

Uccu Budapest Romani Walking Tours



In Hungary, stereotypes and prejudices about Roma are general and widespread leading to serious social problems and depriving Roma in their pursuit of the equal opportunities. For an average non-Roma, there is little chance to meet and get to know the Roma. A significant number of antigypsyist people do not really know who they reject, their knowledge comes from media distortions, hate campaigns on the Internet and other unreliable sources. However, countless research has confirmed that intercultural encounters reduce prejudices. The Uccu Roma Informational Educational Foundation (Uccu) was established in 2010 with the aim of creating opportunities for these kind of meetings and dialogue between Roma and non-Roma people, thereby reducing stereotypes and prejudices against Roma.

Uccu's work involves Roma young people who through informal educational methods, as volunteer moderators facilitate workshops related to Roma identity and culture in primary and secondary schools throughout the country. We offer 8 different educational modules to schools out of which the "Come with us to the eight district!" was the most popular. We developed this walking tour in 2013. The primary target group was high school students because we thought it is important to invite young people to the field and make them get to know the "infamous" eighth district at first hand. In this way, we wanted to reduce the misconceptions about the district and the Roma. In 2016, based on the eight district walking tour, we developed our "Downtown Pécs" walk in Pécs. This created a platform for the youth of Pécs to get to know the Roma and their culture.

Uccu currently operates in 4 cities (Budapest, Pécs, Miskolc, Ózd), in two of which (Budapest, Pécs) walking tours have been led by our Roma volunteers for several years. During our eight years of existence, the interest in our eighth district walk has continued to grow, and today we are holding English and Hungarian language walks not only for school groups, but also for national and international organizations, embassies and foreign groups. The general objective of the Foundation is to reduce the misconceptions and prejudices of the Roma in society so that we can all live in a more inclusive and open world. Hence, we thought it is important to create and open up this opportunity for everyone. Uccu has offered opportunities for students to meet and talk with Roma young people through nonprofit activities, but over the years, one of our core activities has slowly grown into a social enterprise.

The reason is that our experiences from our educational activities have shown that the majority of adults also have curiosity and openness to such meetings, but there was no suitable forum for it. Therefore, in the recent years, an integral part our organizational strategy has become the expansion of Uccu's mission, to familiarize and bring closer Roma and Romani culture to the majority society. That is why we decided to create the social enterprise, where we create an opportunity for everyone to meet and have a dialogue with the launch of the Uccu Budapest Romani Walking Tour offering interactive walks in English and Hungarian in Budapest and Pécs.

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Thanks to the Erste Seeds Incubator program, the Uccu team has developed a business plan for Uccu walks. After many pitch and investor presentations, in 2018 Uccu won the UniCredit Bank “Step with us!” program and professionally supported by NESst we were able to launch the Uccu Budapest Romani Walking Tour social enterprise. Our goal was to make use of the experience gained from the core activity of the organization and to become an urban walk provider. In November 2018 we handed over our new website, we trained 11 Roma guides and we developed our second walking tour in Pécs. We held a walking tour to the press, inviting various news portals, which resulted in many press releases about our work. Thanks to our social enterprise, the Uccu walking tours are the part of the “Look at the world through my eyes!” business team building package, which is interactive, exciting, informative and available to anyone in Budapest and Pécs in Hungarian and English.

In addition, the profit from the Uccu social enterprise is used to pay for the four volunteer coordinators of Uccu (Budapest, Pécs, Miskolc, Ózd). This ensures that our nonprofit activities based on volunteering can continue without interruption for those who do not participate in the work of Uccu as a guide or coordinator. Coordinators working in the four cities - usually former Roma volunteers, - are responsible for organizing school activities, keeping in touch with volunteers and organizing monthly meetings on a voluntary basis.

By attending the Uccu walk or participating in a Uccu team building, participants have the opportunity to get authentic information and talk about Roma identity, shared values, history, and the benefits of a diverse society. Participants receive a valuable cultural experience in exchange for their money, gain a credible picture of some of the city's districts and become familiar with general knowledge about the Roma. In addition, the active Roma youths of Uccu's team gain valuable work experience and financial rewards.

The specialty and novelty of the Uccu Budapest Romani Walking Tour is located in several parts. Our guides are Roma young people who in addition to providing general information about the Roma and the sights of the particular district, bring personality into their walks by sharing their own stories. The purpose of the walks is to bring Roma society and culture closer to the members of the majority society, thus questioning their deeply rooted prejudices and stereotypes. This task is new and has great challenges. Interactivity also makes the walk interesting, giving space to questions, comments, and guides are asking as well. The locations of walks in Budapest and Pécs have a special reputation, making our walk interesting and attracting people's curiosity.

The target group of Uccu is twofold, as besides sensitizing non-Roma people participating in walks or workshops, the emphasis is on training young Roma as well as developing their skills and knowledge. Thus, the organization has an important role to play in community development and leadership training for Roma youth.

In the future, in short term we plan to expand our Budapest tours. In addition to the "Come with us to the eighth district" tour, we will realize and test our "In the footsteps of Roma culture" walk presenting the values of the culture of the three main Roma groups in Hungary

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and the prominent figures of Romani women and men. In addition, we would like to launch the promotion of our Pécs walks, and we will elaborate the Uccu business package, tailored to the needs of large companies in particular. Our long-term plans include the expansion of Uccu Budapest Romani Walking Tour to Miskolc. Our ongoing task is to recruit and train volunteers, guides, and ensure the sustainability of walks.

In total, the Uccu Foundation has an average of 40 Roma young people, 10-15 of whom are guides. These young people, with the volunteer and work experience offered by Uccu, are able to come to the labor market with confidence and preparedness behind them, as the range of activities gives them the opportunity to strengthen their own identity and to acquire the skills and abilities that are essential. Every Roma volunteer are involved in a moderator training to learn communication and debate, cooperative skills, self-knowledge and informal education methodology. In addition, they also have the opportunity to take part in walking training and to develop skills related to other projects. Young people who are ready to go for a walk, in addition to occasional benefits can experience teamwork, perform a responsible task and gain insight into the operation of a small-scale profit-oriented business. In addition to the experts, Roma youth have also been involved in the development of the walking materials and business team building package. Developing and regularly reviewing walks - with our volunteers participating - is a focused process of tracking a project from concept to design through implementation, so everyone can feel ownership over both the goal and the achieved results. We believe is the basis of the joint venture's success.

In 2018, we had 41 walks, 2 team building sessions (Canadian Embassy and XIV. district Police Team) and Uccu's mission reached around 700 people who never met us before. We have created many new partnerships over the past year. Thanks to the social connections and well embedded network of the organization, we have gained recognition both at national and international level, which will enable the Uccu Budapest Romani Walking Tours to be successful in the future.

The organizational tasks and the responsibilities of local project coordinator are carried out by our volunteers who have been members of the organization for a long time and have sufficient experience. This gives an advantage of the entrant young Roma, which can be rarely acquired in other formal settings. This can provide a model for launching similar social businesses, highlighting the value of collaborative work.