **France** had been at the forefront of LGBT rights when it passed a form of civil union for same-sex couples (named ‘PACS’) in 1999. However, more than thirteen years later, and well after many other countries, legislation allowing same-

<sup>73</sup> [activenews.ro/soros-afirma-pe-fata-ca-lupta-impotriva-statului-national-si-organizeaza-un-eveniment-lgbt-fata-moastelor-lui-brancoveanu\\_1831561.html](http://activenews.ro/soros-afirma-pe-fata-ca-lupta-impotriva-statului-national-si-organizeaza-un-eveniment-lgbt-fata-moastelor-lui-brancoveanu_1831561.html)

<sup>74</sup> [www.cuvantul-ortodox.ro/recomandari/2014/04/15/soros-lgbt-piata-sf-gheorghe-activismul-homosexual-distrugea-casatori](http://www.cuvantul-ortodox.ro/recomandari/2014/04/15/soros-lgbt-piata-sf-gheorghe-activismul-homosexual-distrugea-casatori)

<sup>75</sup> [www.replicaonline.ro/secularismul-si-traditia-crestina-se-pregatesc-de-o-noua-ciocnire-la-moastele-lui-constantin-brancoveanu-167508](http://www.replicaonline.ro/secularismul-si-traditia-crestina-se-pregatesc-de-o-noua-ciocnire-la-moastele-lui-constantin-brancoveanu-167508)

From top to bottom:

E. Dalibot, "Human and Citizen", Paris, France

E. Dalibot, "A Gay Wedding is Better Than a Sad Wedding", Paris, France

E. Dalibot, "We Want Equal Rights", Paris, France



sex marriage<sup>76</sup> was met with huge demonstrations opposing the law and gave rise to the 'Manif pour tous' movement ('Demo for all', in opposition to the 'Marriage for all' support movement).

After opposing marriage equality, the 'Manif pour tous' group then extended its struggle against what they called the 'theory of gender' and opposed school programmes against gender stereotypes ("Les ABCD de l'égalité filles-garçons", or "the ABCD of equal rights for girls and boys") by withdrawing their children from schools in protest. Legislative improvements should never be taken for granted and it is important to remain alert against possible backslides. **Spain's** bill restricting women's abortion rights astonished the world this year. Protesters used very creative methods to oppose this reform: many women went to governmental offices to have their bodies registered in commercial registries, to make the point that their bodies didn't belong to them anymore.

"LGBT rights are human rights", participants painted on a big canvas in Bucharest. This is why they concern everyone. The road to equality and civil rights is a long one, paved with many obstacles. The map of LGBT rights in Europe shows a great variety of situations between countries: some have moved faster than others, others have gone backwards... While many of these rights (such as civil union or marriage) fall under national competence, there are ways to act for LGBT rights at the EU level, notably on the basis of anti-discrimination legislation and of rights associated to the full enjoyment of freedom of movement<sup>77</sup>. As previous struggles prove, success is often not only the result of legislative changes (which can then go unapplied) or demonstrations, artistic and awareness-raising actions, but a combination of them all.

<sup>76</sup> In 2014, there are now 10 EU countries allowing marriage equality.

<sup>77</sup> Read more about proposals for LGBT rights at EU level on [citizenspact.eu/citizens-manifesto](http://citizenspact.eu/citizens-manifesto).

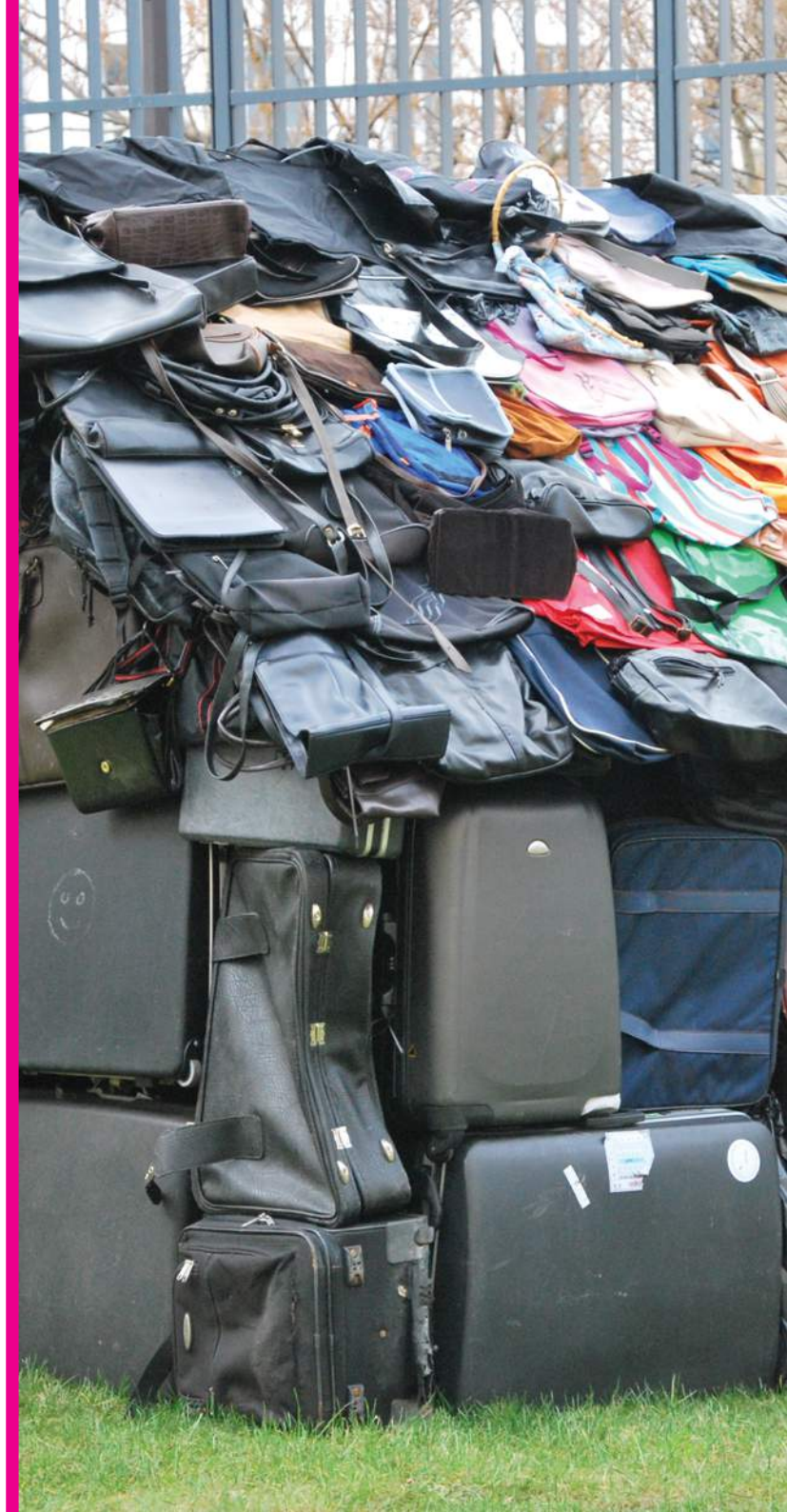
# 8

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# Migration



*E. Dalibot, "Pack  
your Suitcase",  
Paris, France*



## At the Margins: Europe and Migration

Authors: *Olga Vukovic, Anna Lodeserto*

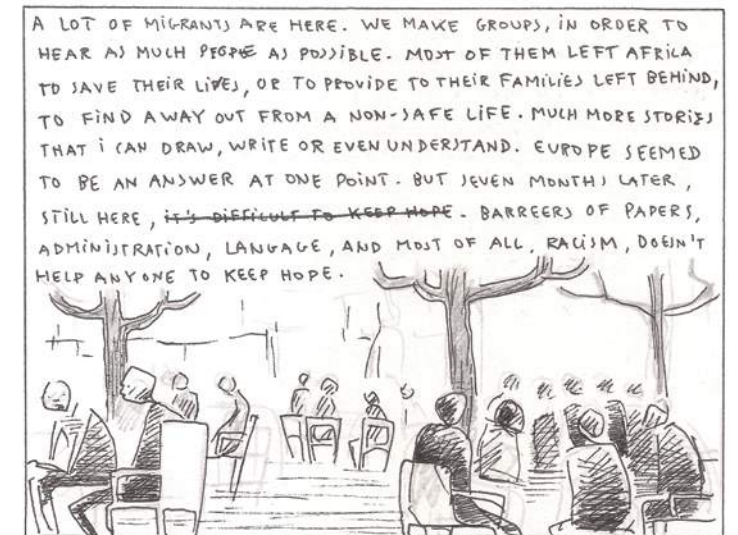
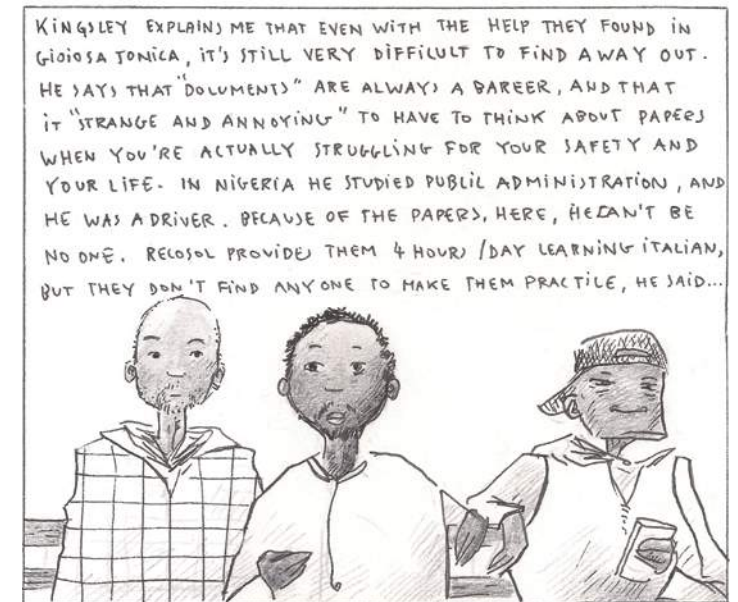
Contributors: *Elena Dalibot, Lucile Gemähling, Vanessa Buth,*

There are those who die trying to reach our borders, escaping from poverty, famine, violence, dictatorships, wars, persecution, in search of a dignified life. There are those who are detained, who experience human rights abuses while being detained or while waiting for their legal status to be determined. There are those who make it, who are inside the borders and in transit, from their point of arrival, trying to reach their final destination. Those who have reached their final destination, having overcome the dangerous journey and all it comes with, have only just begun, because a residency permit does not necessarily mean a home, employment, nor becoming part of the local community. The journey of a migrant is a long, lonely and dangerous one, and their stories often go untold, their struggles often unnoticed because detention centres, reception facilities, even housing, are mostly strategically located on the outskirts of urban areas. Out of sight, out of mind.

The Transeuropa Caravans went directly to these locations, met with migrants who came to Europe through various means and for different reasons, and spoke to the admirable, dedicated individuals fighting for them, working to help them make sense of the system and find a dignified life. This is their story.

### A Political Framework for a Complex Issue

In terms of political framework at the European level, the story does not start off on a promising note. There is much progress to be made; from advocating for the closure of detention centres throughout Europe and exploring alternatives to administrative detention and human rights violations that take place there, to reviewing the “Return



Jean Chauvelot

**Directive**<sup>78</sup> and exploring collaborative responses to the growing numbers of migrants and asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean, efforts must be focused on highlighting many sub-areas where concrete policy change is fundamental.

**“Europe needs to have the capacity to envision itself [...] as an open space, which goes beyond its own borders. I would like to imagine a Europe founded on the fact that each of us, living in Europe and not necessarily being born as a European citizen, can imagine Europe as a space of free experimentation with their own lives.”**

Gianmarco de Pieri  
Bologna, Italy

The Strategic guidelines for the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice included in the draft European Council Conclusions of June 2014<sup>79</sup> aim to replace the Stockholm Programme which expires in December 2014. It is currently one of the most recent and specific instruments, which sets the political orientation of a series of policies including immigration and asylum. These guidelines should offer a pathway for future policy development for the coming years, but they risk representing yet another ‘missed opportunity’. While humanitarian crises mount within the European neighbourhood and public skepticism towards both the European project and government approaches to immigration increases, as is evident from the last European parliamentary elections, the next legislative phase is focused on the consolidation and implementation of existing rules.

A visible focal point for migration issues is now necessary as it is embodying all the voices so far misrepresented from throughout Europe and beyond. One of the major challenges for Europe in the upcoming years will be to understand that the next steps to ensure both equita-

78 [ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/immigration/return-readmission/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/immigration/return-readmission/index_en.htm)

79 [www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/143478.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/143478.pdf)

ble and comprehensive protection for the growing number of people in need will involve identifying and agreeing upon more ambitious options in view of an overhaul of migration policy and equally ambitious plans for their realisation.

Europe cannot continue to postpone nor disregard the adoption of concrete measures and responses to the continuous search for better living conditions that enhance migration flows. This is especially urgent in a time when we are seeing unprecedented numbers of deaths and tragedies at Europe’s borders, a hardening in migration policy in

all of European countries as well as in negative attitudes towards the ‘other’ mainly influenced by prejudice and discrimination. Despite the progress achieved, EU policy on migration and asylum suffers from evident shortcomings. Relevant EU instruments such as legislation, policy measures and operational programmes could be precious but are not yet sufficient to effectively tackle current problems and emergencies.

The scope of action within the migration sector granted to the European Commission and EU agencies is the scope assigned to them by Member States. For a common policy to realise its full potential, the European institutions should be empowered

with a clear mandate and adequate resources. Part of the EU acquis could be improved to better fit with the changing characteristics of migration flows. Despite the temporary **Protection Directive**<sup>80</sup>, and **Qualification Directive**<sup>81</sup> (on Refugees and Subsidiary Protection), today at least 60 different non-harmonised forms of protection status exist, making it more difficult to examine the situation in each country or to ensure the respect of minimum protection standards for migrants.

80 Directive 2001/55/EC [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJL\\_2001\\_12:0012:0023:EN:PDF](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJL_2001_12:0012:0023:EN:PDF)

81 Directive 2004/83/EC <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32004L0083:en:HTML>



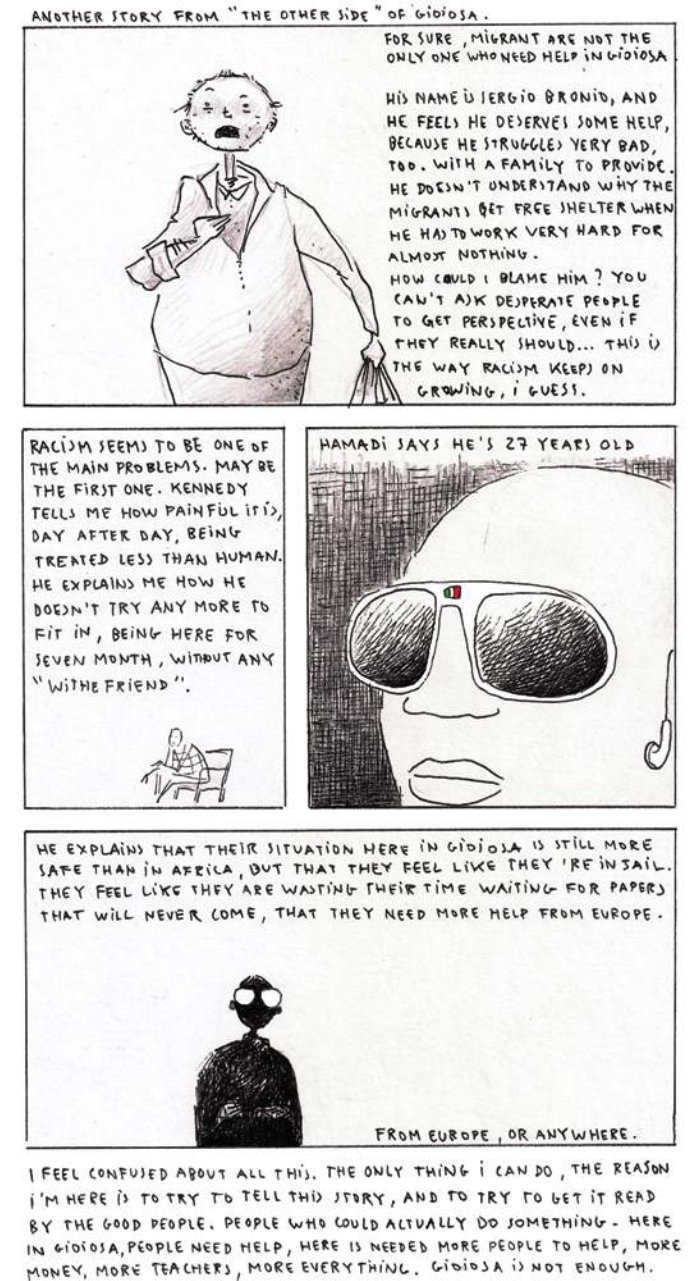
E. Dalibot,  
“Frontex Kills”,  
Sofia, Bulgaria



On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013, 368 migrants (many of whom were never identified) died after having crossed the Mediterranean on a precarious boat a few meters off coast of **Lampedusa**. It provoked a wave of indignation across the continent and threw a shadow of shame and powerlessness over Europe. Some national legislations do not distinguish between those providing humanitarian assistance or rescue at sea and those defined 'facilitators of unauthorised entries', thus creating further stress on the local population which was providing assistance to people in distress. Such wide solidarity shown by the local populations is at odds with the attempts of the institutions to criminalise people upon arrival without differentiating their status. In many EU Member States asylum seekers are treated as criminals, and subject to long detention often in inhumane conditions. Border patrol operations coordinated by Frontex have many shortcomings, and abiding by European fundamental rights protection measures is not enough. In such conditions, migrants are too often deprived of their right to apply for international protection in a safe place.

### The Lives of Migrants

The language of policy often seems detached from the realities on the ground, and migration discourse throughout Europe rarely shows the human face of migration. The objective of the Transeuropa Caravans was precisely this: collecting and representing a wide range of voices that often go unheard by politicians, understanding the needs which aren't being met by the state as well as exploring solutions which aren't being supported by institutions. Creating a bridge between migrants and those working with them and policy and decision-makers can be the only solution to ensuring that policy change will have an impact in the right places. From visits to towns such as Riace (Italy) which boasts a particular model of outreach replicated in several other courageous European cities, or Katerini (Greece) and Terras da Costa (Portugal), home to communitarian kitchens, it became obvious that citizens themselves can and already are doing much to create



Jean Chauvelot



From top to bottom:  
 E. Dalibot, "Migrants' Registration Centre", Sofia, Bulgaria  
 E. Dalibot, "A Tent to Call Home", Sofia, Bulgaria

sustainable development plans at a local level, in many cases without representing neither a financial nor administrative burden for governments.

Visiting the migrant squats of Calais, the handicraft production laboratories of Riace, the greenhouses where migrants work in the hinterland of Eboli, the registration centre of Sofia, and an asylum centre in Poland, the journey of the Caravans provided a unique opportunity to be part of a different conversation, distant from current debates taking place at national and European levels.

## Arrival

On the Eastern border of Europe, in Bulgaria, most migrants arrive by foot from Turkey. It has been an important entry point since the country entered the EU, and in particular after Greece built a wall on its Turkish frontier. According to officials of the Migration Directorate in Sofia, the country's infrastructure is not adapted to accommodate for the new influx of people (in particular in the autumn of 2013), and Bulgaria is often a transit country for most, who aspire to continue their journey to the West. Most migrants arrive from Syria, from Afghanistan and Northern Africa.

Attempts to visit the Busmantsi detention centre outside Sofia (one of the two centres in the country, the other one being Lyubimets, close to the Turkish border – a place "not meant and not designed and not appropriate for asylum seekers" according to the UNHCR<sup>82</sup>) were unsuccessful. This is possibly because of the recent report by Human Rights Watch<sup>83</sup>, which painted a bleak picture of detention conditions in the country. The State Agency for Refugees did however authorise a visit

82 UNHCR Protection Officer Petya Karayaneva, 2011 [www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/en/news/2011/crossing-a-border-irregularly-is-not-a-crime-for-a-refugee.html](http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/en/news/2011/crossing-a-border-irregularly-is-not-a-crime-for-a-refugee.html)

83 Containment Plan: Bulgaria's Pushbacks and Detention of Syrian and other Asylum Seekers and Migrants, [www.hrw.org/reports/2014/04/28/containment-plan](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2014/04/28/containment-plan)

the **Voenna Rampa Registration Centre**. This old school started to welcome migrants waiting for humanitarian status and residence documents in the winter of 2013 and was in a state of advanced deterioration. It is now under construction to ensure better conditions, but migrants (mostly Syrians) still live in tents in what used to be the

sports hall. Many confirmed their will to go West, but few seemed to know that according to the Dublin Regulation<sup>84</sup>, they wouldn't be able to submit another asylum procedure if they had done so Bulgaria.

**“Refugees, wherever they are, need help, support, understanding, not persecution.”**

*Afghan refugee,  
Thessaloniki,  
Greece*

On the South-Eastern corner of the EU, Greece is still a major entry point in Europe for migrants. It receives an estimated number of 130 000 undocumented migrants each year and is very ill-equipped to host them. Tightened controls and the absence of

any other recourse create a back-log in asylum applications. Detention and living conditions are so bad that several EU countries have stopped transferring asylum seekers to Greece<sup>85</sup>. An Afghan refugee met in Thessaloniki by the Eastern Caravan told his story in perfect Greek – he had been to evening courses for four years – explaining the difficulties met by asylum seekers in Greece to receive the pink card (proving asylum application) and then residence permits. Such permits can be linked to the level of income: in this case, losing one's job can also mean losing many more rights. Dozens (if not hundreds) queue overnight, for only about 20 people able to be interviewed for the pink card.

## Transit

On the Northern shores where the Eurotunnel lands on lands on the French coast, and where most ferries directed to the UK depart from,

84 [www.ecre.org/topics/areas-of-work/protection-in-europe/10-dublin-regulation.html](http://www.ecre.org/topics/areas-of-work/protection-in-europe/10-dublin-regulation.html)

85 ECHR Case of MSS vs. Belgium and Greece, [www.hudoc.echr.coe.int](http://www.hudoc.echr.coe.int)

Calais is one of many European towns that are transit places for migrants trying to build more settled lives. It has been so for about 30 years. Once, they were Yugoslavs, Kosovars and Iraqis, and now, they are Syrians, Afghanis, Eritreans, Sudanese who, after months of migration, sleep on the streets and in the bushes of Calais. The cycle in Calais is never-ending; trying to stay warm during the day and during the night, trying to make it to the UK, climbing fences, entering the port or highway stations, sneaking onto boats or trucks. This process is repeated for the following days or even months, with many being arrested and then released.

In a European system where countries still provide different levels of protection, asylum seekers don't have the freedom of choice and not having the freedom of choice equates to a loss of human rights prerogatives. Asylum in a specific country can't be requested unless that country has been reached. But arriving there legally is an option only for those who are privileged and in no hurry. So where there is a will, there is Calais.

In Calais, the only permanent shelter lasted three years and closed in 2009. Now there is nothing to meet the most basic needs for food, shelter, and medical help. Migrants depend on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and citizens' time, commitment, energy.

A **tent camp** by the canal just under the town's belfry, is home to 150 people. In rue Massena, one of the **town's squats** which opened a few month ago an eviction notice has been given, stating that the property must be returned in the state it was found in. This is a tough task, considering how much those currently residing there have invested in achieving barely livable conditions. One after another, the latest squats will close, and camps will grow as more migrants will have to settle outdoors again. Evictions are routine. The black board from one of the homes will be carried to a new location – Macky, who has obtained a ten-year residency in France and settled in Calais for the time being, uses it to give French and English lessons to migrants



From top to bottom:  
 O. Vukovic, "Riace, City of Reception",  
 Riace, Italy  
 O. Vukovic, "Where do the Clouds Go?",  
 Gioiosa Ionica, Italy



from in and around the squat, as well as Arabic lessons to activists. Dozens of bikes and bike pieces which are located in a common room will have to be moved. These are products of a fantastic cooperation with the Netherlands and **Critical Mass / Velorution**<sup>86</sup> Ile de France, which save migrants precious time and energy while crossing the city for various food distributions, legal advice and medical help services, or to watch a football game. Things, like people, don't disappear with evictions. They are just moved further away from sight.

### A Place to Call Home

Bahram Acar, a Kurdish migrant has been living in Riace for sixteen years. He was the first to arrive to this tiny town in Southern Italy, which is now home to almost 200 refugees. The town's mayor, Domenico Lucano has worked hard to ensure this all but abandoned town be put to good use, and is proud when speaking of the **Riace model of resettlement** and reception. Houses which have been abandoned by the town's inhabitants (most of whom have moved to larger cities in Northern Italy) are given to asylum seekers and refugees. The schools, which would have otherwise been shut down, are now open, and laughter and children's voices still fill the streets of this town. Migrants have had the chance at a fresh start, with many producing artisan products and contributing to the local farming culture.

The next town over, Gioiosa Ionica, hosts a similar model, where Italians Giovanni and Giuseppe, who were previously working in Riace, have now moved. Their organisation, **ReCoSol**, offers Italian lessons to migrants, assists them with the maze that is the bureaucratic system for any asylum seeker, offers psychological support, and along the way they share a few laughs. For some, these towns are just transit towns; once they receive official refugee status they are ready to embark on the next leg of their journey. For others, like for Bahram, it is a final destina-

<sup>86</sup> [velorution.org](http://velorution.org)

tion, a place to start a family, a place to call home, a place to help other migrants who are in the position he was in sixteen years ago. Whatever the case may be, one thing is certain, this successful model of reception sets the tone for the future of each migrant who passes through it, and is a model that other European cities could stand to replicate.

Precarious housing and no access to running water or basic sanitation: this is the life of nearly 500 people – 100 of whom are children – who live in an informal settlement in Terras da Costa, Portugal. Several communities, mainly Cape Verdeans and Portuguese ‘Gitanos’<sup>87</sup>, live on this isolated and invisible agricultural land. Life has been hard for them on land they do not own and often without legal papers. They struggle to communicate with residents in the surrounding area, who are not always welcoming or understanding of their situation. Even the local church refused to help. Their only access to fresh water is a water pump near the road, which is over a kilometre walk there and back. Their homes are simple concrete or wooden structures crammed into a very tight space. To improve living conditions, the local community, in collaboration with **Ateliernob**<sup>88</sup> and **Projecto Warehouse**<sup>89</sup>, built **Cozinha Comunitária Terras da Costa**<sup>90</sup>, a community kitchen serving as a social hub for cooking together, exchanging thoughts, or playing cards. The plan is to extend the community space to include for example a washing room and a meeting room. It will be built in a U-shape, creating a garden patio as a safe playground for the children. Moreover, Projecto Warehouse helps the locals to communicate their needs with the Almada municipality, above all trying to gain running water access for the community kitchen.

In Greece, local institutions have also failed to defend migrants, especially from violence, often coming from organised groups such as Golden Dawn, as Eleni Takou, from the **Racist Violence Recording**

87 The term “Gitanos” is generally used over “Roma” in Portugal and in Spain.

88 [www.ateliernob.com](http://www.ateliernob.com)

89 [www.facebook.com/projectowarehouse](http://www.facebook.com/projectowarehouse)

90 [www.facebook.com/cozinhacomunitariadasterrasdacosta](http://www.facebook.com/cozinhacomunitariadasterrasdacosta)



V. Buth, “Terras da Costa”, Portugal

**Network**<sup>91</sup>, explains. The arrest of one of its leading members in October 2013 has been followed by a decrease in racist violence incidences, but the situation is still worrisome. Incidents involving police violence are on the rise, which is a major concern. Undocumented migrants who are victims of racist violence have no access to justice and risk depor-

tation if they enter a police station. It is also difficult to record cases of racist violence since the legal system in Greece is such that biased motivation is only examined once a person has been convicted, so long after the event, when no evidence has been collected on the ground.

For children born in Greece from immigrant parents, the situation is not easier. Up to 200 000 children and young people have no access to formal citizenship, and hence face problems to access the labour market, to travel, to vote, etc. According to Eurostat studies, second-generation migrants between 25 and 54 have considerably lower activity rates than people with native background. Andromaca Papaioannou, from **Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality and Diversity**<sup>92</sup>, explains that the only way for second-generation migrants to be granted citizenship is through naturalisation, which requires a long and difficult process.

## Making a Living

In Italy’s deep South along the Eastern coast, the tour went to Eboli, located in the heart of Campania, a region rich in agriculture and home to Italy’s second Mafia clan, the Camorra. The Italian agricultural sector depends heavily on the presence of migrant workers, most of whom,

91 [www.unhcr.gr/1againstracism/en/category/racist-violence-recording-network](http://www.unhcr.gr/1againstracism/en/category/racist-violence-recording-network)

92 Sign their petition on [www.ithageneia.org/en](http://www.ithageneia.org/en)

particularly in Southern Italy, are exploited, earning €25-30 per day, living in shanty towns, abandoned country cottages or tents, facing extremely poor hygienic and living conditions. Eboli is one of these towns and the new home to **MEDU - Doctors for Human Rights**<sup>93</sup>, operating out of a caravan. After three months of working in Calabria (including Gioiosa Ionica) they moved to Eboli, offering medical assistance as well as health and legal guidance to migrant workers.

MEDU notes that in Calabria, 80% of the migrants visited were below the age of 35, mostly from Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Senegal, whereas in Campania the average age was 35-36 years and the main nationalities identified were Moroccan, Algerian and Romanian. In both regions, in 70% of the cases, patients were in possession of regular residence permits and almost half of them (45%) were holders of international or humanitarian protection status. The majority of illnesses diagnosed by MEDU doctors, in a young and otherwise substantially healthy population, were caused by poor living and hygienic conditions as well as hard working conditions. All those interviewed possessed gloves to be used as a security measure during work while only 29% were equipped with adequate working

**“What we need to build is a transnational network for social movements from both shores of the Mediterranean region, because the challenges we need to face are common. It’s about social injustice, it’s about political and economic corruption, it’s climate change, the management of migratory flows, hate and respect. We have to overcome the idea that the Mediterranean sea is a border, is a front line.”**

Gianluca Solera,  
writer, Italy

93 [www.mediciperidiritumani.org](http://www.mediciperidiritumani.org)



E. Dalibot,  
“Womigration”,  
Bologna, Italy

shoes. In 97% of the cases the workers had to purchase their own safety equipment as it was not provided by the employers.

In Piana del Sele, a small neighbourhood of Eboli, there are over 4000 agricultural companies from Campania, whose produce, ranging from oil, to wine to mo-

zzarella, is sought after in all of Italy and beyond. The migrants working on the land where these products are made, may have endured the journey to Italy and made their way out of the administrative puzzle, obtaining documents to remain in the country, but the struggle to make a living with decent wages and worker’s rights is yet another, arduous one.

The journey of the Transeuropa Caravans was one of discovering faces and stories ever so present in our society, yet hidden from the untrained eye. The number of individuals coming to Europe, living through the cycle from arrival and transit to making a home, as well as those working with them to help them create settled, dignified lives, are ever growing. Yet the tragedies which continue to strike migrants, be it on their journey as is the case with the 2013 tragedy off the coast of Lampedusa, or be it on a normal day at work in the greenhouses of Eboli, can be avoided. These tragedies have increased the speed of convergence of European NGOs and civil society movements around demands for concrete policy change. It is indeed of extreme importance and urgency to strengthen the advocacy capacities of all NGOs and their networks, while also inspiring other, often weaker and less visible, movements to take part in common actions on these issues at a transnational level, thus improving awareness of and mobilisation around the issue on the part of civil society as a whole. All the voiceless and courageous people here expressed will not evade from this commitment. It is our duty to be on their side.

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Find out more about these organisations and initiatives on [www.citizenspact.eu](http://www.citizenspact.eu).

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We believe that today democratic participation, social equality, and cultural innovation are undermined by the nation states in Europe, and that transnational forms of collectivity must be fostered to promote these values.

With offices in four European countries and a network of activists and local groups stretching to over twelve, the organisation is unique in being at once a breeding ground for new ideas and proposals for politics and culture at a European level and in being a political and cultural actor with a truly transeuropean activity, staff and support base.

To find out more about European Alternatives, check out our multi-lingual website:  
[www.euroalter.com](http://www.euroalter.com)

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For any other information you can write to  
[info@euroalter.com](mailto:info@euroalter.com)

What does 'the Europe from below' look like? How do people cope with the crisis, stand up for their rights, experiment new forms of democracy and solidarity? What are the issues that people in Europe organise and rise up for?

Following a three-year participatory process, we collected citizen-led policy proposals at EU level for a Citizens Manifesto. Ahead of the 2014 European Parliament elections, the Transeuropa Caravans set off to meet Europeans throughout the continent and try and answer these questions. From the UK to Greece and from Portugal to Poland, they met hundreds of inspiring people, involved in initiatives and struggles on issues ranging from work and welfare to democracy, civil rights or the environment.

Meet the 'other Europe'!

