

Section A		
Institution: The University of Manchester		
Unit of Assessment: 19 (Politics and International Studies)		
Title of case study: Strengthening Political Representation and Advocacy of the Roma Community in Slovenia		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name:	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Andreja Zevnik	Senior Lecturer in International Politics	2012 – present
Prof. Andrew Russell	Professor of Politics	1994 – 2017
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
Section B		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>University of Manchester (UoM) research by Dr Andreja Zevnik and Professor Andrew Russell on the political mobilisation and participation practices of the Roma community in Slovenia has improved the quality of the national debate in Slovenia on Roma representation. Impact has been achieved in three key areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building capacity within the Roma community in Slovenia for more effective political participation. A key driver has been the creation of an educational hub for Roma councillors – <i>Politicus</i> – of which Zevnik and Russell are partners. 2. Increasing the mobilisation of younger and more diverse candidates running for election as local Roma councillors. 3. Increasing the ‘political consciousness’ of the Roma political elite, influencing and improving the quality of debate about Roma in Slovenian politics and society. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The impact is underpinned by Zevnik and Russell’s research on the political mobilisation and participation of the Roma community in Slovenia [1], supported by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Accelerator Award (IAA) (i), and earlier theoretical work on the mobilisation of marginalised communities by Zevnik [2] and on hard-to-reach groups by Russell [3, 4]. Their research identifies a disparity (structural disadvantage against one minority group) in the Slovenian constitutional arrangement and outlines possible ways in which this might be addressed. The Slovenian constitution recognises three special groups – two national minorities (Italian and Hungarian) and the Roma community. The first two enjoy reserved representation at a national and local level, whereas the latter only does at the local level (and in reduced circumstances). Slovenian Roma are the largest and most marginalised of the three minorities. Although this inequality would be most effectively addressed by a change to the constitution, the research advocates that a more realistic approach to achieving greater equality between the three communities is to enhance the power of Roma civil society and local Roma councillors [1]. Zevnik and Russell’s research demonstrated three key results:</p>		
1. The importance of building political capabilities		

The political education of a generation of Roma activists and future politicians is needed to improve the day-to-day effectiveness of the Roma community's elected local councillors [1]. This includes the need for political and social empowerment of the Roma community through education, community organising, and political skills [1]. Efforts to politically empower the Roma community need to: (a) come from the Roma community themselves; (b) be based on trust in elected Roma representatives and their accountability to the Roma community; and (c) be linked to action by the Slovenian state to address unequal Roma political representation at the national level. The research also emphasises the need for political representation of hard-to-reach groups to come from hitherto under-represented parts of those communities – in particular, the motivating energy provided by youth and female role models [1].

2. Positional power does not, in itself, overcome the marginalisation of under-represented groups

Zevnik's research on political mobilisation of African-American communities shows that holding positions of political power does not help communities to overcome their marginalised status. In fact, this can perpetuate marginalisation, stereotypes, and racism [2]. If a marginalised community is to achieve political visibility, a concerted effort between official political representatives and community activists is essential. This link is traditionally absent in the political activity of Roma in Slovenia. Zevnik's work emphasises the need for the empowerment of community actors, education of these actors in political processes and relationship building between Roma community activists and the Roma community more broadly.

3. The efficacy of voter education programmes to build civic engagement

Russell's research on youth politics and engagement establishes the need for effective and custom-made voter education programmes. Working with the Electoral Commission (2004 – 2006), his research focused on the civic education of young people and voting in Britain. His work for the Open Society Institute (2010 – 2012) collated evidence from East-Central Europe about hard-to-reach groups and youth participation in existing democratic institutions [3]. A *European Journal of Political Research* paper he co-authored demonstrates that the levels of political engagement of young people in developed democracies depends on the level of support for political institutions with which they engage [4].

3. References to the research

1. **Zevnik, A.** and **Russell, A.** (2020). 'Political Representation and Empowerment of Roma in Slovenia: A Case for National Reserved Representation', *Treaties and Documents: Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 84, 51–72. DOI: [10.36144/RiG84.jun20.51-71](https://doi.org/10.36144/RiG84.jun20.51-71)
2. **Zevnik, A.** (2017). 'Post-Racial Society as Social Fantasy: Black America and the Struggle for Political Recognition'. *Political Psychology*, 38:4, 621–635. DOI: [10.1111/pops.12430](https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12430)
3. **Russell, A.** (2005). 'Political Parties as Vehicles for Political Engagement', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 58, 555–569. DOI: [10.1093/pa/gsi051](https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsi051)
4. Fieldhouse, E., Tranmer, M. and **Russell, A.** (2007). 'Something about Young People or Something about Elections? Electoral Participation of Young People in Europe: Evidence from a Multilevel Analysis of the European Social Survey', *European Journal of Political Research*, 46, 797–822. DOI: [10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00713.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00713.x)

Evidence of research quality: The outputs have been peer-reviewed and published in highly reputable journals.

Related grants: (i) Zevnik, A. (PI), 'Roma Councillors: Obstacles and Opportunities in Political Participation of Marginalised Groups (the Case of Slovenia)', ESRC IAA, April - December 2018, GBP15,370.

4. Details of the impact

Anti-Roma discrimination is endemic in Central-Eastern Europe. In Slovenia it has taken the form of an asymmetric application of political rights the group possesses in contrast to other minority groups [1]. Zevnik and Russell engaged closely with key stakeholders such as the National Assembly, the Office for Minorities, Roma political representatives, and activists. They co-founded the *Politicus* training hub and promoted key research findings through dedicated reports on Slovenian national radio and television stations [A]. This led to three key impacts: (1) building capacity within the Roma community for more effective political participation; (2) increasing the mobilisation of younger and more diverse candidates running for election as local Roma councillors; and (3) increasing the 'political consciousness' of the Roma political elite, thus improving the quality of debate about Roma in Slovenian politics and society.

Pathways to Impact: In July 2017, Zevnik and Russell were invited by Prof. Miran Komac (a leading activist for the Slovenian Roma Community) to present their research at the Institute for Ethnic Studies in Ljubljana. Komac was particularly interested to learn how to build the political visibility of a marginalised community through collaboration between elected representatives and community organising [1, 2], and in the similar experiences of marginalisation and racism experienced by Black communities and Roma communities [3, B]. Zevnik and Russell were subsequently invited to a meeting of the Forum of Roma councillors to discuss their research findings with the President of the National Assembly, Dr Milan Brglez. This was the first of three meetings where the researchers and Dr Brglez proposed ways to address the limited scope of current Roma political representation in the country [C]. In December 2017, at an event commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the Institute of Roma Councillors, Zevnik and Russell made the case for reform of the current model of Roma representation at the National Assembly.

Underpinned by the research findings, Zevnik and Russell advocated that the Roma need a national presence to strengthen their political effectiveness on a local level, and in June 2018, co-founded the educational hub *Politicus* with Slovenian partners (the Institute for Ethnic Studies, Forum of Roma Councillors and *Preporod* Society – a Roma society advocating for socio-economic development and political empowerment of the Roma minority in Slovenia). *Politicus* "is designed to educate and develop the political skills of potential Roma councillors in Slovenia" [D, E] and better prepare and improve the effectiveness of the Roma political elite for public office [D]. It aims to build a national framework of Roma councillors and activists rather than drawing its powers from pockets of strength in better-standing settlements and regions. *Politicus* was warmly endorsed by Stanko Baluh, the Chair of the Office for Minorities and a key coordinator of activities for the Roma community, following a presentation by Zevnik and Russell about the asymmetry of reserved political representation of minorities in Slovenia held at the Office for Minorities, and a later training event for newly elected Roma councillors [F]. Subsequently in 2019 *Preporod* Society managed to secure state funding for *Politicus* training events.

Impacts:

1. Building capacity within the Roma community for effective political participation

An increased awareness of what the role of Roma councillor entails and a wider understanding of expectation management between the councillors and the Roma community was established, alongside the exchange of good practice and resources. *Politicus* provides the means for activists and community leaders to put increased pressure at the national level by demonstrating the marginalised status of the group as a whole.

There is a tendency to treat Roma groups as a 'local inconvenience', for whom problems are segmented in terms of differences between communities or settlements, with little acknowledgement of prejudices against Roma [1, G]. *Politicus* emphasises the importance of lobbying national figures rather than local mayors and institutions. To strengthen their lobbying power Roma activists were urged to "count" by keeping records of candidates' age and location, and train them to take advantage of the resources offered to them by local institutions [5, G]. Komac writes "[Zevnik and Russell's] work help[ed] stimulate Roma community. I noted a significant difference in increased frequency of Roma participation in educational activities, their willingness to share their experience of marginalisation and racism in their political work, and in the active participation of younger members of the community in educational events" [B].

Komac further states that "*the introduction of this space was particularly timely – 5 months before local elections. It can be said that Politicus changed the quality of participation and the readiness of Roma political elite to use and engage with expert knowledge*" [B, G]. As Darko Rudaš (President of the Forum of Roma Councillors and *Preporod* Society) asserts, "*the research of Zevnik and Russell has greatly assisted our capacity building and advocacy programmes. It has provided a platform for our activities to be seen in a national and international context and has increased the efficacy of our campaigning and electoral presence as representatives of the Roma community in Slovenia*" [D]. The space also created a better track record of training workshops and focused on expectation management and best practice exchange. This intervention helped the Roma community "*to galvanise the support of the state for training workshops and attract interest from other Roma and minority councillors*" [D].

2. Increased mobilisation of younger and more diverse candidates running for election as local Roma councillors

The research and intervention of Zevnik and Russell has generated a gear-shift in the mobilisation of Roma councillors and potential candidates. Key findings relating to the engagement of young people in developed democracies [5] were used to inform the decision to encourage the development of a new cohort of political leaders for the Roma communities in Slovenia. Zevnik and Russell's research findings around the motivating energy provided by youth and female role models led to a concerted effort by *Politicus* to engage with younger and more diverse groups, including presentations to the Roma Academic Club (a group of young and educated Roma) and female community leaders to encourage their participation in politics. At the 2018 local elections, 26 Roma candidates stood for election, with 19 elected to represent their municipalities. Of these, 12 were present at aforementioned events and have directly engaged with Zevnik and Russell's presentations. As Rudaš states: "*Since we began to work with Zevnik and Russell a cohort of younger and more diverse Roma councillor candidates have been forthcoming. In 2018 local election in 19 municipalities there was a record number of female candidates (5) and a much younger cohort of candidates than had previously been the case*" [D]. The youth aspect is particularly notable as only 6 out of 20 Roma councillors were re-elected, with some longstanding Roma politicians losing their seat to new younger candidates. Further young Roma candidates stood for direct election into municipal councils [1]. In recognition of the support provided by *Politicus*, Rudaš states that "*it helped to diversify the type of people who run for Roma councillors*" [D].

3. Increased 'political consciousness' of the Roma political elite

Zevnik and Russell's research has improved the quality of the debate around Roma in Slovenian politics and society [D]. This has been particularly useful to the Roma political elite, the Forum and the *Preporod* societies. Rudaš states that "*the political parties have started to take Roma interests more seriously as a result of the efforts we have put in based on the research findings of Zevnik and Russell, concentrating on the principles of fairness and equality to scrutinise the effectiveness of political establishment in addressing*

Roma's presence in politics. This awareness raising is particularly important at the moment when a new Law of Roma Community is being negotiated [D]. Discussions about the legal reform referred to were underway in 2017 and are ongoing. Zevnik and Russell's engagement with parliament and media appearances in Slovenia were part of the new discourse around the framing of the new law, contributing to a notable shift in whether Roma should have equal representation on a national level. As a result, Dr Brglez – current MEP for Social Democrats and former Speaker of the House (2014-18) – acknowledged that the existing arrangement (what Zevnik and Russell call 'asymmetric representation') is peculiar and that there was a prima facie case for challenging this [C]. A special Parliamentary sub-committee for "Roma themes" has since been created to address the unjust and degrading treatment of Roma in Slovenia. Zevnik and Russell met the sub-committee chair twice to delineate the dangers of stereotyping the Roma as a 'problem community' and discuss support for reform to political rights.

The presentation of research on reserved representation in the National Assembly (2017) mobilised the Roma community to engage more actively in campaigns for national representation (including publicly voicing demands for a status equal to that of Italian and Hungarian minorities) [G]. Based on Zevnik and Russell's intervention, the community was also made more aware of its broader international context and has begun making connections and alliances with other similarly minded communities. Rudaš states that "we were encouraged to feel part of a wider phenomenon of minority community involvement and more positive about the prospects for change. We have continued to look abroad and forge alliances with other Roma groups in Eastern Europe – for example Croatia or Ukraine" [D, G].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Interview on Slovenian National Radio and TV station [TV: <https://4d.rtv slo.si/arhiv/romska-oddaja/174586607>, from 4min13sec to 7min10sec] [radio: <https://4d.rtv slo.si/arhiv/nase-poti/174583282>, from 9min35sec to 21min24sec]
- B. Testimonial from Prof. Miran Komac, activist on political organisation of Roma in Slovenia (15 October 2019)
- C. Testimonial from Dr Milan Brglez, Former Speaker of the Slovenian National Assembly (29 October 2018)
- D. Testimonial from Darko Rudaš, president of the Forum of Roma Councillors and Preporod Society (11 June 2019)
- E. Declaration to create *Politicus* (2018)
- F. Invitation by Mag Stanko Baluh to speak at the Office for National Minorities (2018)
- G. Zevnik and Russell (2020) 'Nič o nas Brez nas: vloga romskega svetnika v Sloveniji' ('Nothing about us Without us: the role of the Roma councilor in Slovenia'), Preporod. Zveza Preporod: Vejar. <http://zveza-preporod.si/2020/05/17/e-revija-preporod/>