

**The *gitanos* of La Mariola (The Gypsies in Lleida).** Ariadna Garreta Llevot. Col·legi Episcopal (Lleida).

## **Introduction**

The gypsy community has maintained its cultural difference and identity throughout the years, even at a transnational level. The negative stereotypes that often surround these people motivated this study with the objective of acquiring a profound knowledge of the gypsy community in a neighbourhood in the city of Lleida. The aim of this research is to know their culture, language, identity, socioeconomic situation and educational at a theoretical and empirical level. The methods that have been used consist of a survey and several in-depth interviews. The results help to know better the gypsy people as well as the suburb of La Mariola, avoiding social bias against them.

## **Objectives and hypothesis**

This work intends to focus on this people, sometimes forgotten, sometimes mistreated, and often kept or segregated from society. The objectives of this work are:

- To know the perception that the population of Lleida has of the district of La Mariola and of the gypsies. And to deepen in different subjects like their labor situation, residential, educational..., their culture, the relation between gypsies and non gypsies.
- To define and to contrast the perceptions that exists with respect to the district, their situation and their strengths and weaknesses from information contributed by the gypsy population resident in La Mariola and by the professionals of the administrations that work in him.
- To propose social, cultural, economic, urbanistic, educational actions... to improve the neighborhood and the situation of the people (especially the gypsies) who live there from the information obtained from the respondents and the interviewees.

The objectives must allow for the verification or falsification of the working hypothesis developed and present at all times. Specifically, we start from the idea that the gypsy community of the La Mariola district suffers from a double stigma, that of being a gypsy (which even today implies carrying a negative image for non-gypsies) and living in a district that has generally been associated with socioeconomic positions in a situation of risk, with under- and over-occupied social housing, with social conflict, etc. In spite of this double stigma, we believe that neither the gypsies nor La Mariola respond completely to this profile, nor living in this neighbourhood is satisfactory for them and even a reason for pride since it allows for a fluid and frequent intra-ethnic social relationship.

## **Methodology and research techniques.**

Based on the theoretical framework, on the gypsy population (its origin, social, cultural,

economic situation...) from documents and bibliography, an empirical study is carried out trying to deepen into the current situation of the gypsies that live in the mentioned district. The empirical work has been developed in two different phases, one quantitative (survey of 336 people over 16 years old living in Lleida) and the other qualitative focused on the Mariola neighbourhood. This research perspective is complementary to the survey and is relevant since it provides the most personal, experiential perspective of the people with whom one interacts. The 14 interviews carried out, had the following profile: XX technicians of the administrations that work in this neighborhood and YYYYYY gypsies of different ages from the neighborhood of La Mariola.

## **Results**

La Mariola, is one of the 12 neighbourhoods of the city of Lleida, which has always been at risk of being marginalized (Solís, 2017) due to the employment and economic situation and the low educational level of their residents. The district, according to the survey, is a well-known neighbourhood among the residents of Lleida although it is not a desirable neighbourhood to live in. La Mariola is considered unattractive from an urbanistic point of view, the cleanliness of its streets and squares can be improved, it is not considered a quiet area.... In addition, the neighbourhood is loaded with numerous negative prejudices (related to conflicts, evictions, occupations, etc.).

However, it is also true that people who live in the neighbourhood emphasize that life is good, despite some problems. In fact, they affirm that the prejudices that exist about the district have been built over the years with the cooperation of media. But despite having weaknesses, there are also strengths: identification with the neighbourhood and the relationship between residents.

The neighbourhood hosts a gypsy community that is difficult to quantify, but some indicate that there are about 2,000 people. The meaning of being a gypsy is linked to the common origin, the sentiment of identification and the cultural practices that link them (even at an international level) and for which they feel close and proud. The Gypsies interviewed give great importance to the union and the bond that exists between family members and with their neighbors. Their roots, language, values and traditions are what unite them and what they share, while at the same time differentiating them from non-gypsies. Furthermore, it is also true that as a gypsy people and as a gypsy community in La Mariola they show weaknesses and aspects to change and/or improve: especially their labor and educational situation, which mutually condition each other. In fact, the priority actions to be carried out in the coming years should focus on these areas, along with the improvement of residential conditions. However, our study points out that in order to design these interventions it is necessary to listen to the voice of the residents in the neighbourhood and the gypsy community. In this way, the intervention will respond to their needs and they will feel it as their own.

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