



## Economic Communities

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### Kumpania

The central economic unit within the → socio-organisation of the *Kalderaš* – of the → boiler-makers or the coppersmiths – is represented by the *kumpania* which is the joining together of more extended families (*vica/-i*) or of the members of different *vici* in order to form an economic community.

A *kumpania* does not follow a strict order but represents a loose association, which can be extended or reduced permanently, depending on the requirements of the present relations. The professional knowledge is handed down within the families and/or the *kumpania*. Preconditions for a functioning *kumpania* are an unlimited co-operation and the fulfilment of group internal rules, whereas the traditional law and court of the Roma – → kris – functions as the control organ.

If these factors are met a *kumpania* represents the possibility to react, in a flexible way, to current economic and social conditions and to discover always new economic niches thanks to its independent and open structure. This kind of flexibility was and still is of great importance because the Roma and Sinti do not have access to many professional areas. The reasons for this limitation were mainly discriminating regulations, prejudices and stereotypes.

In the German-speaking areas, Roma and Sinti groups have continually been hindered from settling within city walls. They were not allowed to become members of craft guilds or to purchase agriculturally productive land. In contrast to this situation, in the southern Balkan area the Roma have been working as agricultural workers or farmers for many centuries.

Further limitations in professional areas are due to culturally conditioned prohibitions. Certain professions, e.g. work with animal skin or work in hospitals, have a low social status and/or the members of some groups, (e.g. *Sinti*), still consider these kind of occupations as → mahrim ("unclean") and therefore to be avoided. However, it is to be mentioned that the ritual cleanliness rules do not represent a central element of ethnic identity for all groups, only for some of the Roma and Sinti groups who feel committed to the traditional socio-culture. The majority of all Roma and Sinti groups can almost not fulfill cleanliness regulations, which influence professional choice due to social and economic constraints.

### Trade associations and the example of the Roma in Prizren

Another form of economic community could develop in the southern Balkan area, and especially in Kosovo, due to the comparably Roma-friendly policy and society. The Roma in Prizren (e.g. *Arlije*<sup>1</sup>) who have been leading a settled life since the 12th century, at that time founded trade associations which are comparable to the craftsmens guilds in central and western Europe. Besides their economic relevance these economic communities to a great extent contributed to the standing of the group.

The annual guild celebrations represented a part of the party tradition and influenced the ethnic identity of the group. Every guild had its own flag (*bajrako*) and a patron (*o biri* – "master"). Biri derives from Persian and can either name an "old master" or a saint.

<sup>1</sup> The name *Arlije* refers to the former settled life of this group. It originates from the Turkish *yer* (place). In Turkish *Yerli* means "native"



The most important example of the celebration tradition of the Roma in Prizren, is the party in honour of the *Hasreti Daut* (Saint Daut)<sup>2</sup>, the patron of the blacksmith's guild and of the Roma in the Terzi Mahala. A celebration is given for seven weeks after the → George's Day (*herdelezi*). This century-long tradition was maintained until the Kosovo War in 1999. These days it is only present in fragments.

## Sources

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<sup>2</sup> *Hasreti Daut* corresponds to David of the Old Testament who overcame Goliath