



The project Amaro Records consists of a recording studio and music café with job training positions run by the NGO IQ Roma servis z.s. It focuses on providing support to young Roma from socially excluded areas in Brno. Amaro Records is actually a new social enterprise of IQ Roma servis, created together with volunteers from the Romani community and general public in place of a former gambling house on the Milady Horakove street in Brno. Since 2016 it has been serving as a place for cross-cultural exchange which helps change lives, the Romani community, the public and our city. It provides space for musicians to meet during regular cultural events, such as concerts, jam sessions or lectures.

“Amaro” means “ours”!

We see our project as a huge opportunity to **encourage initiative and participation of young Roma from a socially excluded area**. In the beginning, we had a very limited budget and the destroyed premises of the former gambling house. But we also had a big dream to create the recording studio with a music café, a lot of courage, enthusiasm and trust in human strength. It has never been an easy journey, but it opens ways for Roma to more often actively participate in what happens around them and help determine and change conditions in which they live through something they enjoy. By actively including the community in the extensive reconstruction, choosing a name, decorating the café, PR and organizing cultural events we encourage development and self-presentation of Roma, Romani art and Romani musicians.

There is a “positive” prejudice that the Roma have musical talent. In many cases that is really the fact. We want to take this advantage, use music to **encourage activity of young Roma and develop their competencies for the future**. We are the only recording studio in the Czech Republic offering the possibility to exchange volunteer hours for recording time. Even young people from the excluded areas can therefore afford to make music, develop their potential and talent and to fulfil their dreams.

At the same time, we are a social enterprise which offers job training positions to Roma, at this moment in the music café. Currently, we have four barista positions, which allow the employees to gain work experience, professional competence and above all positive feedback, showing them that they can achieve something in their life and do something meaningful both for themselves and for others.

An important part of our mission is to **encourage mutual recognition, communication and collaboration between the Roma and the majority population**. It is often said that music breaks down barriers and makes everyone feel better. Our project hopes to achieve this through musical events, which connect musicians, both starting and experienced, regardless of their ethnicity or age in the South Moravian region and through them “push” the Romani community towards the majority public. Even now, we collaborate with universities (JAMU, Masaryk University), Czech Television, and Czech Radio, we host regular jam sessions, and take part in cultural festivals in Brno.

The Amaro Records team consists of the chief coordinator, a sound engineer and four Romani employees in the job training positions. At the same time, more than a hundred musicians and community members are involved in Amaro Records. Despite experienced management and all the volunteer work which is key for operating Amaro Records, the project could not be realized without the expertise and support provided by the organisation IQ Roma servis, the city of Brno (or Municipality of Brno-centre), Masaryk University – Faculty of Social Studies and the donors: Bader Philanthropies Foundation, the VIA souSedime si Foundation, and Impact First acceleration program of Česká spořitelna.



Innovation in Project Idea

A significant majority of services for the Romani population focuses on direct assistance to people in difficult situations. However, IQ Roma servis and the Amaro Records project also want to encourage independence and initiative of the Roma, so that they do not depend on help from the outside, but are able to assume responsibility for their own problems, fulfil their potential and succeed in the world. We want to build on the achievements of social services and provide additional opportunities to clients, who had already resolved their immediate practical problems. We want to give them a chance to move on with their life, encourage them, show them their strong points and life's opportunities. Young people from socially excluded communities are often caught in a downward spiral, have little motivation, lack social bonds outside the community and positive role models in it, end up unemployed right after school, have no work experience. What they do have is potential, talent, and the desire to work, to follow their dream.

The idea behind our project is such: Involve people in something they enjoy and they will pour their heart and soul into it. Give them the opportunity to realize their potential and they will achieve great things. There are many Romani musicians in Brno and we aim to help them realize their dreams not only inside, but also outside of the Romani community. We believe that Amaro Records helps to portray Roma and their abilities in a good light, that this project will help many Roma follow their dream, see their own worth and do good things for others.

Innovation in Accessing Target Groups

Just as we try to make the recording studio and training café economically sustainable, we also want to keep the project attractive for our main target group – socially disadvantaged Roma. We try to carry on with the cultural events and existing job training positions and maintain the present state of the recording studio and café, but we also strive to improve the operation, launch new cultural events, and secure new job training positions. Amaro Records should be available to everybody who wants to participate in the project, our community should grow and develop. From the very beginning, we aim to develop the potential of the target group. We have involved the Amaro Records community in the project from the initial 'brainstorming' stage, during the complex reconstruction and now in the organisation of cultural events. We respond to the feedback, both from the community and the general public.

In Amaro Records, we do not treat Roma as clients of the social services. They are a natural part of our community, partners who enjoy working together and create new things for themselves and others. We offer them good job training positions and meaningful ways to spend free time. We would like to be known as a successful social enterprise, whose employees and in fact everybody involved enjoy working together and set an example to others. Amaro Records represents unique space for intergenerational cooperation and offers opportunity for meeting with professionals from Roma community as well as other role models for young Roma. We want to be an enterprise which will not only generate profit, but whose existence will be beneficial to the whole area, the city Brno, and society as a whole. Our emphasis is on viewing those socially disadvantaged as equals, who may have their problems, but also have tremendous potential, energy and ideas.

The Roma are participating in our project and want to stay involved, they have motivation and are committed to the project. They volunteer their time, work on and within the Amaro Records project with all their heart, create a great atmosphere, participate in various events. All this clearly shows that our project is meaningful and has significant impact on how the Roma in the community participate and spend their free time. Especially when all their involvement is voluntary. This fact creates a very unique opportunity for development of idea of volunteering into the Roma community and could bring Romani people to the involvement into other civil society initiatives (also in the fields that are not connected with music).



Innovation in the Realisation of the Project

To reconstruct a former gambling house, scrape the necessary money, install new flooring, wiring, and air-conditioning, procure and install all necessary equipment, fit together a recording studio and a café, approach various partners (the local university, a donor from overseas, city hall and our associated experts) and to make the decision to create a social enterprise which will hopefully in time be economically self-sufficient: we think all this can be called a courageous, innovative and creative feat, unique in the Czech Republic in its focus and complexity.

At the very beginning the project focused only on creating a space to make music, however this was soon followed by the idea to respond to the deeper needs of the Roma, on their initiative, involvement, their employment opportunities. The possibility to exchange volunteer hours spent on building and running the operation for a chance to record or perform has proved very effective not only in encouraging involvement of local Roma, but also in solving very practical problem – the lack of finances which, due to the complicated reconstruction, we had faced while building the recording studio. Thanks to it we have succeeded in turning a former gambling house, place of despair for many local (not only) Roma families, into a place for development, inspiration and cooperation.

Innovation in Public Perception

Amaro Records is located right on the border between the city centre and areas marked by social exclusion. For us, the location is not problematic. Quite on the contrary, we see it as a strategic location for connecting the Romani community with the general public, for establishing a dialogue between them. In implementing the project, we try to be open to various institutions and organisations. The high level of involvement of miscellaneous actors proves that we were able to create an attractive project.

Since the very beginning, we have placed great importance on establishing collaboration with the relevant city district and local experts (architects, contractors). When it comes to job training positions, we cooperate with the Employment Office of the City of Brno and also with other local cafés, which offer our employees barista training. We also join forces with the Janacek Academy of Music and Performing Arts and the Masaryk University in order to establish a high-quality recording studio and contacts needed to successfully organize cultural events.

Participation in the Accelerate Program for start-up social enterprises organized by Impact Hub and Česká spořitelna has been especially important for us during the initial stages of the project. Taking part in their workshop focused on finances and marketing helped us sort out funding, our options, and possible ways of executing the project plan. Amaro Records project even won their Impact First award for start-up social enterprises.

Feedback is very important to us as well. Not only from the ever growing Amaro Records community, but also from general public, institutions, and organisations. We were pleased to have captured the interest of the media (Czech Television, Czech Radio) and to receive offers to participate in public cultural events, collaborate with other local organisations (Museum of Romani Culture) or become a member of the city's cultural parliament. Another important indicator that our project is well received is the ever growing number of visitors both in the café itself and of the cultural events we organize (more than 4.000 visitors and 30 events in 2016).

