

Maria Manuela Mendes  
Olga Magano  
Stefânia Toma *Editors*

# Social and Economic Vulnerability of Roma People

Key Factors for the Success and  
Continuity of Schooling Levels

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# Introduction

According to the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA 2017), the World Bank (2016) and other international agencies, Roma people and families are severely affected by social and economic vulnerability, stemming from a complex set of factors that are interrelated. As a result, there is still a great deal of persistent inequality in the various European countries in terms of access to schooling and success in education by Roma individuals and families. Formal education is important for the social and cultural rights of individuals and is one of the main keys to entering the formal employment market and guaranteeing the basic conditions of survival. Despite the effects of some social and educational policies, the majority of Roma continue to have low levels of education and high rates of school failure, dropout and illiteracy and low rates of higher education graduates compared to non-Roma. Although there has been an increase in the educational attainment of European citizens, there are still persistent inequalities between Roma and non-Roma, exacerbated by gender inequalities as well, which greatly affect Roma women. Several recent researches (see e.g. Abajo and Carrasco 2004; Gamella 2011; D'Arcy 2012; Brüggemann 2012; Pasca 2014; Rostas and Kostka 2014; Bereményi and Carrasco 2015; Brüggemann and Friedman 2017) have shown in particular that continuity of school trajectories depends to a large extent on public policies and programmes, but also on other explanatory factors inherent to the individual, the type of support received from the family group, the presence of reference figures and role models and the importance of peers and institutional factors inherent to the functioning of the public school. In this context of discussion, it is important to understand the factors of success and school continuity, and even of social mobility, but also the reasons that account for the high rates of school dropout and failure.

Since the early years of this century, two institutional initiatives embodied in unprecedented State commitments have contributed to changing this scenario: On the one hand, the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015, the initiative of the Open

Society Institute (OSI), the World Bank (WB), and the European Union (EU).<sup>1</sup> Under this initiative, European governments undertook to eliminate discrimination against the Roma, focusing on the priority areas of education, employment, health and housing. More recently and due to the efforts of the European Parliament, through the European Strategy for the Integration of the Roma (European Parliament 2011), greater attention is given to the issue of the Roma people in various European countries, with each member state being compelled to produce national strategies for the integration of the Roma adapted to the reality of each country. These strategies particularly address four major axes: housing, education, employment and vocational training and health. This publication is inscribed in the midst of the full implementation of the European Strategy and the accompanying national strategies of some of the countries under review herein.

The indicators on illiteracy, early school leaving and low schooling levels shown by the Roma in European countries, in a general manner, continue to be a poignant and very alarming issue, justifying a discerning and in-depth eye on any opportunities that may arise. This implies greater political interest, recognition that we are dealing with a question of structural inequality very often allied to situations of poverty, segregation and social exclusion, and consequently more financial assistance for research as well as support to measures of empowerment of Roma individuals). Nevertheless, these dynamics of growing interest coexist with the reproduction of cycles of poverty, constraints that involve an inability to structurally confront the contributions towards economic and social empowerment without stereotypes or racism of diverse nature (but immensely worrying in the case of structural racism in which the social intervention agents and other social actors believe that those primarily responsible for the situation in which the Roma are found are the Roma themselves).

The difficulty in obtaining statistical data about Roma people in some countries, due to legal and other impediments, greatly limits the work of the researchers. Moreover, the actual academy has extra responsibilities in the “academic narratives” about the Roma, making this an even larger challenge in an international panorama marked by the growth of populism and extreme right-wing parties, by the intensifying governmentality incident on the Roma, and by the persistence of phobia and paranoia in relation to the Roma, primarily in Europe.

But despite the numerous historical attempts of assimilation, in Europe the Roma are not a homogenous and united group, rather portraying a plurality of historical trajectories, national and local policies and distinct modes of coexistence and interaction in relation to the non-Roma. They evince a heterogeneity of lifestyles, trajectories of life and representation in society, very much dependent on gender, position in their life cycle, how they are received and accepted within the majority society and possession of educational, social, economic and symbolic capital, among other aspects. This endeavour to de-homogenise and not essentialise the Roma is

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<sup>1</sup>The Decade followed the international conference “Roma in an Enlarged Europe: challenges in the future” organised in Budapest in 2003.

very evident in the literature and analysis of extremely divergent national realities, just as those portrayed here, the Finnish, British, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak and Russian. The different authors employ distinct theoretical and methodological approaches, however, with qualitative methods being dominant. The diversity of approaches should be noted in particular, with some texts being more theoretical, theoretical-empirical or empirical, using various scales and layers of analysis—neighbourhood, camp, region, country, international and transnational spheres.

In this book, the different texts demonstrate, on the one hand, the continuous reproduction of social inequalities in relation to the Roma and, on the other hand, the processes of change underway that reveal the challenges experienced by the Roma in relation to school, facing changes both from within and outside school. According to UNESCO (2009), inclusive school and education involves a process that seeks to respond to the diversity of needs and potentialities of each and every one of the students, through increased participation in learning processes and in the life of the educational community. However, its accomplishment is far from being completely materialised. Despite the existence of anti-discriminatory laws and policies, practices of separating children into specific schools and classes appear to have increased in Europe, by virtue of the intensification of migratory and refugee movements and flows. Segregation at school is a reality in Europe today, affecting not only children with disabilities, children of immigrant origin and institutionalised children but also Roma children (EU Fundamental Rights Agency 2017; Farkas 2014). This is an extremely serious form of discrimination and violation of the Rights of Children and Young People.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we are witnessing a manifestation of injustice that perpetuates marginalisation, negatively and indelibly affecting the trajectory of life of these children. In this regard, the findings of the survey conducted in 2016 in nine member states by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) are illustrative. But segregation also happens inside the school premises, where Roma children can be relegated to specific and separate classes, being prevented from using common spaces such as playgrounds or canteens (FRA 2017). Further exacerbating this situation is the high number of Roma and traveller children attending special classes and year groups, where it should be highlighted that in some countries the probability of Roma children being enrolled in special classes is 27 times higher than that of non-Roma children (FRA 2017). This is highlighted in the texts that constitute the first part, Education Policies, Inclusion and Exclusion, and which portray such diverse realities in the UK, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Russia and Hungary. Hence, the social organisation of school is an excellent reflection of that of society in a broader sense, establishing a clear demarcation between educational and residential spaces for the Roma (Powell and Lever 2017), who move between spaces of relegation and almost cloistered circles.

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<sup>2</sup>Article 28 1. States recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunities.

The book is structured into three parts. The first part, subtitled *Education Policies, Inclusion and Exclusion*, includes six chapters on research developed in five countries: Russia, Romania, UK, Slovakia and Portugal. This part returns to the issues of difficulties, problems, barriers and discrimination and many other factors that were identified as influencers of the low educational attainment and success of the Roma in different geographical, social, economic and political contexts. Through the article by Zsuzsa Plainer we gain access to an understanding of the connectedness of school and employment and the thoughts and values that are attached to this by the Roma themselves. Plainer's ethnographic research in a Romanian urban Roma community describes a scenario—maybe too well known—where life priorities formulated by the Roma neglect the importance of schooling, and without proper incentives from the school or outside context, the school and education of children remains merely something of secondary importance to the members of the community. For this reason, a segregated school that is much more familiar to the children persists in being an alternative for Roma families with all its shortcomings: no access to resources, lower quality education and high turnover of teachers, just to name a few.

Likewise, the chapter by Pavel Kubanik highlights the importance of the community, showing how life in the Roma community and school activities are not independent of one another, but are linked through child agency despite the inflexible and hierarchy-dependent character of the school. Kubanik presents ethnographic data on how child-plays are able to act like agents of change in a local school, but also the community by contributing to the socialisation of the Roma children with a school environment that in some cases even contributes to the strengthening of ethnic barriers (i.e. use of Slovak as the language of communication).

Carol Rogers' chapter presents a critical reflection on the educational experience of Roma children in the UK, from the perspective of whether they have inclusive learning opportunities or whether, as in other areas of their lives, they face situations of exclusion and disadvantage. Using country-level statistics, Attila Z. Papp and Eszter Neumann propose a typology of resilient and irresilient schools and then compare the performance indicators of the pupils in the two school types. Based on their findings, the authors formulated three hypotheses that also are worth replicating in other contexts. Firstly, the data show that resilient schools are more likely to be found in smaller settlements where the segregating effect of school choice can be avoided. Moreover, resilient schools are located more in the proximity of the capital and not in areas/regions where the percentage of Roma pupils is high. Secondly, the higher the rate of Roma students, the more likely the school will be irresilient. But an important aspect needs to be highlighted here, because when the school and teachers' characteristics are taken into account, and not only the social background of the Roma students, then the significant effect of the percentage of Roma students loses its explanatory power and the school becomes more resilient. And last but not least, tests were done on whether intervention and development programmes do or do not have an effect, with the result being that Roma-targeted programmes in schools might have had negative effects, meaning that these types of interventions in schools where the percentage of Roma pupils is high do not contribute to improving school skills.

The chapter authored by Manuela Mendes and Olga Magano presents in detail the policy context of the education of Portuguese Roma (Ciganos) combined with the findings of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with representatives of Roma communities. It is shown that regardless of the policies implemented, there is always a need for a closer follow-up of the effects of the implementation and new approaches in policymaking. The impact of schooling and education on the professional life of the Roma is not perceived as being influential; so, that might require a new approach from the interventions. Additionally, it is highlighted that it is important to take into account the specific informal educational strategies applied in Roma communities, which define the socialisation of Roma children.

A distinctive argument is presented in Jekateryna Dunajeva's article, but from a historical point of view, as the reader is taken back to the early Soviet Union period when policies harshly intervened in identity politics in different domains of life, including education. Dunajeva presents a case study based on the example of school textbooks, showing how reconfiguration of Roma identity took place at a discursive level in the Soviet nativisation policy. This chapter emphasises paradoxical situations in the education of Roma throughout, once again underlining that independently of the historical period (these are cases that occurred at a distance of almost a century) the policies and programmes targeted at the Roma aim at "normalising" and "civilising" those marginal and marginalised.

The second part, which focuses essentially on "Obstacles and Key Factors for the Continuity of Education", involves four chapters seeking to discern different factors that could contribute to increase the school paths of Roma children and young people.

The chapter written by Stefânia Toma examines the outside school context in order to detect broader societal factors that in well-defined contexts might contribute to the improvement of the school participation of Roma children. Toma uses survey data comparing the educational data of different student cohorts that had different experiences. First, she finds that a community intervention not related to the immediate school environment and which targeted preschool children living in the segregated Roma community was able to act like a positive model-creating environment. Further, the engagement of Roma families in international migration and the use of remittances (spending directly or indirectly on schooling) also had a positive effect on the school presence of Roma children. While these two factors (NGO intervention and migration) differ considerably in their nature (one is an influence that comes from outside the community, and the second is dependent on family motivations and decisions), opportunities and possibilities were created that were creatively channelled towards improving the children's education, contributing to the empowerment of the local community.

Along similar lines, Marko Stenroos and Jenni Helakorpi present the results of research in which they gave voice to multiple actors involved in the education of Roma children in Finland. They highlight the need to not only focus on the Roma as individuals or as a group in the education system, but to also shift the scrutiny to the structures of the education system. Practices in education both privilege certain pupils and exclude others through systems such as othering and racism. In the

analysis of Roma schooling, it is important to analyse societal forces (mainstream society) and community forces (local Roma communities) affecting the education of Roma children.

Magano and Mendes return with another account of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Portuguese policies aimed at the integration of Ciganos, taking stock of the factors that define the educational trajectories of Cigano youth. These trajectories are not only intertwined with public policies and intervention, but are also associated with the (re)configuration of identity construction processes. The authors conclude that continuity in the school participation of Roma youth in Portugal is highly dependent on public policies and programmes, but contextual factors inherent to the community and individual must also be taken into consideration.

The last chapter in this part focuses on a specific case study, located in Portugal. Lurdes Nicolau presents the outcome of research developed in the Portuguese northeast region of Trás-os-Montes in which it is found that notwithstanding the Cigano population's progress in terms of schooling, it remains insufficient and far from complying with mandatory schooling, similar to that observed in the rest of the country. The author recognises the positive impact of some policies such as Social Insertion Income, but teachers indicate various underlying difficulties, such as the lack of attendance of pre-primary school, the inadequate support and scant interest shown by the parents concerning school. The evidence also points to the inability to ensure the children's follow-up and the cultural distance in relation to school, reflected in early school leaving especially at puberty.

The last part of the book, *Education Strategies: Success and social mobility vs. Reproduction of Inequalities*, focuses on the identification of innovative educational strategies that could boost school success and social mobility and/or, conversely, could contribute to the continued reproduction of social inequalities.

Andria Timmer and Máté Erős's chapter starts this part bringing new arguments and views from a multidisciplinary angle of alternative ways to empower Roma children and improve educational attainment. Inspirationally combining ethnographic and philosophical approaches, the two authors present a new model of organising education for Roma children that was implemented in Hungary. Choosing one school as a case study, the authors demonstrate that by selecting the right educational strategies and methods, the dualistic and many times paradoxical nature of education (that the academic literature discuss extensively) can be overcome.

The second chapter of this part comes from the context of another country and raises the question of whether available social capital of members of vulnerable groups might have an impact on the educational attainment of youth, examining factors lying outside the immediate school environment. Lazar and Baciu used qualitative methodology in their investigation on the effects of social capital among Roma students. Their results highlighted—in line with the literature on social capital theory—that different forms of social capital might have an impact though in different ways depending on the prevailing social context, but all in all it might contribute to improvements in educational attainment.

The chapter by la Rosa and Andreau argues strongly for the need to fill the gaps in research on the Roma's participation in education. Following a brief overview of the

Spanish literature—both academic and policy—and insights from the international literature on the educational situation of the Roma, these authors underline the need to give more attention to the Roma’s participation in higher education. They identify several issues related to this topic, at the same time stressing the difficulties in doing this type of research. First of all, in many cases there is merely anecdotal evidence of the continuous presence of Roma youth in higher education and academia. Less research has been done, partly due to the “invisibility” of the Roma youth at this level, as they rather prefer to conceal their identity. For the authors—and likewise for some of the other authors of this book—the importance of focusing on the presence of the Roma in higher education and on their achievements would act like a counterforce producing some kind of equilibrium in the widespread approach to Roma education, which mostly focuses on negative aspects, like dropout rates, underachievement, failure and so on, and in this way contributes to undermine the positive aspects.

The last chapter, written by Judit Durst and Ábel Bereményi, comes as an immediate response to the needs formulated in the previous chapter, as they convey strong arguments, this time also empirical, based on the findings of long-term ethnographic fieldwork, of the importance of investigating and trying to understand the upward social and educational mobility of Roma youth. In their inquiry, the authors present in detail what the costs and gains of this upward mobility are for persons coming from a highly stigmatised minority group. Their approach is centred on the concept of “ethnic capital” and the strategies employed to effectively use ethnic capital to mitigate the psychological consequences that would hinder social mobility, as described in the international literature. Later, the authors bring in “resilience capital”, which together with ethnic capital, not only contributes to the successful mobility of the Roma, but is also a constitutive part of a “new ethnicity” that socially mobile Roma deploy and that is characterised by double rootedness.

This book takes the reader on an inversed timeline. It begins with glimpses into the—hopefully positive—future of the Roma in higher education, which merits being discussed no longer in terms of “future”, but as a domain in educational research that has not yet been sufficiently explored but definitely conceals promising insights. Then accounts of factors more or less outside the immediate school environment are considered, all worth being taken into account by policymakers. And finally, several texts follow which critically examine policy measures that either had positive effects to some extent and in certain contexts, or need to be fully reconsidered, as they ignore important aspects related to being a member of a mostly stigmatised and discriminated minority in Europe.

In sum, this book aims to discuss this social reality from a multidisciplinary and transversal point of view, sharing knowledge and practices in different countries. Accordingly, we appealed to the participation of researchers who share analyses with diverse paradigms of analysis and methodologies, but which certainly contribute to broaden our knowledge about the articulations of families, individuals, school and public policies in our societies.

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**Part I**  
**Education Policies, Inclusion and Exclusion**

# Chapter 1

## Inclusion or Exclusion: UK Education Policy and Roma Pupils



**Carol Rogers**

**Abstract** Education is widely recognised as a key factor in improving social mobility and improving life chances. Therefore, this is fundamental to UK education policy which aims to improve outcomes for all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result of expansion of the European Union over the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of Central and Eastern European Roma families settling the United Kingdom. Together with indigenous Gypsies and Travellers, Roma families remain some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged families in the UK, with Gypsy and Roma children having the poorest educational outcomes of all pupil groups. An inclusive educational philosophy underpins the UK educational system, however, there is a tension between current austerity measures and outcome driven education policy and the principles of inclusive practice. Whilst there are examples of good practice and inclusive educational experiences for Roma children, some barriers and exclusions are also evident.

**Keywords** Roma · Education policy · Inclusion · Inclusive education · UK

### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the educational experiences of Roma children in the United Kingdom (UK) considering if they have inclusive learning opportunities or if, as in many other areas of their lives, they face exclusion and disadvantage. The chapter begins by clarifying the complexities of identifying who Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are, followed by a brief outline of the current political position influencing education and Roma migration and settlement in the UK. The discussion then focuses on the interwoven nature of the educational landscape and the tensions between policy enactment and educational practice as: ‘Education means different

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things to different people according to the context in which they experience it' (Marshall 2018, p. 1). The quote highlights the complexities of education recognising that its aims, purpose and context will vary according to the value that both individuals and society place on it. From a political perspective education is the key to breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage, improving social mobility and the economic growth of the country. Resulting in an outcome driven policy focus. However, for individuals, the value of education and ultimately the outcomes may be determined by the nature of the experience, whether this is inclusive or discriminatory and exclusive. Finally, the chapter will consider the position and experiences of Roma children exploring educational outcomes and areas of good practice.

## **Defining Gypsies, Roma and Travellers**

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) are often used as generic terms to identify members of ethnic groups who are or have been traditionally nomadic. Defining this terminology to identify individual groups and communities is however relatively complex. Across Europe the term 'Gypsy' is often considered racist and offensive, whereas current cultural and policy usage in the UK, 'Gypsy' is the preferred terminology when referring to members of the English Romany community. Whilst 'Traveller' is used both to refer to ethnic minority groups such as Irish and Scottish Travellers and as a generic term to encompass all other groups of nomadic people, or those of nomadic heritage. The use of the word Traveller is increasingly accepted as a politically inclusive term which permits all nomadic people, whatever their ethnic origins, to acknowledge some form of collective identity whilst recognising the structural constraints and common experience of prejudice and racism encountered by all currently nomadic people as well as those who are 'ethnically' Gypsies or Travellers albeit living in housing. Across Europe "Roma" is used as a broad term to include all groups with nomadic histories, (Women's and Equalities Committee 2019). However, in UK policy documents Roma are classified as migrant populations from Europe who share a cultural/linguistic heritage with English (Romany/Romanichal) Gypsies but who, as relatively recent migrants, are perceived of as 'other' than Gypsies and Irish/Scottish Travellers who have a history in mainland Britain of many hundreds of years. English, Welsh and Scottish Gypsy/Travellers and Irish Travellers are recognised in law as ethnic groups under the Equality Act 2010 and Roma protected by their ethnicity and national identity (Council of Europe 2012; Cromarty 2018; H.M Government Equality Act 2010; Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2017).

UK education policy uses Gypsy/Roma to identify Gypsy and Roma pupils and separate ascription for Irish Travellers.

## The UK in Context

As this chapter is written the UK is undergoing an unprecedented period of political and economic change following the decision to leave the European Union (EU) in the 2016 referendum (Brexit). The country has a diverse and increasing population which is currently estimated in excess of 66 million people (Office of National Statistics 2018). It is the rapid population growth attributed to increased migration following the right to freedom of movement across the EU that has in part influenced the decision to leave the EU (Wadsworth et al. 2016).

Throughout history people have traversed the world and migrated across continents to trade, avoid persecution and improve their life chances. In the UK, early evidence of migration is attributed to increased trading power in the sixteenth century, with small numbers of European, African, Asian people entering the country (Migration Watch 2018). Although their origins are unclear, it is during this period that Romani Gypsies are first recorded and given the similarities between Romany and Indic Hindi and Sanskrit languages, it is widely accepted that they were nomadic travellers of Indic heritage. The arrival of nomadic people continued into the seventeenth century with an influx of Irish Travellers, who together with Romani Gypsies are now recognised as the indigenous Gypsy and Traveller population (Okely 1983; Bancroft 2005).

Migrant numbers remained relatively small until the twentieth century when successive governments sought to improve the economy by increasing the working population, most notably following the Second World War and when the UK joined the European Union (EU) in 1973 (Migration Watch 2018). However, the more recent expansion of the EU in 2004 and 2007 to include Central and Eastern European countries of Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic resulted in a significant increase in migration to the UK (Morris 2016). Following this expansion, the right to freedom of movement provided many Roma people, amongst others, with the opportunity to move to the UK and other western European countries, aiming to improve their life chances (James 2017; Morris 2016). As a result, net migration from EU countries has continued to increase, trebling between 1995 and 2015 from 0.9 million to 3.3 million (Office of National Statistics 2018; Wadsworth et al. 2016). This unprecedented increase led to moral panic, with influential media and political campaigns capitalising on migration as a key issue in the referendum. Much of the media focus was directed at Roma migrants with overwhelmingly negative reports suggesting that they were ‘benefit tourists’ and criminals (Naydenova and Butler 2014; James 2017). In contrast to this, migrating Roma families cite employment and improved life chances for their children as their motivation for resettlement (Ryder et al. 2014). Nonetheless, it is against the backdrop of racist discrimination, usually targeted at the indigenous Gypsy and Traveller population, that Roma migrants in the UK also find themselves: having left their home countries to avoid prejudice and disadvantage only to find the same, albeit perhaps to a lesser extent in the UK (Morris 2016).

Although migration has been a key focus of Brexit, an increase in social disadvantage resulting from austerity measures and driven by the neoliberal politics of post-2010 coalition and conservative governments, has also been influential (Warwick-Booth 2019). Neoliberalism favours marketisation, competition and privatisation. Whilst this ideology aims to improve the economy and reduce inequality through competitive market forces, the social divide is increasing: the rich become richer and the poor poorer (Davidson 2013; Moss 2014; Marshall 2018). This became evident in a decade of austerity which has seen a significant increase in social disadvantage, with three in 10 children now living in poverty and little improvement in intergenerational ethnic minorities experiences of poverty and deprivation. Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are particularly disadvantaged, having the poorest life chances of any ethnic group in the UK (Diacon et al. 2007). Consequently, they face significant disadvantage across the four key social determinants of employment, education, housing and health: experiencing high levels of homelessness or poor housing; barriers to accessing healthcare leading to poorer health outcomes; and the lowest educational attainment levels (Morris 2016; Women's and Equalities Committee 2019).

For some time, education has been recognised as a key driver for improving economic growth and social mobility. As a result, of increasing poverty and social disadvantage not all children have positive early childhood experiences. Hence current education policy has been developed with the aim of providing equal and inclusive education opportunities, as the next sections of the chapter discuss.

## The Educational Landscape

Although the focus of this chapter is on UK education policy, it is important to note that there is not a unified approach to education policy across the four nations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Although similar, there is not space in the chapter to fully discuss the education policies, frameworks and variations of each nation, so as the largest Roma communities are located in England the focus of this discussion will be the education policy for England (Brown et al. 2013, 2014).

As neoliberalism underpins the political landscape, it is not surprising that it also shapes education policy, shifting the focus of education from a pedagogic approach to one focused on future economic outcomes as stated below:

Education is the engine of our economy, it is the foundation of our culture, and it's an essential preparation for adult life. Delivering on our commitment to social justice requires us to place these 3 objectives at the heart of our education system (Gibb 2015; DfE 2013).

Accordingly, current policy sees education as a tool for economic growth with children viewed as 'future citizens' essential to the economic prosperity and social mobility of the country (Peckham 2017; Marshall 2018). Although education is recognised as the key to social mobility, one of the main challenges with the present

education system is closing the attainment gap: the gap between the achievements of pupils from different social backgrounds. It is against this backdrop of an increasingly socially and geographically divided country driven by austerity that hinders the progress of closing the attainment gap leaving some children, most notably Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, struggling to improve their life chances (OFSTED 2014; Cromarty 2018). Currently the national attainment gap at the end of secondary school between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers is 19.3 months (Andrew et al. 2017), increasing to over 2 years for GRT children (Hutchinson et al. 2018). This is illustrated by the national achievement data for 2016, nationally 57% of pupils attained the expected qualifications of 5 GCSEs (or equivalents) at grades A\* to C, including English and Maths. The figure for pupils identifying as Gypsy/Roma was 9% (Cromarty 2018). Moreover, it is widely recognised by both researchers and policymakers that the gap between children from different social backgrounds is well established by the age of five. For example, children aged five with poor vocabulary are more than twice as likely to be unemployed at the age of 34 (Andrew et al. 2017).

Recognising how crucial the first 5 years of life are in determining later life chances has resulted in education being the catalyst for improvement. Consequently, the UK's education policy has an 'earlier the better' approach to children's education. Unlike most European countries where formal schooling begins at 6 or 7 years of age, in the UK compulsory schooling starts at 5 years of age, although most children begin formal schooling between the ages of four and five and will have experience of nursery or pre-school from 2 or 3 years of age (McDowall-Clark 2017; Peckham 2017). Underpinning this early start policy are the independent reviews of Field (2010), Marmot (2010) and Allen (2011) who collectively emphasised the need for early intervention to improve individual life chances and break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. As the importance of the early years became evident, early years' provision has been formalised and influential in reducing early disadvantage, aiming for all children to start school on an equal platform.

## **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is enshrined in UK legislation, stretching back to the Education Act of 1944 and more recently underpinned by the Human Rights Act 1998, Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and the Equality Act 2010. Nonetheless, there is a tension between current education policy's measurement driven approach where schools are less likely to encourage underachieving pupils (such as those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds) to attend their schools with the inclusion agendas which aims to improve individual outcomes and underachievement (Bhopal 2011; Ryder and Cemlyn 2016).

Inclusion is a complex concept with fundamental values of equality, rights and participation, but these are often also the very things underpinning exclusion. Therefore, to understand inclusion, it is necessary to first consider its opposite exclusion and the tension between them, as exclusion can create barriers to inclusion (Booth and Ainscow 2011; Borkett 2019; O'Connor and Bolshaw 2018). It is not enough to be 'included' by just being within the same environment, inclusion is about belonging, empowerment and participation (Borkett 2019). Hence, providing inclusive education involves: acknowledging children's rights to high quality educational experiences in a nurturing and supportive environment; reducing exclusion, discrimination and barriers to learning; and participation by fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and surrounding communities (Centre for Inclusive Education 2018). Traveller education support services (TESS) have been fundamental to the development of these principles and the promotion of inclusive education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

Traveller education support services were first introduced to the UK educational system following the influential Plowden report in 1967 which recommended child centred education and highlighted priority areas for improvement which included recognition of the need to improve outcomes for Gypsy and Traveller children stating that:

the needs of gypsy children cannot be effectively met by measures of the kind we recommend for the more general problems of urban deprivation. They will require special attention and carefully planned action. (Plowden 1967, p. 595).

Acting as 'cultural mediators' (Derrington and Kendall 2004), TESS provide a bridge between GRT families and schools promoting the development of trust between families and schools to ensure that GRT children obtain their full entitlement to education (Clark and Greenfields 2006). TESS provide a range of services including support and advocacy for GRT families, improving attendance and reducing exclusions, classroom support, information and training for schools, transitional support to secondary schools, providing outreach educational programmes and (Wilkin et al. 2009). TESS provision has been integral to the development of inclusive practice for GRT children. However, since 2010 austerity funding cuts have severely reduced education budgets resulting in a significant reduction or complete loss of the TES in some local authorities. The reduction of TESS challenges inclusive practice and risks marginalising GRT families further as their advocates and support services are diminished, the challenge for schools is to find alternative ways of supporting children using mainstream rather than specialist support services (OFSTED 2014).

## Roma Integration Framework

The Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (FNIRIS) was established by the European Commission in 2011 as a European wide inclusion strategy following the recognition of the multiple disadvantages Roma communities experience across the key social determinants of employment, education, health and accommodation. The aim was to improve social mobility and promote inclusion into mainstream populations. This required all EU states to develop national integration strategies focusing on the four social determinants mentioned above. In relation to education, the aims of the strategy were to: improve the access to and the quality of early childhood education; reduce segregation; and ensure that all Roma children complete at least primary school education. The UK's response was to suggest that existing legislation and wider social inclusion policies with some specialist interventions were sufficient. However, these mainly focus on Gypsies and Travellers, only referring to Roma in the context of education. Furthermore, there has been some criticism of this approach by civil society organisations who suggest that the UK is 'migrant blind' (Brown et al. 2014), arguing for specific funding support for Roma communities and fearing that current EU funding that supports many of the current interventions will be lost following Brexit (Ryder and Cemlyn 2016; Women and Equalities Committee 2019).

## The Arrival of European Roma

As the largest ethnic minority group in Europe, estimated at between 10 to 12 million, Roma people have historically, and continue today, to experience widespread social and economic exclusion in their home countries (Bancroft 2005; European Commission 2011; James 2017; Morris 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising that many Roma families have taken advantage of the opportunities to improve their life chances. The numbers of Roma settling in the UK are unclear, as the 2011 National Census did not provide a separate category to identify as Roma. A more recent mapping exercise in the format of an administrative survey completed by the University of Salford estimates the Roma population at approximately 197,705 (Brown et al. 2014). However, the challenges with population counts of marginalised groups are that many will hide their true ascription because of long-term prejudice and discrimination, resulting in a significant underestimation of population numbers (Clark and Greenfields 2006; Ryder et al. 2014). Furthermore, the invisibility or perceived small numbers has a negative impact within policy and funding mechanisms as the needs of these communities are largely ignored (Brown et al. 2014). Similar difficulties are found with trying to identify the numbers of Roma children within schools. The 2018 school pupil Census for England estimates Gypsy/Roma pupil numbers of 39,672 across both primary and secondary school provision, recognising that this is probably underestimated as not all GRT families

will identify their true ascription. Smaller numbers of 1320 pupils are recorded for Scotland, under ascription Gypsy/Traveller as Roma is not separately recognised (Department of Education 2018).

Although living in the UK offers more opportunities than their home countries, as a result of lower levels of discrimination and better employment prospects (albeit often unskilled work) (Brown et al. 2013), Roma families continue to face significant challenges. As a result of discrimination within their home countries educational outcomes can be limited, low literacy and skill levels mean that employment available to Roma is often within the unregulated economy, and below the minimum wage. Low income and access to employment also has an impact on housing. Contrary to the stereotype of a nomadic lifestyle, preferred by Gypsies and Travellers, Roma have lived in settled communities for centuries, living in extended and intergenerational family communities (Ryder et al. 2014; James 2017). Across the UK migrant Roma families have settled mainly in the north of England, Kent and London, with smaller communities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Morris 2016). However, a lack of social housing means that these families often live in deprived urban areas with poor housing and often at risk of exploitation from private landlords (Ryder and Cemlyn 2016). Poor housing can lead to poor health, with difficulties accessing healthcare often due to language difficulties and their unfamiliarity with NHS systems. Therefore, Roma families alongside Gypsy and Traveller populations experience multiple disadvantages including high levels of poverty and poor health (Lane et al. 2014; Morris 2016; Cromarty 2018). Moreover, these outcomes perpetuate intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, with poor educational outcomes limiting employment, housing and health outcomes, all of which influence the developmental and educational outcomes of the next generation. Accordingly, education is central to improving social inclusion and fundamental to the rationale for many Roma families moving to the UK as the example below illustrates.

My daughter is at school from five. . . I want that she will receive a good education here and then she will have a job (Lane et al. 2014, p. 31).

In their home countries Roma children face significant barriers to education. Despite the right to education free from discrimination determined by the Human Rights Act 1998, across Europe the educational achievement of Roma children is amongst the lowest of all ethnic minority groups. Most notably in central and eastern Europe where entrenched education practice excludes or segregates Roma children (Council of Europe 2017). This starts early with most Roma children having little or no experience of early years education. This is in part due to limited early years provision and the structure of formal education starting at the age of six or seven. However, Roma children can face discrimination in accessing early years provision for number of reasons, including limited or no provision within the locality; institutional discrimination through non-allocation of places; and prohibiting transport costs (Greason 2016). Discrimination continues into formal schooling with Roma children placed in 'special' schools, segregated classes or in Roma only schools. Segregation in mainstream education is most prevalent in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Greece (FRA 2014). Although there are no official policies

for segregating Roma children the chances of them being enrolled in a special school have been 27 times higher than for non-Roma children (Lane et al. 2014; Council of Europe 2017).

Placing Roma children in special schools or segregated classes has been heavily criticised and is in fact in breach of the European Roma Integration strategy (European Commission 2011). To avoid this criticism, these schools were renamed as ‘practical’ schools (ERTF 2015). However, changing a name does not change the provision and Roma children continue to be disadvantaged. Once in the ‘special’ or ‘practical’ school system children are taught a substantially reduced curriculum, as a result re-joining mainstream education or continuing to secondary school and fulfilling their potential becomes almost impossible.

## **Roma Education in the UK, Inclusive Or Exclusive?**

As many Roma children will have experienced segregation or have little, or no formal schooling in their home countries, the inclusive approach to education in the UK should immediately improve their educational opportunities. Nonetheless, Roma children entering the UK education system face multiple challenges, not least because the educational systems across Europe differ from that of the UK. Hence Roma parents are unlikely to be aware of their statutory responsibilities regarding schooling, this can be further exacerbated by having English as an additional language. Moreover, the impact of poor parental education experiences and fear of prejudice and discrimination can create protective attitudes and a hesitance towards engaging with education authorities and schools (Greason 2016; Lane et al. 2014). In addition, cultural heritage and traditional views of education also create barriers, secondary school (11–16 years) curriculum and formal qualifications are perceived as less relevant than family-based learning and self-employment, and the expectation of early financial independence, marriage and parenthood are often valued over formal education. Protective factors including concerns about community values being undermined by formal (e.g. sex education) and informal (drug culture) aspects of education are also prominent. There are also factors linked to the school educational environment that can lead to early withdrawal from school such as, early exposure to racism and bullying; social and cultural isolation; conflict with teachers or peers, a perceived lack of support in accessing the curriculum; and low teacher expectations in relation to attendance and achievement (Traveller Movement 2019).

Furthermore, social exclusion and disadvantage also translate to multiple barriers for educational inclusion in the following ways:

*Bullying and exclusion—Roma children often experience ethnicity-based bullying and exclusion, often only socialising with Roma peers rather than other pupil groups. This can also lead to parents withdrawing children from school to protect them from prejudice and discrimination.*

Poverty and social disadvantage—*parental socio-economic status and educational outcomes can hinder their children's social inclusion and social mobility. Poor and overcrowded living environments can impact on children's development and learning outcomes.*

Low expectations of educational achievement—*teachers will often have low expectations of Roma children's achievement, expecting early withdrawal from school.*

Inequality in health and wellbeing—*poor health and wellbeing has detrimental impacts on children's development and subsequent educational outcomes.*

Underdevelopment of home learning environments—*parental support can be as difficult due to low literacy levels and English as an additional language.*

Although UK education policy promotes an inclusive approach, in many cases this still does not always translate into good educational experiences for Roma children as social exclusion often follows them into the classroom. Whilst there is some evidence of improving outcomes, Roma children remain the lowest achieving and most excluded children of all ethnic groups within schools, with Gypsy/Roma pupils well over 2 years behind their peers (Hutchinson et al. 2018). Educational attainment remains disproportionately low with attainment at the end of secondary education (key stage 4) just 11.8% in comparison to 67.6 girls and 60.3 boys of white British children. Similarly, exclusion rates are highest for Gypsy/Roma boys (120.4 per 1000) followed by Gypsy/Roma girls (54.8 per 1000) in comparison to 24.2 per 1000 for White British pupils. Low attendance and achievement in statutory education also means that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are also under-represented in further and higher education (Andrew et al. 2017; Equality and Human Rights Commission 2018). Where separate data is available Roma children have marginally better educational outcomes than Gypsy and Traveller children, with 63% of Roma pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) remaining in school until statutory leaving age compared to 38.3% of Gypsies and Travellers, illustrating improving outcomes particularly for Roma children. Whilst there are undoubtedly still significant challenges in overcoming entrenched social exclusion and discrimination there is also evidence of inclusive and successful educational experiences for Roma children.

The current measurement and outcome focused education policy creates a tension with inclusion policies. The reduction of TESS has resulted in good practice in GRT education becoming exceptional rather than the norm. For schools the outcome focussed academic policy agenda creates a tension with inclusive practice as it is challenging to be able to achieve both. Some schools do not have sufficient understanding of GRT cultural heritage or provide sufficient support under the Equality Act 2010 to prevent discrimination and bullying (Traveller Movement 2019). Under these circumstances the poor outcomes experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are symptomatic of the failure of inclusion strategies, and the marginalisation they often experience. Conversely schools that have an inclusive ethos provide some excellent educational experiences and outcomes for children. These can be attributed to schools that promote a community focused approach working in partnership with families, pupils and local communities to develop an ethos of respect. They provide

a flexible approach to learning and have high expectations of their pupils (Traveller Movement 2019).

### **Examples of Good Practice Are Illustrated in the Following Case Studies** **The Roma Early Childhood Education Programme (RECEP)**

This early intervention project is delivered in partnership with the Altmere Children's Centre in London and offers weekly 'Stay and Play' sessions for children under five and their parents. There is also a parent support programme, which encourages parents to discuss their childhood experiences as part of learning more about their own children's development and how to confidently support their children's early learning within the UK education context. The development of trust and early engagement with parents enables a smoother transition primary school (Greason 2016).

#### **Parkside Community Primary School, Kent**

Is a small primary school in an area of high deprivation. The proportion of Roma pupils on roll was 10.3% in 2013. The key ingredients of the school's success are strong commitment from the headteacher and governing body, a welcoming ethos and consistently effective communication with parents. This is achieved through good community links and an outreach worker with communications designed to be accessible, the school newsletter is pictorial, and parents receive texts rather than formal letters. Information is sent more than once to ensure that they do not forget events. The outreach worker makes home visits and feeds back information to the school. The curriculum is genuinely adapted to reflect the community's language, culture and values; this is not tokenistic. For example, a topic on homes included caravans alongside dwellings. The school reflects the tradition of oral story-telling but also places a strong emphasis on teaching reading. The impact of this support and commitment is reflected in outcomes for these pupils. In 2013, the attainment of Gypsy/Roma pupils at Key Stage 2 was well above that of Gypsy/Roma pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics and in line with that for all pupils in the school and nationally. Most importantly and reflective of the inclusive approach of the school, Parents report that the school respects their culture yet does not treat their children as 'different'. Roma pupils say they feel welcomed and valued (OFSTED 2014).

#### **Babington Community College, Leicester**

Is comprehensive school on the outskirts of Leicester, with a growing cohort of Roma students. In 2013, 10.7% of its pupils were identified as Roma or Gypsy compared with 3.9% in 2011. The emphasis of the school is on high quality teaching not interventions.

Staff members had built up good relationships with Roma families, developing families' trust was vital in securing their engagement. The home-school-links worker and a Roma support worker run coffee mornings to build up relationships with the Roma community.

(continued)

Leaders spend time listening to parents and regular meetings ensure that the families are clear about and support Babington's expectations. Roma students' progress is outstanding from their exceptionally low starting points when they join the school, but their attainment is low compared with the national average for all pupils. However, some Roma pupils are in top sets, especially in mathematics. The curriculum has been modified to reflect Roma history and culture. The college celebrates gypsy/Roma Traveller month and involves families in musical events. Students arriving who are new to English are paired, wherever possible, with a student who speaks the same Roma language and dialect.

Key Stage 4 completion rates are very high for Roma pupils and the college tracks post-16 leavers closely, most of whom go on to Leicester College (OF STED 2014).

## Conclusion

The prevailing neo-liberal approach to educational policy in the UK aims to improve outcomes for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Using a human capital approach that invests in early intervention to mediate early childhood disadvantage, this approach seeks to improve social mobility and reduce social welfare expenditure on adults disadvantaged as children. The resultant quasi-marketisation and attainment focus of current education policy is at odds with principles of inclusion, not least because austerity funding cuts have had the greatest impact on support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Consequently, there remains a serious gap between policy and action for GTR communities as antigypsyism remains commonplace and the attainment gap wide with the lowest educational outcomes for GRT children.

The Roma community remain one of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups experiencing social exclusion and discrimination, which often transfers to the classroom with some Roma children continuing to experience persistent inequalities in educational attainment and over-representation among children excluded from school. The educational challenges and tensions for Roma children are numerous and often influenced by their cultural heritage where formal qualifications are perceived as less relevant than family-based learning, self-employment, and the expectation of early financial independence, marriage and parenthood. Early withdrawal from school can also be linked to the school environment with experiences of early exposure to racism and bullying; social and cultural isolation; conflict with teachers or peers, a perceived lack of support in accessing the curriculum; and low teacher expectations in relation to attendance and achievement. Nonetheless, whilst evidence suggests that there are many barriers within education, there are also examples of good practice as illustrated in the case studies.

Inclusive education is achieved through the development of policies and legislative provision that includes excusing unauthorised school absence of children from families with an itinerant occupation, allocating extra resources and grants, to schools working with Roma pupils and building successful relationships between schools, families and the community. Demonstrating the synergy between inclusive practice within schools, wider community and social inclusion. Although there are examples of both inclusion and exclusion for Roma children in the UK undoubtedly, they have more inclusive educational experiences than in their home countries.

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## Chapter 2

# Educational Situation of Portuguese Ciganos: Social Changes versus Social Continuities



Maria Manuela Mendes and Olga Magano

**Abstract** The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the main impacts of Portuguese public policies in the area of education in Portugal, since 25 April 1974. To this end, diversified information was collected, processed and analysed involving legal and other documents about these national policies, especially those of greater impact on Ciganos, in addition to thorough mapping of ongoing projects of local and social support in the Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas, where the empirical research is being carried out. At a later stage, interviews were held with technical staff, project coordinators and local institutions, as well as Ciganos and their families. The purpose of using various data collection techniques is to capture the reality experienced by Cigano individuals and families, namely patterns of continuity and social change, particularly in the area of education, through triangulation between the discourses of informants and scientific knowledge already consolidated in these matters. We present a critical and reflexive interpretation of the policy orientations and achieved social rights, focusing on narratives of Ciganos, stakeholders and school representatives centred on what has changed in the school trajectories of Ciganos, in terms of continuity, success and permanence in public education.

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## Introduction

In the first decade of this century the ‘Cigano/Roma issue’<sup>1</sup> became a hot topic in European political debates. However, in Portugal,<sup>2</sup> until recently, political and public discussions around this topic remained residual and at the margin of other European Member State efforts, pending between invisibility in society and public policies and stereotyped negative representations. Such negative imagery helps to explain why Ciganos are still the largest rejected minority in Portugal (Silva et al. 2008).

More recently, along with an intensification of the official discourse on the social integration of Ciganos/Roma people in Europe, the ‘integration’ of Portuguese Ciganos began to take on an unprecedented centrality in the national context, finally culminating in the establishment of a National Strategy for the integration of ‘*Comunidades Ciganas*’ (‘Roma Communities’) in 2013 (Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 25/ 2013 of 27 March), this time following a direct request from the European Union to its Member States (European Parliament 2011).

As the production of ethnic-based statistics is explicitly prohibited by the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, there are no quantitative and cross-sectional studies at a national level enabling us to know the situation and the access of Ciganos to education, housing, employment, health, justice and social security, or to evaluate the implementation of the social policies associated to these aspects.

Accordingly, this chapter aims to critically analyse the changes and continuities that have recently taken place as well as during the last ten years in Portugal in terms of success and continuity of schooling of Ciganos, men and women. Presently, Cigano men and women still do not complete the 12 years of compulsory education (being very far from this goal) or acquire the necessary skills to integrate into the labour market (Mendes et al. 2014). Based on a literature review about policies, programmes and projects active in the last decade, which evidence suggests has influenced an increase of the Ciganos’ educational qualifications in Portugal, and on recent research findings obtained from a 2-year research project conducted by the authors in the Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas, which involved fieldwork conducted in neighbourhoods marked by a high concentration of Portuguese Cigano families, inside urban areas, school ethnographies and in-depth interviews with Ciganos and individual and institutional stakeholders who worked in the territories where Cigano families and persons lived, this article aims to critically analyse the persistence of social regularities in associating Portuguese Ciganos to low education qualifications and the persistence of high school absenteeism and dropout rates. The Portuguese case is also contextualised within a wider European education policy targeting Ciganos. In view of the striking absence of research on the impact of

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<sup>1</sup>We maintain the term in Portuguese, as it is still recognized and used by the Portuguese Ciganos themselves. In international context, the term can be understood as Portuguese Roma or Romani persons.

<sup>2</sup>Portugal lived a democratic revolution on 25 April 1974.

academic success and school continuity on Cigano students, both at the individual and family/community levels (Bereményi and Carrasco 2015, p. 7) this reflection hopes to mitigate this lacuna which is transversal to the Portuguese scenario.

Although Cigano children and youth are more present at Portuguese public schools compared to previous periods, there continues to be a high number of cases of educational underachievement and early school leaving. These circumstances reveal the incapacity of policies and even compensatory measures to overcome the challenge of (in)completion of compulsory education, a situation that persists and continues largely unresolved in Portuguese society in relation to Cigano citizens.

It is in this analytical context that the present chapter is founded on the results of qualitative research which demonstrates minor changes in Cigano-school relations. It is also clear that there is a tendency towards the persistent and continuous reproduction of social and educational inequalities in relation to the Ciganos. This analysis begins by outlining an updated diagnosis of the educational situation of the Ciganos in Portugal. We subsequently examine the projects and policies of greatest impact on Cigano schooling, attempting to draw out what has changed in the relationship between families and school; and lastly, some concluding notes are presented concerning school-family articulation in the Cigano community.

## **Background and the Portuguese Context**

In Portugal, estimates suggest that there are about 40,000 to 60,000 Portuguese Cigano citizens (ACIDI 2013) and although these numbers vary according to the sources and the theoretical and methodological procedures used, it is consensual that it is a small population number compared to other European countries. Nevertheless, the living conditions and challenges experienced by Portuguese Ciganos are close to those of other countries, particularly in terms of the analytical axes often referred to: education, employment and vocational training, housing, health, but also in terms of the discrimination to which they are subject and the ignorance about their plural ways of life (ERRC/NUMENA 2007; FRA 2012). Ciganos are affected by social and economic vulnerability, reflecting a complex set of interrelated factors. According to O'Hanlon (2010) "Access to education and the educational attainment of Gypsy/Travellers is affected by direct and systemic discrimination in, and exclusion from, education and influenced by their overall conditions of life, which are invariably characterised by high unemployment, substandard housing and poor access to health services, creating a vicious circle of poverty, exclusion and marginalisation" (p. 250).

The wave of scientific analysis produced from the 1990s up to the present prevailing qualitative and micro studies located in very specific geographic areas has contributed to a better understanding of Portuguese citizens who identify themselves as Ciganos (Mendes and Magano 2013). These studies evince the plurality of ways of living, the exclusions and tensions experienced, the complexity

of intra and inter-ethnic relations (Afonso 2012; Mendes and Magano 2013), and also the changes and continuities between generations and those who are considered by other Ciganos as living a life as ‘*Senhores*’ (‘*Gentlemen*’) (Magano 2014). The national study (Mendes et al. 2014) corroborates most of the findings already demonstrated by previous research but has also exposed the harsh reality still experienced by Ciganos and the deep inequalities between Portuguese Ciganos and non-Ciganos. The data collected show the existence of strong contrasts at the level of school education between Ciganos and non-Ciganos and between Cigano men and women. Thus, among the 1599 respondents, about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of them did not go beyond primary education or never attended school and only 2.8% finished secondary and higher education (Mendes et al. 2014). In the European context, school segregation and other forms of discrimination are also common. There are exclusion dynamics from the moment Ciganos enter school: classification procedures are generated and Ciganos are moved to special education (for disabilities) and they show a minor presence in higher education (IRS 2008). This is a very serious form of discrimination and violation of the Rights of Children and Youth.

The characterisation achieved somewhat reinforces several of the stereotypes often used towards Ciganos, especially when viewed in a linear and deterministic manner: the prevalence of low schooling levels and high absenteeism rates (starting in primary education), high school dropout in the fifth and sixth year of education, particularly for girls, evidence of strong gender inequalities and a high dependence on social policy measures, namely, *Social Integration Income* (‘RSI’) and other family allowances. Despite this, there has been a significant increase in school attendance since 2000. Nevertheless, the results of our study show important ongoing changes and their impacts on various dimensions of Cigano life in Portugal, such as a growing interest in schooling, an improvement of the relationship between the school and the families, a reduction of absenteeism and school dropout rates through RSI policy and a higher presence at nurseries and kindergartens. Furthermore, it is important to mention the increasing participation of women in literacy courses (Mendes et al. 2014). The increase of educational qualifications is related to trajectories of social mobility in Portuguese society (Almeida et al. 1993) and it is known that socialisation through schooling promotes the learning of citizenship rights (Vala et al. 1999). Yet, in the European sphere, Ciganos are often perceived as the most disadvantaged minority in Europe. However, it should be mentioned that the Ciganos are not the only ethnic minority that experiences educational deprivation, such as is the case of Afro-descendants in Portugal (Seabra et al. 2016). People from ethnic and language minorities all over the world face similar disadvantages (for an overview, see UNESCO 2010, pp. 149–153). Even though the patterns of educational exclusion of different ethnic minorities vary, the structural drivers underlying these processes, might be similar for such heterogeneous groups as migrants, indigenous people and Gypsies/Roma (Brüggemann 2012, pp. 10–11).

## What Do we Know About the Educational Situation of Portuguese Ciganos?

According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA 2017), World Bank (Gatti et al. 2016) and other international bodies, Roma people and families are severely affected by social and economic vulnerability, arising from a complex interplay of factors of multiple, historical, structural and intersectional discrimination, which are correlated with each other. Gender, as well as other characteristics such as age, religion, nationality and socioeconomic status, cross with the Roma ethnicity generating a bundle of variables that intensify the complexity of the situations of inequality marking the lives of these citizens. The findings of EU-MIDIS II (FRA 2016) show that Roma children fall short of their non-Roma classmates in all education indicators. Merely half (53%) of Roma children aged from four to six years old, the latter being the age of starting compulsory primary education, participate in preschool education activities. On average, 18% of Roma aged from 6 to 24 years old attend a school level below that corresponding to their age. The percentage of early school leaving among the Roma is disproportionately high compared to the general population. Segregation at school continues to be a problem in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia.

Moreover, and notwithstanding the profusion of social and educational policies and the implementation of National Strategies (and European) aimed at integration of Cigano communities (2013–2020), among the Ciganos and compared to the rest of the Portuguese population, there continues to be low schooling levels, high rates of educational underachievement, dropout and illiteracy, as well as low rates of higher education graduates.

Despite the constraints imposed on the production of ethnic-based statistics in Portugal, nevertheless, some surveys and research projects have been conducted enabling us to get a closer and quantified look at the presence of Ciganos in Portuguese schools. The most recent data relative to the academic year of 2016/2017 (DGEEC 2018) are very revealing. Out of a total of 10,349 Cigano students enrolled, 48% had been held back to repeat the year in one or more years, denoting a direct relationship between the rate of repeating the year and the schooling level. In other words, this rate decreases as the schooling levels rise, being 45.4% for students of the first cycle of Elementary Education; shifting to 23.7% in the second cycle of Elementary Education; 13.8% in the third cycle; and 2.0% in Secondary Education.<sup>3</sup>

Although the overall school dropout levels stand around 5.9%, it is important to highlight some nuances which should not be ignored and are interesting to scrutinise, as this figure reaches 11.3% in the second cycle of Elementary Education and 8.8% in the third cycle. Gender inequalities are particularly marked, namely in the Lisbon metropolitan area, where the dropout rate of girls in secondary education is 37.5% (compared to 16.2% among boys); 25.1% in the second cycle of Elementary

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<sup>3</sup>The age of entry per elementary cycle in first cycle: 6 to 9 years old, second cycle 10 to 11 years old, and third cycle 12 to 14 years old; and in secondary: 15–18 years. Compulsory education is 12 years.

Education (versus 8.2%) and 20.4% in the first cycle of Elementary Education (versus 14%).

In this scenario, it is also noteworthy that there is a growing interest of Cigano families in Home Schooling, with highest participation seen among girls, primarily in the second cycle (52 versus 12 boys). Alongside this, Distance Learning appears to be yet another resource that families have mobilised. On a purely illustrative note, 5 Cigana girls aged between 10 and 13 years old were identified as attending Distance Learning (Oliveira 2018), resident in an area assigned to a small socio-educational intervention project in a neighbourhood in the city of Lisbon. However, the real impacts and outcomes of these two educational offers among Cigano children and youth are as yet unknown. Although the families consider this type of schooling positive, in practice, the young people feel a lack of support and it remains to be ascertained whether this does not consist of yet another new way of segregating young Ciganos (Mendes et al. 2020), separating them from real school contexts and from intercultural and interethnic conviviality.

These data complement the available information that was collected under the National Study on Cigano Communities (Mendes et al. 2014), which surveyed 1599 Cigano individuals on national territory. This study reveals that  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the respondents never attended school or did not go beyond the first cycle of Elementary Education; only 2.8% possessed a secondary school and/or higher education diploma (Mendes et al. 2014). In contrast, in the same year, 19.2% of the Portuguese population had completed secondary education and 16.5% higher education (Pordata 2014). However, these schooling levels are not distributed homogeneously and uniformly throughout the country, as patterns of regional nature stand out clearly, with illiteracy rates being higher in the Algarve and Alentejo, standing at 39% and 38%, respectively. It is in the North and Lisboa e Vale do Tejo regions that these rates are lowest. Conversely, it is in these regions and in the Centre that a higher proportion of people with at least the third cycle of Elementary Education is concentrated.

## Methods and Fieldwork

The methodology adopted in this study is qualitative and combines several techniques: documentary analysis, institutional interviews and interviews to Ciganos in order to collect information about numerous experiences and life paths regarding the impact of the social policy measures, mainly in the area of education. Taking this into account and aiming to cover and analyse the main impacts of public policies in education, we adopted several strategic methods: (1) mapping and characterisation of the institutions, services and ongoing social intervention projects in the Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas; and (2) we conducted 36 interviews 18 in each of the territories addressed, such as within Private Welfare Institutions, Local Authorities, Groups of Schools, Local Development Associations and other NGOs. As a result of the interviews to socio-institutional actors (NGOs, public services, churches,

mediators, Cigano representatives) that we have always considered as key interlocutors due to their intervention experience, knowledge and territorial proximity, we were able to map and characterise, on a preliminary basis, the Cigano population and its living conditions. We investigated whether the Ciganos live in well-identified communities or in big groups or in small groups or even isolated in areas mainly inhabited by the non-Cigano population (Rughiniş 2010, pp. 360–361), the constraints and opportunities of integration and some of its basic features.

It is estimated that the Cigano population covered by the local projects, in which technicians and coordinators were interviewed, is approximately 1500 persons in the Porto Metropolitan Area and 6200 in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. The role of the institutions in solving the problems of the Cigano population is especially mediation—namely in the connection, facilitation and streamlining of the access to different services—health, education, housing, social security, among others, most of the time helping to read the officially published information.

In a third moment, (3) 72 semi-structured interviews were conducted to Ciganos, 36 interviews in each area, in six selected territories where Ciganos live and there are ongoing local intervention projects. These interviews were conducted to 52 women and to 34 men in 3 neighbourhoods of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and 3 in the Porto Metropolitan Area. The selection of these places was based on several factors: the ease of approach to the field due to the fact of having previous knowledge and contacts in the field; the presence of public policies and diversified measures; the presence of a significant number of Cigano individuals and families; the existence of projects in the territory (e.g. ‘*Escolhas*’ programme); the choice of diversified residence areas, type of housing, environment and location and the reference of these territories in the media news. The script of these semi-structured interviews focused on issues regarding school trajectories, taking into account gender issues, relationship between school and families, support and incentives for education, importance of the projects and social policy measures related to permanence, return, success and continuity of the Ciganos in school. The interviews were tape-recorded with the data subsequently being transcribed. The interview data were analysed using methods based on grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990) in which themes were coded and indexed, using MAXQDA software.

## Public Policies and Cigano Education

Public policy measures are universal, so there are no specific measures in accordance with the social and cultural origins of individual citizens. The right to education, enshrined in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, and fair and effective equality in school access and success (articles 73–77) is of utmost importance in Portuguese society. In this context, the Framework Law of the Education System

(*Assembleia da República*. 1986) established the general framework of the current educational system and defends universal, compulsory and free primary education. Since 2009, compulsory schooling has expanded to 12 years and it was established the universality of preschool education for children from the age of 5.

In terms of educational support measures, we highlight, in particular, the Educational Territories of Priority Intervention Programmes (TEIP) and other alternative measures to regular education, such as the Integrated Education and Training Programme (PIEF), created in 1996 and 1999, respectively. Currently, TEIP3 is in force, under the auspices of the Ministry for Education and Science, which is guided by the central objectives of promotion of educational success, combat of indiscipline, early school leaving and absenteeism, educational guidance and qualified transition from school to active life, and coordination between school, family and community. Under the joint supervision of the Ministry for Solidarity, Employment and Social Security, PIEF is an exceptional measure aimed at encouraging compliance with compulsory schooling by minors and ensuring the academic and professional qualification of minors aged 16 years or over, in a situation of exploitation of child labour, namely, those that have concluded employment contracts.

The '*Escolhas*' programme also deserves attention, having appeared in its first generation in 2001, and is now in its sixth generation (2016–2018). The main objective of this programme is to promote the social inclusion of children and youths from the most vulnerable socioeconomic contexts, with a view to equal opportunities and the strengthening of social cohesion. This measure includes the most important actions developed in promoting school inclusion and non-formal education, due to its impact on Cigano youngsters and families (Calado 2014, p. 73).

In terms of housing, the State has financially invested in distinct actions of relocation in social housing with controlled costs (built or acquired), especially the Special Relocation Programme (PER), which began in 1993. Under this public housing policy many Cigano families have been rehoused all over the country, almost always in a concentrated form, with superficial knowledge about their ways of life and without taking into account certain particularities (Pereira and Rebelo 2013).

Another important area of public policies involves the social protection of citizens. In this respect, it should be noted that the guaranteed minimum income (RMG) was created in 1996, applied from 1997 onwards, and replaced in 2003 by the social integration income (RSI). These social policy measures to fight poverty are intended to support people or families who find themselves in a situation of serious economic distress and at risk of social exclusion. In these cases, the State provides a cash benefit to meet basic needs, and an insertion programme that encourages social, professional and community integration. Although there is no available data at a national level on the number of Cigano beneficiaries, those that are available do not precisely unveil this situation (Branco 2003). In 2008, the Social Security Institution disclosed that 3.9% of Cigano families were beneficiaries (5275 out of 42,8131) (Parliamentary Committee 2008); other sources attest that 35.9% of Ciganos of active age received social integration income (Santos et al. 2009). Recently, the national study on Cigano communities reveals that among 6089 Ciganos (who are

the head of households) the main income source of 33.5% is social integration income (Mendes et al. 2014, p. 185).

The Promotion of Education Operational Programme (OPRE) has been enforced since 2016, arising from a partnership between the Portuguese High Commission for Migration (ACM), through the *'Escolhas'* programme, and a Cigano association (*'Associação Letras Nómadas'* or Nomadic Letters Association). This initiative is directed at students of Cigano origin that are attending higher education, and aims to attenuate the existing barriers between Ciganos and the formal education system as well as to prevent early school leaving in this study cycle. However, the selection criteria and the impact of the program are not known until now. It is important to mention that National Strategy for the Integration of Cigana Communities was reviewed in 2018, being perceived as an integrated and intersectorial approach, aligned with other national strategies such as the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018–2030 *'Portugal + Igual'*, namely in the recognition of the particularity of Cigano people and their experiences of discrimination, as well as international commitments with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **Individuals, Families and Social Policies: The Voices from the Field**

In the two metropolitan areas the participation of Ciganos in the services and projects is generally high and the opinions expressed are mainly positive; these are strongly influenced by the creation and consolidation of relationships of trust with the technicians of welfare benefits and services, in general, and the institutions and technical managers of social integration income, in particular, in the case of Ciganos, play a central role in the available range of social protection. Although this is the primary benefit referred to in relation to Ciganos, social security support to motherhood, child allowance, supplementary child allowance in the case of disabilities and also some pensions were also mentioned. In turn, the receipt of unemployment benefit is barely mentioned for this population: cases of workers who have paid social security contributions are rare, whether on the part of self-employed workers or employees. One of the implications of the contracting inherent to the insertion plan signed for the receipt of social integration income is the need for registration at public employment centres, which leads to a high number of Ciganos having the formal status of unemployed (Marçano 2011).

Currently, in both metropolitan areas most Cigano families live in public housing with a residual number in leased houses of the private market or that have purchased a house. To address the processes of relocation under the Special Relocation Programme, the respondents were given the opportunity to express their disagreement concerning practices of concentration and segregation of Ciganos: in the same blocks and in the worst places of quarters (without exits, or without access to shopping facilities or transport, for example).

In general, Ciganos that the respondents know are characterised by low schooling levels and high absenteeism and dropout rates, in the first and second cycle of primary education, respectively, but, currently, almost all children are integrated in the first cycle. The main explanatory causes of school leaving identified pointed to the centrality of Cigano marriage (Mendes 2007; Magano 2010; Nicolau 2010). Cigano families make a considerable investment in preparing their children, and in particular their daughters, for matrimonial union, very often devaluing their formal education. Girls begin to help their mothers in carrying out household chores from a very early age, constituting an important support, and learning housekeeping duties and how to take care of younger siblings, thus preparing for their future functions as mothers and housekeepers, after marriage.

I was the eldest, I took care of them all. (...) I was the one who did everything. My mother did the selling, went to the fairs and I was the one who did it. I tidied up, cooked, took care of my siblings. I was the eldest, I had to do everything. (woman, 40 years old, does not know how to read or write, has been a widow for 6 years of a Cigano marriage that occurred when she was 17 years old)

But I did everything like my mother at home. Little Cigana girl. . . My father was in prison, my mother used to go and visit. My mother would go (I was 10 years old) and I would cook the meals, I would wash, I would wash my siblings. My mother would arrive and I would have done the meal. I was 10 years old; I already did everything (woman, 38 years old, 9<sup>th</sup> year of the New Opportunities Programme, first Cigano marriage at 16 years old)

This last respondent recalls the beginning of her school pathway as follows:

Interviewer: What age were you when you first went to school?

Respondent: I was 12 years old.

Interviewer: When you first went?

Respondent: Yes, it was me who wanted to go. I grabbed my identity card and went to school.

Interviewer: When you were little, you never went to school?

Respondent: No, I never went.

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: I don't know. One day I saw children coming out of a school. In those days they left at 1 pm. And I said to myself: "Ah, school". I thought that school was very important. My mother doesn't hear very well, she has hearing problems. I grabbed my identity card and said to my mother: "I am going to enrol at school, I want to go to school", and my mother: "Well, fancy that!". And I went and she is still employed there: "Look, I want to go to school", "You really do? Alright?". (woman, 38 years old, 9<sup>th</sup> year of the New Opportunities Programme, first Cigano marriage at 16 years old)

In turn, the bibliography in the area of Ciganos/Roma and education focuses on poor outcomes and the consequent educational failure arising from primary socialisation, insufficient cognitive stimulation, meager language resources, lack of motivation for learning, the absence of expectations regarding school—often reinforced by the unawareness of Ciganos who have effectively completed the ninth and twelfth grade (low number of cases identified in the two metropolitan areas) or even enrolled in higher education (in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area for example, the known cases of Ciganos who have attended or are attending university are children of a non-Cigano father or mother).

In what concerns the relations that Ciganos establish with school, we find gender inequalities, which, according to the respondents, is due to the roles traditionally assigned to Cigano women. The girls, in general, leave school earlier than boys (Mendes 2007; Magano 2010; Nicolau 2010).

The testimony of a teacher who participated in one of the focus group discussions is presented below, highlighting the need to provide technical and individualised support to Cigano students.

They need very individual and technical support for every one of them and someone with time... so that we have time to be... I think that they gain a lot from relations of trust which are able to be established and without time and without resources that's not possible. [...] They have difficulties in learning... Therefore, they need a person practically for each one. A ratio of one to one, at the moment, is very, very difficult, it's impossible! (Teacher, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles)

In contrast, on the part of some families who also participated in the focus group discussions, there is clearly an attitude of acceptance of school dropout as “natural”

I have a fifteen year-old daughter. My daughter is married. She married at the age of fifteen. She liked the man, she went. I did not go and take my daughter away from the man. I did not go racing after her, I did not order my daughter to marry. She liked that man, she went, she's married to a man, she's fifteen, and now I am going there to take her away? Now the Court is going to arrive and take my little girl from the man? That would be the last straw! (Cigano woman, does not know how to read or write, social insertion income beneficiary).

Thus, the strong pressure exerted on girls and on their families determines that the “need” to drop out of school at puberty, instilled and announced from a tender age, is internalised by these young people who also accept it as natural.

Interviewer: At what age did you leave?

Respondent: Around 14 or 15 years old.

Interviewer: And why did you leave?

Respondent: Because I was already feeling grown-up, I no longer felt comfortable at school. So there. There was also no-one left of my ethnicity and it was that thing of not having anyone. So, I left school. (woman, 22 years old, married, dropped out of school in the 7<sup>th</sup> year and later completed the 9<sup>th</sup> year in a vocational course)

For a large number of the interviewed representatives of institutions, the disadvantaged situation that marks the Cigano/school relationship is due to the lack of positive aspirations and expectations towards school. Usually, the social factors associated with ethnicity underlie the arguments for this type of explanation, the tradition and the need to preserve Cigano values. In fact, concerns about the preservation of cultural and family values are well-founded fears (Gwynedd & McCluskey 2008).

The UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey (2011 and 2017) also shows significant differences in aspirations between Roma and non-Roma. One should however not conclude that differences are mainly caused by culture (Brüggemann 2012, p. 50).

However, some signs of changes in attitude and behaviour regarding gender relations in the analysed territories are visible, albeit gradually. Such learning opportunities over life (Gomes 2013) are often stimulated by the RSI teams and

are very important for improving the living conditions of the Ciganos, and in particular of Cigano women, as education, training and qualification may enable integration into the labour market and social mobility, and may boost abandonment of the traditional way of life (Magano 2010).

The respondents even point out the relationship between the parent's appreciation of school and the tendency of their children's academic success, while confirming that the parents continue to hold low expectations as to the school's influence on the employability of Ciganos. It is also important to add that closed schools in poor and spatially segregated neighbourhoods normally present poor results. Moreover, the discontinuity in terms of projects and local intervention measures end up producing and reinforcing structural social inequalities.

Strangely, some of the professionals reproduce stereotypes traditionally associated with Ciganos, often homogenising and essentialising, almost always linking the perspective of poverty with social exclusion (Bastos et al. 2007; Magano 2010; Mendes 2012).

There are some areas where the path taken shows positive signs, such as in health, housing or education, even if only in the first cycles of primary education. However, these negatively emphasise the core issues of employment and more transversely of prejudice, preventing the Ciganos' integration and full participation in many spheres of social life; as well as the reinforcement of focus on education and training courses for the second cycle of primary education; the creation of school models and expectations adjusted to Cigano children and youngsters, for example through knowledge of reference Cigano youngsters and adults integrated in schools or in the labour market; the implementation of measures for protected employment; the appreciation of Cigano history and culture by promoting activities aimed at society in general. The respondents showed lack of knowledge about some social policy measures in spite of working in institutions deployed in the field. For example, although they have already heard about the national strategy for the integration of Cigano communities, they are unaware of its content and specific strategies, i.e. there is not a thorough understanding of the document and targets.

## **Portuguese Ciganos: Social Changes and Continuities Towards School**

Some generational changes were observed in what concerns valuing school, breaking with the past. These changes are related to the fact that many parents with children attending classes are themselves educated and have engaged in greater follow-up of their children's educational background. The future of their children is perceived in a different light, putting in perspective the possibility of pursuing a career choice and considering the expectation of economic stability, social mobility through work, the value of school as the means to achieving a 'good job' and not as an end (better education).

We went to school alone, there wasn't that business of going with their children, of meetings, it was different, I think that things have changed now (woman, 31 years old, 4<sup>th</sup> year)

I would even cry, that I wanted to go to school, but at that time the parents wanted the opposite! Nowadays, children don't want to go to school, but we force them! And at that time, we wanted to go to school and our parents wouldn't let us. (...) And also at school, they really teased us. Even the teachers... because we were Ciganos they put us apart. (woman, 45 years old, 2<sup>nd</sup> year)

Another interesting aspect is the fact that none of the interviewed Ciganos with more education (secondary school and university) attended only regular education. Even in cases of further school education, this is due largely to the influence of public policy of educational nature or social protection reflected in educational options that were professionally guided in the case of the male interviewed.

For example, among the Ciganos interviewed in the Porto Metropolitan Area, seven young people were identified whose school trajectories, already completed or not, involve secondary education, although with a single exception, all through professional routes, which also represents a progression compared to the previous generation.

Therefore, from the time they are twelve or thirteen years old, they [the girls] are promised or something else, they no longer come here. And as they move upwards, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, secondary, the funnel gets increasingly narrower, there are increasingly less students of Cigano ethnicity, and in secondary there will be two or three students here but more linked to vocational courses and not in regular education. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle there are some students that are in some so-called classes of regular education, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle they start to turn towards CEFs<sup>4</sup> or, let's say, alternative pathways. (Teacher of the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, AMP)

Abajo and Carrasco (2004) point to other elements beyond institutional that are also relevant in explaining the school success of the Cigano population: the existence of personal continuity projects; individual undertaking and pursuit of favourable conditions for the implementation of such projects; the capacity to negotiate with family, community and peer pressure; social skills and support of peers.

Among the respondents there remains a tendency to value school as a way of achieving a different job that would allow them to have a better life than that of their parents. Continuity in school is seen as a way to access employment. Together, schooling and employment are seen as drivers of social mobility where the valorisation of school continuity and access to employment are directly linked.

Effective schooling is positively influenced by social support, whether through the importance of the support of school employees or local projects, individually and this, in a way, reveals how education is done: by a combination of several methods entailing regular education and alternative teaching proposals. Most of the time continuity occurred by stages as opportunities were found to arise, revealing the connections with public policies in which individuals and families are involved.

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<sup>4</sup>The Education and Training Courses (CEF) represent an opportunity for youth aged 15 years old or more to complete compulsory schooling, through a flexible path adapted to their interests, enabling them to enter the world of employment in a qualified manner.

For technicians and some teachers, the participation of Cigano families in school is still lower than that of non-Cigano families although increased interest is recorded: it is perceived that nowadays children go to school at appropriate ages and that the first cycle of primary education is a widespread reality. There is also increased attendance in nurseries, kindergartens and afterschool support for homework and studying.

The attendance of nurseries and kindergarten is viewed as preparation for upcoming schooling, playing a valuable role in facilitating entrance into elementary school.

Because they are progressively taught, they [the children] acquire other habits, they become more educated. They have rules for this and that. It's good. They socialise with other children. It's very good. Because just being at home is also bad for them. And like this they begin to socialise. They learn how to play... (woman, 43 years old, 4<sup>th</sup> year of schooling)

It's good, by the time they go to school they know how to write their name, they already know little things, the colours, they already know the colours. It's good. But my Patrício, he never liked going either. He went when he was very young, he was 2 years old. It was punishment to go. But he still went. It's good for learning. The teachers very often help, by the time they arrive at school they already know. With my granddaughter... She is at preschool and she already knows how to write her name, the colours. She knows how to say lots of things and she's only 4 years old. When she goes to school she will already know. (woman, 38 years old, 9<sup>th</sup> year of schooling)

Another relevant aspect highlighted as a difficulty is the non-continuation of the teaching body which eliminates their preparation to work in these environments. Achieving outreach educational work is important and possible through convenience and mutual understanding. For that, it would be important for teachers to stay in school longer in order to enable getting to know the children and their families, and also to develop teaching materials and appropriate approaches.

Solutions found by schools with Cigano children and youngsters tend to concentrate Cigano students in the same classes of regular school (mostly in the first cycle of primary education) and in specific educational activities (e.g. alternative curricular paths). These classes have, as a general rule, worse results and greater teaching difficulties. Cigano students often get to second grade without the necessary skills to succeed in a new educational cycle of schooling.

Institutional players highlight the incapacity of schools to ensure that students do not miss school from the second cycle of primary education. In this second cycle of primary education there are some significant changes for children, youths and families: distant schools, increased number of teachers for different fields, i.e., teachers lose the importance shown in the first cycle of primary education. Subjects and learning contents became more complex and there is no advance preparation, difficulties tend to accumulate. To overcome the situation, work in partnerships between territory institutions is suggested.

On the other hand, in Cigano discourse there is a valuation of the skills gained in the first cycle of primary education, namely reading and writing, which are essential for reading functions and getting a driving licence. Some fears remain in what concerns school ('insecurity') and school environment, mostly in territories with a

stronger history of conflict or with a strong presence of an immigrant population, but there is a very positive distinction regarding schools of first cycle of primary education.

The reasons for early school leaving are almost always related to the instilled centrality of marriage and preservation of women's 'purity'; it is difficult to accept the teaching of certain curricular contents (e.g. related to reproduction). We are still witnessing differentiation in what concerns support to continuity of school from parents, according to gender. Girls are not encouraged to continue school from a certain age (menarche) and year of schooling (variable). For the boys the situation is different, they have the possibility to decide, which constitutes an individual option for young men.

Generally, early marriage and childbirth disrupt schooling and continuity in school (Mendes 2005, 2012; Casa-Nova 2008; Nicolau 2010; Magano 2014) after which education takes place only through vocational/training courses in cases where they are beneficiaries of social protection and are compelled to take these courses.

Even in cases of schooling extension we notice some degree of disenchantment due to lack of opportunity that persists even with the increased schooling: even those with more schooling years have more difficulties of inclusion in the labour market and feel discriminated. It is almost always considered an effort of the students and their families which is not reflected in new opportunities.

There is almost always a positive image of the teachers. Nevertheless, concrete reports persist of situations of discrimination in some territories and schools concerning a few boards and teachers.

Families experience difficulties in supporting home schooling due to lack of knowledge required to enable this follow-up and also as a result of lack of space to study due to household size: the presence of many people at home and the noise implies that it is difficult to study.

As a way to lessen difficulties in learning and improve the relationship between school and families and that of the families with school, mediators could be an effective option. There are known cases of good performance of some school mediators and that presence is highly valued in attenuating some of the major recurring problems.

The idea that enjoying school does not always mean enjoying classes does not merit reservations. Youngsters like to hang out at school but are not very interested in classes. Parents do not feel responsible when their children skip school; this is seen as the school's responsibility. In contrast, the attendance of local projects is valued, like the project '*Escolhas*', among others, which enable access to school support and recreational activities.

## Conclusion

Nowadays, it is rarely the case that Cigano boys and girls are not integrated in the school system at the first cycle level. However, from here onwards difficulties continue to persist, with high school dropout levels. While this situation varies

among different territories, an increasing number of Cigano youths, the more and the less “*brilliant*”, manage to overcome this barrier and continue their school trajectory, just like the other non-Cigano students. In any event, considering the dramatic reality that we encountered throughout the fieldwork, particularly from the third cycle, we were amazed to find that the official school data are not clear in relation to the number of Cigano youths, under the age of 18, that are in a situation of absenteeism. In some cases, the “numbers” relative to dropout were almost zero, when, on a daily basis, we met young Cigano boys and girls of school age who were not integrated in any school of the ethnographic territories.

As we observed, in the different School Groups, the cases of some Cigano students, who are above all boys, that completed the third cycle or attend secondary education continue to be presented as “*exceptional*” cases, of particularly “*brilliant*” students, just as a decade ago. We did not observe in any of the territories a gradual continuity of the schooling paths of all the Cigano students, going much beyond the first or second cycle of elementary education. On the other hand, the great majority of Cigano students, particularly the girls, who achieve third cycle academic years do not do so through Regular Education, but rather via different alternative training solutions that the School Groups we visited have progressively created to specifically enable the continuity of the schooling of some Ciganos, notably the girls. We highlight, in particular, the case of the Alternative Curricular Paths (PCA) and the Integrated Education and Training Programme (PIEF), in this last case more targeted at Cigano girls, Training Offers that the people contacted in the field refer to as targeting Cigano students. These involve classes where the percentage of Cigano students reaches around 85%. It is notable that, according to what was conveyed to us, School Groups cannot establish classes just with Cigano students without explicit authorisation from the Ministry of Education, and, as a rule, such requests have been systematically rejected.

Although the PCA and PIEF have enabled many young people, boys and girls, to extend their permanence at school and continuity of their schooling path for a few more academic years, allowing these students to complete the second cycle and many to attend and even complete the third cycle, particularly the boys and also increasingly the girls, we do not know what the later happens to these young boys and girls, and to what extent the training they received contributed to important changes in their lives, namely at a professional level. In fact, in the three territories, we found that the School Groups do not have any follow-up strategy for their male and female students, and do not have any way of assessing the real impacts of the work that has been developed. We found that more than guaranteeing professional integration, in general among Cigano students, the schools’ greatest concern is to assure that the students remain within the school system (that they learn “*basic rules*”) for as many years as possible, thus prolonging their schooling. On the other hand, the most “*exceptional*” cases, which continue to be almost exclusively male, considering the reality that we observed in the three School Groups, are currently provided with a diversity of Training Offers and Support Measures that have permitted the continuity of their schooling path and the acquisition of important skills for integration in the labour market, especially via vocational courses. In the

three territories we felt that there was an excellent embracement of these students which are often used, for want of a better term, as examples for everything. As we observed, these students are proudly “exhibited” with a visibly enormous dedication, within their possibilities, by the School Groups in supporting these students. They are also frequently involved in school activities and presented as “*success cases*” in spheres outside the school.

It is also envisaged by many professionals contacted in the different territories that the fact of Cigano students, but especially the girls, staying in contact with school for a longer time, irrespective of the training offer in which they are placed, will always have impacts on their lives and, overall, on the integration of this population in the school system.

The impacts of schooling on professional life are still seen by Ciganos as not as significant as the expectations raised, which can be due to racism and discrimination issues. They are still very below the training average, despite being significantly higher than that of their parents, but they are always highly constrained in the labour market and when they access it, they almost always get the most disqualified jobs. In fact, the universalism of Portugal’s public policies has not had the desired effects in terms of reducing the levels of poverty, exclusion, discrimination and racism concerning Ciganos.

Although the changes underway are quite marked with a greater presence of Cigano children and youths in public schools, there are still significant differences between the organisational and operating logics of the school institution and those of Cigano families, hindering the communication between these two relational spheres. In the first place, school teaching procedures appear to continue to be discordant with those activated within the family group, in which learning based on real experiences is favoured; in other words, acquired and incorporated know-how are simultaneously know-how-to-be and know-how-to-do.<sup>5</sup> As stated by Jean Pierre Liégeois (1987, p. 63), the teaching procedures “unfold in the context of real tasks, through participation, and not through verbal instruction, and as preparation for future participation.” Secondly, teaching contents are also of a very distinct nature, where the same author stresses that for Ciganos, the problems are essentially those of their daily life, “those of personal interaction, logical-formal generalisations are unknown, useless and replaced by specific and particular symbolisms, which reflect shared and reciprocal experiences.” (Idem).

Thirdly, Cigano intergroup organisation and functioning logic continues to be distant from the way that the school institution is structured. Their lifestyle is still to a large extent based on the present, the immediate, on survival and management of daily life, with higher value given to outcomes than processes. Having a certain schooling level is not yet very important for the ethic and relational status and capital of the individual within her/his ingroup. For Ciganos, it is still above all the family’s prerogative to ensure education, and not the school’s mission. Non-Ciganos have a

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<sup>5</sup>Liégeois (1987, p. 216) also adds that “apart from the child’s experience, none of the significances within the school are, for this child, of any significance.”

stereotyped representation of education which is portrayed by Cigano parents, considering it markedly permissive, sloppy, sometimes even negligent in which there are no prohibitions, rules, physical punishment and control, a representation disseminated in various European countries (Lukšić 2019). However, the reality is far beyond what is apparent and, in fact, these children are prepared from a very early age, in a collective process and with a strong emotional charge, to be autonomous and independent, as well as respectful of the baseline and structuring values of the Cigano group. The socialisation of these children is markedly intergenerational and normally occurs in the context of the extended family, but in an informal manner, non-bureaucratised, experiential, by observation, imitation, mimicry; through the cohabitation and conviviality of various generations and in a collectively form, in which times, roles and tasks intermingle, not in a restrained way but rather contextualised in a polychronic cultural logic (Hall 1976).

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# Chapter 3

## Segregated Schools, “Slow Minds” and “Must Be Done Jobs”: Experiences About Formal Education and Labour Market in a Roma Community in Romania



Zsuzsa Plainer

**Abstract** Based on a long-term ethnographic fieldwork, this study applies the cultural-ecological theory to understand reasons for making and maintaining a segregated school in a Romanian town, and those community forces which track and maintain Roma children there. As findings indicate, creating and sustaining such an institution reflects the flip sides of Romanian national policies, which due to the financing strategies and centralized curricula—involuntarily—block the chances to provide quality education to marginal groups. Tracking and staying of Roma children into such schools is a result of their parents’ ambivalent experiences with formal economic activities and formal education. Experiences with work and schooling shared by this urban group of Roma reveal that parents have clear expectations towards school: transmission of practical knowledge, good treatment and isolation of the school problems from family life, which not always can be fulfilled by the educational units.

**Keywords** Roma school · Educational inequalities · Cultural ecological theory · Romania

### Introduction

School segregation is a core issue in the scholarship on Eastern European Roma educational inequalities (for relevant literature see Messing 2017). Academic and policy accounts define this process as the making and reinforcement of those institutions, where—intentionally or not—Roma pupils are physically separated from their non-Roma peers (Rostas and Kostka 2014, p. 272), the proportion of Roma children exceeds 20%, truancy and school abandon is high, educational

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achievement of the students very low and the institution has bad fame (Rekosh and Sleeper 2004).

Despite many great researches focus on the institutional factors responsible for making segregated educational units (Rostas and Kostka 2014; Rostas 2012; Feischmidt 2013), little do we know about the (Roma) community–, (Roma) parents’–, (Roma) families’—experiences that unwillingly track and maintain children in these schools. However there are only a few investigations on the relation between education and macro-social factors (Szalai 2010), researches on labor market and school segregation from an emic point of view are even less.

This study intends to account the above-mentioned issue. Based on a long-time ethnographic fieldwork, it investigates experiences about work and formal education shared by parents and grandparents from a Roma community, whose children attend a segregated school. In doing so we try to identify the commonly shared practices and beliefs, which are unwillingly responsible for making and remaking educational inequalities in this group<sup>1</sup> through the lenses of anthropology, a framework rarely used in educational studies in Romania (Anderson-Lewitt 2012). For an anthropological approach, such practices and beliefs of the parents are seen as coping strategies of a marginalized community (Tauber and Zinn 2015). From this perspective Roma groups are not perceived as passive, hope- and helpless victims of blind social forces, but active agents, who—despite of extremely hard social and cultural pressure—remain masters of their lives (Kovai 2017; Horváth 2010).

## Focusing Outside the School: Ogbu and Its Critics

Cultural ecological theories coined by John Ogbu (Ogbu 1981; Ogbu and Simmons 1998; Fordham 1988) were chosen as an explanatory framework for this investigation. According to this approach there could be sizable differences between certain minority groups and the dominant society regarding school performance, and these differences are not standalone classifications—they are brought about as a result of the treatment of minority groups in society, which may be reflected in school. Thus, certain individual and community-based perceptions of schooling and education may occur, which may influence and/or determine school behaviour (Ogbu and

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<sup>1</sup>For earlier versions of this study see: Plainer, Zs. (2017) “This Is How I Abandoned School and Began Selling Sunflower Seeds”. Work Experiences, Living Conditions, and Relations to Formal Education of Roma Families in a Romanian Town. In Roth, K., Benovska, M. (2017). *Balkan Life Courses. Part I. Ethnologia Balkanica*, 20. pp.33–44. For community history see: Plainer, Zs. (2018). “Everybody Loved Each Other There”. Roma Memories of the One-Time Cinka Panna Colony in Oradea and Its Liquidation during the Communist Times. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. XX/10, (pp. 1–24). For institutional background see: Plainer, Zs. (2013). Audit Culture and the Making of a ‘Gypsy School’ Financing Policies, Curricula, Testing and Educational Inequalities in a Romanian Town. *Philobiblon—Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, 2013/2.

Simmons 1998; Ogbu 2003). According to this framework, school is linked with other sociocultural institutions (family, larger community) and the broader field of economy. Community forces (group relations, family) are influencing school success and failure: in this dimension, patterns of employment/unemployment, economic and social positions, social mobility, and the role of schooling within the family should be investigated (Ogbu 1981). The connection between school and the broader society is revealed in this model through the definition of schooling, which provides credentials for young adults to enter the labour market (Ogbu 1981), as: Schooling is a culturally institutionalized device for rewarding individuals with society’s status system. And the most significant content of the status system is one’s job (Ogbu 1981).

Based on such definition, this model pleads for a multilevel analysis based, on the one hand, on the analysis of the school and, on the other hand, on a macro-perspective, which intends to link formal education to the broader economy structure and the parents’ economic and social opportunities. In doing so, Ogbu assumes that children and parents belonging to low-status ethno-racial minorities use adaptive strategies at school, and these strategies strongly influence their educational outcomes (Ogbu 1981; Fordham 1988).

According to this model, such an analysis has to grasp (at least) two important dimensions: the system and the community forces in order to see, how these two influence cultural patterns of education. Analyzing the system implies how these minorities are treated (mistreated) in education through educational policies, including all sorts of discriminations in and outside the school, which sometimes are directly reflected in the classroom or the educational establishment. On the other hand, the so-called community forces have to be researched, covering the range of formal positions on the labour market, conditions of living, and access to different resources. Community forces should pay attention to beliefs about the value and role of schooling, the degree of trust between the clients and the institutions, as well as the symbolic beliefs in education and the way it enforces positions on the labour market as well as the way it contributes to minority identity (Fordham 1988).

Having in mind all the critics addressed to Ogbu for his deterministic and holistic way of defining culture (Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein 2012) I will reject to label culturally mediated patterns on education as “typical for the Roma”, as I do not see them as manifestations of a “Roma culture”. Even though the culturally mediated practices on school and work result from commonly shared experiences not independent from the global social history of the Romanian Roma, I consider them as ones typical for a group of people, who refer to itself as “Gypsies” and who may have more in common with local non-Roma, living in the same social environment, than with Roma from different sub-ethnic groups and economic conditions from the country.

## The Research Itself: The Community Itself

My Roma interlocutors (over 90% of the interviewee) refer to themselves as “Hungarian Gypsies”, this label denoting a group of Roma, who consider themselves as part of the local Hungarian society long ago. The old ones, born in the 1950s speak Romany without being able to identify their dialect, or the sub-ethnic group they belong to. The language was not transmitted to the younger ones, where the generation of parents understand Romany but are not able to speak, meanwhile the children, who are now teenagers, do not even understand it as the first language in the family is Hungarian. Children are enrolled in classes with Hungarian language, they all consider themselves eligible for the benefits accorded by the Hungarian state to those who learn in Hungarian language (*oktatási támogatás* in Hungarian).

The community lived on the eastern fringes of a Romanian city in a Roma-only colony, which was dismantled in the 1970s in line with the communist policies of urbanization (Bárány 2000; Achim 2004). Colony members were relocated from their self-made adobe houses into two neighboring blocks of flats, which gradually turned into an urban ghetto. The better-off Roma moved out from the blocks in the 1980s, before the degradation of the place, so they live now in separate houses in the area, among non-Roma neighbors; the poor ones still live in the ghetto. A third category never moved in the blocks, instead they tried to seek a house elsewhere in the area. This study deals with that fraction of the group, which live outside the ghetto, together with three families, who still live in the area. It is so, as my research unit was not the shanty town, but the school these children attend.

Many (half) of these people are economically marginal (living on social allowances, child-benefits, etc.), and are only temporary employed. Another half has permanent jobs, the women work as cleaning persons or semi skilled workers/employees in sewing factories in the town, men are hired in constructions; a great number of persons are migrants. Their children—in many cases—are brought up by the grandparents, usually the grandmothers, as the parents (the mothers) are working abroad, sending money back home.

The school which many of the Roma children attend, is located from a 15 to 20 min’ walk from the urban ghetto. It is not the only one in the area, as another one is located in the proximity (roughly 15–20 min walk, either) but on the opposite direction. Majority of the children attend this latter, meanwhile a few of them, were enrolled in the first one, together with other Roma children, who live outside of this neighborhood. The school has Romanian and Hungarian classes,<sup>2</sup> the presence of the Roma children being over 80%. There is a foundation in the neighborhood, established and run by the Reformed (Hungarian) Church, which—in strong collaboration with the school—provides hot meal and after school programme (for free) for the Hungarian school children. Another foundation run by the Orthodox (Romanian) Church is in the neighborhood, having the same services for the children in Romanian classes.

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<sup>2</sup>Romanian and Hungarian refer to the language of the education.

Data collection started in 2011, and had three main dimensions. The first one—based on interviews with the actual and previously active school staff—meant to shape the institutional processes which lead to the making of segregated school. In this phase a series of interviews were conducted with headmasters, school teachers and the auxiliary staff: psychologist, psycho-pedagogue and the Roma school mediator. The second dimension of the research consisted of interviews with the parents, and other Roma or non-Roma, who witnessed the changes of the 1970s and 1980s, the forced relocation of the Roma community during communism; this layer intends to outline the local history. The third layer focused exclusively on the parents and grandparents, whom I visited regularly, mainly after the end of each school year. These interviews were made for two reasons: to identify how personal and family experiences are related to the broader cultural patterns and the institutional setting of the school. Secondly, these interviews tried to document the changes in school performance, school experiences and the changes of parent’s living conditions in the previous 12 months.

Although class ethnography was part of this project, its findings are not as complex as to be presented here.

## **Systemic Issues: The (re)Making of a Ghetto School**

The school with elementary (0–4) and secondary (5–8) classes is a state founded one, as the majority of the Romanian educational institutions. Likewise others, it has a low level of autonomy in elaborating a curriculum (suitable for the needs of socially disadvantaged children), in financing, in hiring teachers, in establishing the number of the classes the institution needs. These all have to be “approved” by the county-based inspectorates and the Ministry of Education. Recently, the local council has more and more influence on material decisions: it decides the number of new classes and the number of children and the school staff the school can enroll.

School segregation here is not just an effect of the white-flight (leaving of non-Roma children into better institutions) (Rostas 2012), it is also reinforced by the embeddedness of national policies of education (Neumann 2016; Toma 2011). As financing of schools in Romania depends on the number of enrolled students (state allowances are established per capita), in a shortage of children the previous headmaster voluntarily gathered all those who were not “wanted” by other education units. Simultaneously, the school hired a mediator<sup>3</sup> who was seriously involved in recruitment. She visited all the parents, who could have children of school age, and convinced them to enroll in the institution. This process seemed to be extremely helpful for two reasons: the school mediator was member of the one-time colony,

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<sup>3</sup>In the climate of EU adherence, Romania applied the transnational model of Roma mediator in many schools. According with the initial definition, these persons coming from the Roma community are employed to facilitate communication between the school and the group (Rus 2006).

being a ghetto dweller for a short time, thus she was a credible person in the eyes of the community; besides she took over from the parents (who felt lost in the labyrinth of bureaucracy) all the administrative work necessary for enrollment. This process gradually turned to be a self-acting one: the parents and grandparents enrolled their children in the school about which other community members had a good opinion. They strongly demark this school from the other segregated one in the area, where—as they say—majority of the children are “blockers” (in Hungarian: “blokkosok”: i.e. block dwellers), which means “they are up to no good” at school.

Unlike the ideal type of a segregated school (Duminică and Ivasiuc 2010; Surdu 2012), this one is more or less equipped and most of the school staff is qualified and dedicated, this may explain why abandon rate is low, only truancy is high. Still, as I have previously mentioned, the school has no possibilities to invent and adopt a curricula based on the necessities of the children, meanwhile the nationally designed one does not fit the real needs (as it was worked out for middle-class condition, supposing that all children were attending kindergarten, all have books at home, all have conditions to do their home works etc.). The industrious work of the elementary school teachers to help children acquire basic skills is not recognized and rewarded even within the professional community. Material reward is not possible, as the state does not recognize such performance, and almost every teacher on the same professional level is paid equally, regardless of his/her efforts. But symbolical reward of the colleagues is missing, too:

Yesterday we had our compulsory, regularly organized meeting, were all teachers in the town are invited. Its topic was outdoor activities. My colleagues from better, downtown schools, presented their marvelous outdoor programmes like taking their children to trips in Hungary. My achievement was to take my class to the puppetry. After I finished my presentation, the colleagues looked at me sorrowfully, saying: ‘yes, you have no possibilities to work properly’. They did not realize, that for many of my children this was the first and probably the only occasion to see a puppet show. (interview with a form teacher)

## Community Forces

### *Work and Attitudes Towards Works*

In this section I intend to take stock on work types these Roma men and women performed and the values and beliefs attached to them.

Majority of the colony dwellers were economically independent in the 1970s and 1980s. Women were selling feather and used clothes or sunflower seeds in the city. Men were doing trade with horse, many worked as carriers with horse and a cart, transporting and processing wood in the city, others were involved in gambling. Both men and women did informal trade with goods smuggled from Hungary and Serbia, which—purchased from the black market or through informal networks—were highly valued commodities in the economy of shortage of Ceaușescu’s Romania. Roma were also working in public sanitation or performed day work at a neighboring company which processed fruits. These two were workplaces “which

hired Gypsies and we knew that”—as many Roma remember. Some men and women were industrial workers permanently employed by the neighboring factories.

The next generation (born in the 1970s or later) was leaving school at an early age. They helped their parents either in informal trade (scrap iron, selling coffee, gold, sunflower seeds, transporting and processing wood etc.) or—the girls in housework and child caring. It was so, as they were too young to be hired as unskilled workers. Nowadays many of them do the same (informal trade with goods, selling clothes, collecting scrap iron), or work in small factories in light industry (shoemaking, sewing), men are generally hired in constructions; majority of the Roma have only temporary jobs.

Attitudes towards different types of work are relatively similar among the community members. However benefits of industrial work during communism was acknowledged even by those researchers, who were skeptical to socialist types of modernization (Stewart 1993) these type of jobs were seen very critically by majority of community members. It was only one person, who recalls with pride those years in the factory, when was promoted from an unskilled worker to a semi-skilled one; all his working years he was accepted by his non-Roma colleagues. Others consider industrial work as “tiring”, “dirty”, “demanding as we had to work in three shifts”. There is a common belief that such work is dangerous to one’s health: “my husband was working in the factory but he got ill”; “mum was working in the plant, but she died as she had to breathe the smell of toxic materials”. More than that, many of the younger generation saw their parents, who were forced to go in a sick pension, and died before reaching retirement age, leaving their children with no material security at all. This might be a reason why such a carrier path was not transmitted as successful from one generation to another: “It was out of question for me to go and work in a factory. I had seen my parents, who got ill.”

Present day encounters with the formal employment are equally negative. The experiences below are shared not only by Roma, but all the non-Roma, who have been employed almost their entire lives and faced similar conditions:

When my sister worked in the shoe-factory, she arranged me a place here, at the Italian owner. She told to her boss that I am OK, I do anything I am asked for. But I do not liked it, as it is a dirty work and glue smells. You do not feel it anymore, as you get accustomed, but I feel like dizzying ... This is a good job, I mean it is a should-be-done job (in Hungarian: muszáj munka). I would leave it if I could but others told me, other places are worse. It is like a prison in here. I must not talk, I have to register with my card whenever I go to the loo. I always feel like living in a prison. But the bosses are not OK, they pursue you as much as you cannot stand it. You have to make 700 pairs [of shoes] but they force you to make 500 in two hours. You cannot sit down, not even for a while. And they shout at you, which is something I cannot stand. (Roma woman, about 40)

And these workplaces do not recognize one’s educational attainment:

Of course I do regret not attending a vocational school and having only 8 classes. But, on the other hand it would not help me too much. My colleagues are working next to me with baccalaureate. They have reached exactly where I am now. As education matters only of the employer takes it into account. (Roma woman about 50)

Besides, Roma narratives show, that this section of the labour market is much harder to reach for Roma than to the non-Roma:

I was refused in the shoe-factory. I could not lie, as they asked me about my schools, and my eight classes were not enough. But there was a Hungarian girl there, who told me, she was hired, although she had less. I was told to come back in a week as they have no work. [. . .]. This is what usually happens. Everything is all right on the phone but when they see you, they reply: we have no vacancies anymore. (the same narrative)

Informal work, especially collecting waste and scrap iron, as well as doing small trade with goods purchased from the Serbian and Hungarian black market, remained a major occupation either for men or for women even after the collapse of communism.

When I was 18 [in 1990] I was buying and selling, and I liked it. 10 lei, 25 lei, 100 lei which was big money in those times. And it was all mine. My sister went to school and I could bought her anything I wanted to. I went to Hungary and bought things, clothes, better than those in Romania. And I could buy food there. I had my guide, L., who was transporting Hungarian tourists, and called me when they reached the border. Then I get on the bus and did the business. It was so, as L. appreciated me very much. But we were abused by the police many times. My mother was beaten. So I thought I should find a job. (Roma woman, 50)

The meaning of doing informal trade (being economically independent, earning one's living by making up networks with the non-Roma) became a common value since the colony life. As the settlement was located in the proximity of the timber yard and oil factory, the Roma could purchase wood and oil and resell it to non-Roma in the town. But this possibility was only for "the trustworthy" as they say. So informal trade was a sign of prestige and acceptance. Besides, as they recall, purchasing commodities from the black market, helped them to improve their living conditions:

I wanted to leave out from the block, so went to the office. Gave coffee and some gold to the public servants and they arranged me to get an allocation for a better apartment. (Roma man, 60)

Doing work from a very early age was not loafing one's time. Helping the carriers during the 1970s, carrying fruits and vegetables for the vendors on the market were useful activities by which one provided material sustaining for the family.

I left school after four classes and helped on the market. I brought home some money and gave some staff. I was happy to help my mother, who was bringing us up by her own. (Roma man, 25).

### *School and Attitudes Towards School*

The most salient aspect when analyzing narratives about school is the contrast between its normative value (schooling is good) and the experiences that lay behind. In line with other empirical data (Surdu 2011) all my respondents consider schooling

important and—as a first reply—they recall positive memories about that. But, as the following fragment reveals, the years spent in formal education were rather ambivalent:

**‘Were you attending school?’**

‘Yes, there was a school in the colony, close to our house. I had only four classes but I knew much more than one with twelve years of schooling, as I knew writing and reading, because the parents and the teachers looked after us.’

**‘But you told you have only four classes?’**

‘Because I was a repetent, and sent to another [remedial] school, where we spent all the week. We were eating there and sleeping there and we were took to the zoo and for a walk. It was good. I tell you, how I reached there. I did not want to go to school, so my father sent us to this new one. The teacher agreed as we finally learn reading and writing there—she said. We spent one year there but then mom kept crying and persued my father to bring us back and she did not want to be without us. And we stayed at home. Anyway we had a lot to do there: look after the children, feed the pigs, do housework.’ (Roma woman, 60)

However the fragment raises a series a questions and problems (see later), only one is pointed out in this subsection: the negative experiences with formal education. A great majority of my respondents associate school with compulsion and pressure. Some say it was difficult to stay in the same room each day, some recall the police, who forced children and parents to attend school regularly. Other recall that “they were not helped” in school and many name teachers who applied physical force in the classroom.

### ***School and Knowledge Transmission***

Narratives on educational experiences indicate very clearly what sort of knowledge is expected to be acquired through formal education: “I quit from school as I was able to read and write”, “I want to send my children to school. I want them to know how to read and write not be remain stupid.”

The practical knowledge which should be transmitted by school has its meaning in outside the institution and is considered a symbolical advantage in economic activities:

We were doing business (in Hungarian: csencseltünk). Went to Vinga, near the Serbian border to bring soap and sweets, which were rare in those times. I was eleven and helped my uncle to look after the staff. They took me, as they I knew I can count very well, no one can fox us. I was like a calculator. (Roma man, 50)

And a school, which helps to acquire such knowledge becomes credible:

I learned how to count very early, as my father forced me. After my first school day he asked me how much is 3 X 3. I did not know, so he became angry, and I became sad. But there was a teacher in the school, who asked me what happened. When I told her, she stayed with me after hours and taught me how to count. I went back home and said: now I can do that. (fragment from the same interview)

## ***Reasons for Attending and Leaving School: The Good and Bad Students***

Most common reason for abandoning school is the lack of school success. It is noteworthy that parents and grandparents, who “were quick learners”, share pleasant experiences with school (however they left it early), in contrast with those, who were not endowed with this: “the teacher explained me a lot but I still could not see what this is about”. These children do not regret abandoning, and they were not forced by parents to stay. They had “a slow mind” (in Hungarian: *nem fog a feje*) as the Roma most frequently explain: “I had a slow mind, so my parents did not force me to go to school.” “Having slow mind” is most important reasoning when a family decides who should continue education and who can leave school among the siblings: the quick learners stay, the slow minded ones leave the institution. But being endowed with the natural skill of quick learning was not just a guarantee of a higher level of education but a source of school success and acceptance and support by the school staff, too:

I left school because nobody cared for us.

(her sister): You are nonsense. Everybody cared for us. I liked to be there, my teacher, I learned everything and the teachers liked me and cared about me. There was one, Enikő, I remember her name, who wanted me to continue and do high school. She said she arranged a place for me but I quit after the 8th form. It was because I was a quick learner and everybody loved me. You should not say, you were not helped. You were but you could not do that, that is it! (two Roma sisters of 40 and 50 years)

This pattern of the good student occurs not only in the memories of the parents but—identically—in teacher’s experiences with their children: “My older son was doing well at school. The teacher came home to us and said, he is ok, he is doing well”. Or: “the math teacher asked, who is good with Mats in my family, because my daughter can count anything.”

“Bad students” are the ones “with problems”: not attending school regularly, “being lousy”, and “being a basher” according to the school staff. In a few cases these portraits reflect the widely shared categories of cultural racism (Modood and Werbner 1997); “They said they were going for cycling. But later the girl told me, they stole a bicycle and were forced by the police to return it. This is what they called ‘cycling’. It tells a lot about their world.”

On the other hand parents expect the school to solve problems of discipline: “I don’t understand why the teacher called upon me? She said my child was uncivilized. This is something she should solve in the school.”

## ***A Good School***

Narratives on formal education trace out the main features a “good school” should have. Each parent spontaneously mentioned the foundation (ruled by the Reformed

Church) when speaking about education: "there is the foundation, where my kid goes. They spend there the afternoon, make the homework and get some hot meal. So, when he comes home everything is done." This request cannot be fulfilled by the school, as the state does not provide resources to start and afterschool programme: money and the necessary conditions for preparing and serving food (certificates from the authorities etc.). The so called "better schools" with a pool of middle class students, introduce afterschool programs with the material support of parents, which in this case is not possible. Parents "associate this with the school although we have no resources to provide this. If the foundation is closed, the school will have to loose"—according to the headmasters.

When speaking of insufficiencies, parents mention the physical distance (from school to home) as a main barrier of sending the child regularly, especially when the older siblings attend a high school elsewhere in the town, and the younger ones cannot be left by their own in the morning. Others consider a merit of the school that it claims no material contributions from the parents: "My son has a nice teacher. She asked us no money still she we celebrated mother's day at school."

Attachment to the form teachers is a frequent topic in the discussion. Roma parents and children underpin that "they are good", "they take care of the children". It was a common narrative when children were in the 0–4 classes, having only one teacher, who stayed with them all day long, including the breaks. Almost everybody missed this personal attention and carrying after the fifth class, when form teachers were replaced by five or six colleagues.

### *The Meaning of Education*

A few interviews were conducted with those, who continued school after graduating 8 classes. They—and their family—consider education a worthy thing, which has symbolical advantages:

My daughter is now in a vocational school, my son finishes the second class now, he is 10. But I told them firmly that as long as I live, school should be continued. And the 12 classes should be finished to get a baccalaureate. And the university. My son says he is going to be an electrician, as he wants to make big money. No, you cannot be rich with studies but people look you differently. (Roma man, 40).

The only person with postgraduate studies I met during the research explains this endeavor as follows:

I remember when I was defending my thesis at the university. Everybody treated me with respect. The last question I got, was to tell what is the Romany for bread. Fortunately I knew the word as we do not speak Romany at home. And after I finished, some university teachers came to me and said that I should be very proud of myself as I am example for my nation. [...] I work now as a masseur, as I earn much more with this, but still, am so proud. (Roma woman, 25)

## Conclusions

In line with cultural ecological theory, two dimensions were identified to be responsible for educational inequalities of a Roma community from Romania: systemic ones, responsible for making and sustaining a segregated school, and the community forces which track and maintain children there. Findings clearly show, that reasons for creating and sustaining it are more complex than a fear for losing one's job (Vidra and Feischmidt 2010).

Maintaining segregation reflects the flipside of the national system of financing, where allocation is up to the number of children enrolled. Incapacity to provide quality education (through elaborating an adequate curricula), to guarantee the permanency of the teaching staff (by material and symbolic incentives) result from centralisation of the Romanian educational policies, too.

Work experiences of two generations of Roma reveal that participation on the formal labour market is rarely a story of success. Narratives underpin that the socialist project of modernization, which aimed to facilitate upward mobility to the Roma by integrating them into working class, was not pattern worthy to be transmitted from one generation to another. Taking permanent jobs in the mid 2000s has—to many in this group—similar outcomes. Feeling physically controlled and forced to produce much over the assigned quantities, are not only unpleasant individual experiences but they reveal how—after the collapse of the socialist industry—Romania became a supplier of cheap workforce for western and south western companies. Moreover, due to the surrounding climate of racism, to many Roma is very difficult to reach even these fringes of the formal labour market (Vincze et al. 2019).

Economically independent but informal and sometimes half legal or illegal activities (like trading with smuggled foreign goods) seem to be a more successful economic strategy, even though its flipside are now visible: pauperization, living on allowances etc. It is so, as these convey a certain status to the performer (capacity to trade, to make up a network, to establish contacts with the Roma, instead of being subordinated to them). And this successful path needs no formal educational performance and credentials: they can be acquired through personal experience through face-to-face interactions within the family.

Although many respondents agree with the importance of education, schooling is associated to negative and ambivalent experiences, where only a natural gift, that of a quick learner, (which means to be a good student) can bring some recognition.

The good school in the narratives is more complex than a place where no child is racially discriminated. Thus, the affirmation about staying in ghetto schools because the protection they provide against racism (Messing 2014; Zentai 2011) is but one aspect. It is so, as Roma-only schools cannot entirely protect children from racial classifications: these discern students of the same origin into “good Roma” and “bad Gypsies” (Dunajeva 2017), the latter being embodied by the block dweller childrens in the investigated community. As the interviews reveal, sticking to a segregated school has more complex reasons: the geographical proximity of the institution,

credibility of the school mediator, whom they can turn to if any problem occurs, the emotional attachment to the teachers, especially to the form teachers in 0–4 classes is a very important factor to stay. Traits of a good school are also grasped through the narratives: providing food, helping with homework, mediating the conflicts “to have everything there: food, home works and all of this”. But schools have rarely material possibilities to fulfill such requests.

Experiences and beliefs of the educated community members highlighted that schooling is not seen as a source for educational mobility. It is rather a way of symbolical recognition by the non-Roma, a possibility to erase the racial stigma. This also indicates that successful policies of inclusion should not only plead for ceasing physical separation; these should fulfill expectations of each Roma community towards formal education, too.

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# Chapter 4

## School, Languages and Power in Pretend Play of Romani Children



Pavel Kubaník

**Abstract** This text explores different language ideologies and different ideologies of childhood and socialization among Romani parents and local teachers of Romani children. It also makes some notes on different modes of learning that the children can come across both inside and outside the school environment. All these features can be linked with the child-structured pretend play with school instruction as the main topic, as I observed it during my stays in one segregated Romani settlement in Eastern Slovakia. Among other functions, this play creates a natural niche of using Slovak, a language of instruction and the second language of children in Gav, which is not used in home environment of the children. I will show that, despite the teachers seeing the Romani settlement as a non-stimulating environment, the children learn many things in many different patterns. Nevertheless, the text presents the settlement and the school not as two different worlds, but as places naturally linked together through child agency.

**Keywords** Language socialization · Second language acquisition · Romani · Slovak · Child play

### Introduction

One of the possibilities of securing equal access to education in states with substantial language minorities is enabling education of minority children in their mother tongue. Although this is an option also in Slovak legislation, it is very rare when teachers or their assistants in Slovak schools attended by Romani speaking children have some knowledge of the children's language (Office of Public Defender of Rights 2013, pp. 23–24).

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This article is a short case study from a locality, where local school is attended only by Romani children from spatially, socially, symbolically and infrastructurally excluded locality. While all of the pupils in the local school were native speakers of Romani, the language of instruction at the school was Slovak. In this article I will try to focus on how teachers, parents and children deal with this practice.

I will point at different ideologies of childhood and socialization between Romani parents and local teachers of Romani children, I will make some notes on different modes of learning which the children can come across inside and outside the school environment and I will present the settlement and the school not as two different worlds (as they are sometimes portrayed by teachers), but as places naturally linked together through child agency.

## Romani Childhoods in Academic Discourse

Studying different childhoods became a visible trend in sociology and anthropology especially in last two or three decades (Corsaro 2005; LeVine and New 2008; Montgomery 2009; Wells 2017). One characteristic feature of these studies is that they don't take children as containers into which outer knowledge of more experienced people is poured, quite reversely, children are understood in these paradigms as actors, which take part in (their) socialization. One possible facet of their agency in socialization is that they socialize their caretakers into caretaking roles (for example grandfather socializes his granddaughter, but also the granddaughter takes part in socializing the man into the specific social role of grandfather). Another facet could be seen in the mutual socializing role of children in peer collectives or groups of children of different ages.

The most common context in which Romani childhood is studied so far is school education. Bittnerová (Bittnerová et al. 2011, pp. 122–123) for instance, notes that in Czech academic literature on Romani children and socialization, most of the studies focus on (non)compatibility of socialization in schools and in Romani families. The character of Romani childhoods is thus studied almost exclusively through the lens of a preset pattern of education in school. Only a few texts focus on emic concepts of childhood and socialization (Bittnerová et al. 2011, 2017) or give voice to Romani children themselves or study their agency (Tauber 2004; Viková 1996; Engebrigsten 2007).

This feature of academic discourse mirrors more general inequalities that can be found in teachers' discourse as well. During my fieldwork in Slovakia the open letter of teachers from Eastern Slovakia was published (Polgáriová and Liptáková 2012), in which its authors expressed their complaints to the Minister of Education about insufficient support for teachers who teach Romani pupils who grow up in poor Romani settlements. The letter portrayed Romani families as units without any socializing function, i.e. socialization in Romani families was not taken as simply different, but as completely absent.

In this article I will focus on second language (L2) socialization and I will show how this facet of socialization is experienced and performed by parents, teachers, and children themselves.

## Methodology

My chapter works with data that I gathered during repeated shorter fieldwork stays in the Romani settlement Gav (the name is changed) in Eastern Slovakia during 2012–2013 where I spent 5 months in total. The main focus of my research was language socialization (see below). During the fieldwork I was gathering audio and video recordings of social interactions between children and people in their surroundings. At the beginning of my research I knew the locality and its dwellers already for 8 years, during which I was in regular contact with them. Besides the research in the settlement itself, I had an opportunity to observe instruction in the preparatory class in the local school in September 2013 for 1 week, i.e. I was enabled to observe one of the first days of a group of 6 years old children from Gav in school. I had also the opportunity to informally speak with and to interview local teachers.

The basic theoretical framework of my research in Gav was language socialization. Language socialization is based on a precondition that language and socialization are multiply interconnected processes (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984)—children learn to use language as social means to reach different goals (to make a joke, to ask someone, to object) through their participation in everyday socially structured activities. On the other hand, language works as a basic medium of socialization of children and other novices. Research in language socialization focuses on repeated everyday interactions of children with their caretakers and other people in their surroundings and links conversation analysis of these interactions with broader concepts of the particular culture. Language socialization explores how these concepts permeate and structure everyday interactions with children and by doing so it addresses topics of the relation between language and culture, culture transmission and change.

In this chap. I will use also theoretical categorization of patterns of learning (Rogoff et al. 2007). Rogoff and her collaborators pay attention to social organization of situations, in which children learn (flexibility of roles, how much learners can participate), purpose of these situations both for learners and for advanced participants, means of learning, kind of communication during these situations and kind of assessment that learners can obtain. On the basis of these facets they recognize three basic models of learning—intent community participation, assembly line instruction and guided repetition. This theory points to a variability of situations and ways of learning new things in life and understands classic school instruction just as one specific way of learning children encounter during their life. In the following text I will show that children in Gav experience all these basic kinds of learning and that some of the learning situations are initiated and structured by the children themselves.

## **Ideologies of Language (and Socialization)**

The primary language of communication and socialization in Gav is Romani, or more precisely, one of its Northern central varieties [see Elšík and Beníšek (2020) for overview of Romani dialects classification]. The language of instruction at local school is Slovak. Children are exposed to Slovak from an early age through media or when accompanying their parents when they leave the ethnically segregated settlement etc. Only some of the children attend local kindergarten (often irregularly). Most of the children enter preparatory (or zero) class by the age of 6. The school is attended only by children socialized in Romani, teachers are only non-Roma whose competence in Romani is limited only to a few basic words or phrases. According to the local teachers most of the children are not competent in Slovak when they start the preparatory class. Better competence in Slovak is observed only if the children attended kindergarten regularly—however in time of my fieldwork the capacity of the local kindergarten was not sufficient for including all of the children who were born in the settlement during 1 year.

According to the teachers it is the parents who are responsible for the competence of their children in Slovak. Before my research started, the school was running a project focused on teaching the parents Slovak poems and nursery rhymes. The parents were supposed to teach these pieces of Slovak their children and thus to establish some foundations on which further competence in Slovak can be built upon. Short poems and nursery rhymes were also one of the initial activities of lessons in preparatory classes, which I had an opportunity to observe.

The teachers took Romani as a language with a restricted number of concepts that is less important for the future of the children than the Slovak language. This view was a part of a broader teacher's concept of the settlement as a non-stimulating environment. "Non-stimulating environment" was a short-cut term for the fact that the teachers were not able to identify features in the life of their pupils outside school which they would recognize as prerequisites of "normal" secondary socialization in school. The children from the settlement don't have any experience with texts, they are not led to use pencils and pens, "the only thing they have is a ball". According to the head master, the children from Gav "do not come into contact with real life". Implicitly, the real life awaits only outside the segregated environment. The goal of the school instruction is to prepare children for this life "outside", which is also part of the motto the school uses in its materials: "We learn for life". It is important to notice, that the teachers (as any other non-Roma) do not visit the settlement and their knowledge of the life of the children is based on what they can hear from the children in school and what they can infer from children's behaviour in school. Although this experience can be quite substantial, the general mindset of the teachers was that the environment of the children did not offer enough stimuli and these have to be imported from the outside. It is also important to notice that the children in the settlement of course live their real lives full of various stimuli. Chances for life out of the settlement were on the other hand limited by many social barriers. For instance, until recently not a single Romani family was enabled to buy a house in the village,

although Roma were citizens of the village for more than 100 years. Ethnic segregation is also one of the basic limits for the acquisition of Slovak in pre-school period.

To a certain extent the school is open to multicultural discourse—it celebrates the International Day of Romani, the International Day of the Roma, it involves pupils in other initiatives supporting Romani. On the other hand, this position of Romani at the school is limited by these extraordinary events. It is characteristic for the everyday operation of the school with only L1 Romani pupils that the instruction is in Slovak, teachers don't know Romani and they refuse the possibility of learning Romani as an impropotional intervention into established relationships between pupils and teachers (“the children could took advantage of our competence in Romani and they would not strive for learning Slovak”), competence in Romani is not a criterion for a position of the assistants to the teacher who are part of teacher's collective at the school, and some of the teachers also claimed that they stop children from using Romani even during school breaks. By these processes the school is active in maintaining the borders between the Romani and non-Romani environment.

Although the teachers described the competence of the children in Slovak in the first months of their school attendance as practically non-existent (with the exception of several children who were attending kindergarten), in our group interview about limits and the potential of the children the language barrier was not mentioned at all (maybe because it was too obvious). However, bilingualism of the children was not mentioned as a possible asset either (maybe the reason here was that, as in case of many other bilingual children, their bilingualism did not correspond to the ideal balanced type; see Wei 2000 for categories of bilingualism). Nevertheless, during the lessons in the preparatory class that I was allowed to observe, i.e. during the first days of children's school attendance, the teachers were speaking Slovak, which means they had to presuppose that the children (or at least part of them and to a certain degree) are able to understand Slovak. The children accepted the language rules of instruction and they took part in the lesson by responding individually or (more often) in groups to easy questions by the teacher. In this sense they took part in letting the instruction flow and were confirming the social position of the teacher (had they not reacted, they would have challenged the teacher's role). Sometimes children who were more competent in L2 served as interpreters for their less L2 competent classmates—sometimes they were asked by their teachers to translate, more often they did it on their own initiative.

Concerning the style of communication during the lessons in the preparatory class, it had a clear structure of multiple initiation-response-follow up sequences in which the teacher asked simple questions (“what is this called?”), children responded (“paper”), teacher controlled the answer (“yes, this is paper”) and went on to another question or task (“and now we will draw some lines”) which (s)he again controlled and supervised its fulfillment (“not that way, do it like this”). The teacher segmented the final knowledge (for example writing) into subsequent steps (drawing lines, drawing circles etc.). The real goal of these delimited steps could not be comprehensible for the pupils on their own. Children had very limited opportunity to

intervene into the teaching process and to collaborate on its development. This was caused also by language barrier. A simple knowledge of politeness routines of Slovak (addressing the teacher with *pani učiteľka* “Mrs. teacher”) could lead to a possibility of asking something out of the set of the instruction. However, not all children knew or were able to use this simple technique during their first school days.

As I’ve already noticed, teachers took Romani parents as a key actors of socialization of their children, including second language socialization (despite the fact that the Roma live segregated from native speakers of Slovak). However, in the daily practice of the settlement not only parents, but also children and other adults were important actors of socialization. Parents took children from 3 or 4 years as those who can already take over some part of the daily care of the younger children—they could play with them, make fun with them or comfort them when it was needed. As children grew older, also their socializing competence and tasks were higher. Children of an early school age not only played with younger children, they could also carry them and help their pregnant mothers or aunts when they couldn’t carry their child on their own. It is important to notice that children in Gav had confidence in responsibly carrying out these tasks from their surroundings. Older children were able to help younger ones in different ways, especially girls could cook some basic food; 7 year old children (i.e. in the age of the beginning of school attendance) were already commonly left alone to care for much younger siblings. They had confidence to do it and they could learn through their participation in these socioculturally structured activities.

Second language acquisition fits very well into this context. Romani parents took the school as a place where their children will learn Slovak. Parents didn’t teach their children Slovak, although they intentionally prepared them for school enrollment—they taught them questions and words in Slovak which they would need to know to answer correctly (names for colours or animals, their name, age. . .). As a kind of motto or refrain in these functional language activities I see the Slovak request *Pani učiteľka, prosím si na záchod* “Mrs. teacher, I need to go to the toilet”. Parents in Gav (but also in several other Romani settlements I have visited) took this polite request as very substantial because it could save their children from being disgraced in the eyes of their classmates and teachers. However, siblings, cousins and friends, who were already attending school were also involved in the development of such preparatory strategies for pre-school children. Both parents and preschoolers in Gav were saying that children can learn the basics of Slovak from other children. In the segregated environment of the Romani settlement with close to 100% unemployment and restricted contacts to the outer world, at least in time of my research, it was to a great extent the Romani pupils who were most regularly (almost daily) crossing the border between the Romani settlement and non-Romani village. It was the children of school age who most often had to use Slovak actively on a daily basis. And it was children of a school age who were transmitting their (language) experiences naturally into their households and were spreading it in peer collectives in which they were spending most of their free time.

## Playing the Books

During my fieldwork visits in Gav, I've regularly encountered with child-structured role plays, which Romani children themselves called *te bavinel křiški* "to play the books". In my view, *playing the books*, a play with school instruction as the main topic, can be taken as an essence of children's agency in L2 socialization, although it wasn't the only situation in which the local Romani children were playing with their language repertoires including features of Slovak.

The topic of pretence during "playing the books" was school instruction. Both "pupils" and "teachers" were speaking Slovak during this pretend play, although their mother tongue or the language which was almost exclusively used during interactions in the settlement was Romani. Concerning this language environment, "playing the books" served as an important niche of the second language acquisition, which was structured and performed by the children themselves. During this particular pretend play, even 3 year old children showed they were able to respect the sociolinguistic norm of using languages in their speech community to a certain degree. Adult Roma in Gav are all at least bilingual and they use Slovak also within Romani based discourse, especially in reporting utterances of non-Roma (which is a very common function of code-switching in bilingual communities, see Gumperz 1982). This type of speaking and code switching forms also a natural part of children's language socialization. Therefore, because the instruction in school runs in Slovak, the children also use this language (or at least are trying to use it as much as they can) when they are taking on roles of teachers and pupils during play [see also Réger (1979) for a similar case of Romani children in Hungary].

The mere designation of the play is significant. It shows, that the play was played so many times, that an appellation could be established (I observed this play during all of my fieldwork visits in Gav). The name of the game also does not mention school as such, establishing books as a synecdoche for the school, i.e. selecting a typical object which is in the view of the children linked only with school (I haven't seen books in the Gav households except for the Bible in the families of several members of the Pentecostal church). This goes partly in line with the observation of the teachers that the children do not have contact with texts in the pre-school period but also undermines the supposed "lack of various stimuli" in the children's daily routines in Gav. What is more, it shows that schoolchildren in particular can mediate some kind of contact with texts to pre-school children.

Playing the books [see Kubaník (2015) for detailed linguistic description of these interactions] is played by a collective of four to ten children, in which both school and pre-school children participate. Some children take up the role of teachers, the other ones perform pupils, the game can last over an hour. Within the play children keep the rule to speak (or at least try to speak) only Slovak, i.e. to use language which is used in school. Switching into Romani is taken as a marker of out-of-frame sequences, i.e. speaking about the play or stepping out of it (for example when one of the players asks for something his/her mother who is passing by at the moment). Aside from the language it is also the broader context of coexistence of the school

and its pupils from the settlement which becomes part of the pretend play. Child teachers are asking about kinship relations between their pupils, they reprimand them for not being neat, ask them if they already brought money for school lunches and snacks, they use only the official first names of the children, not used when children are addressed in the settlement as other than official first names are routinely used in daily communication. Child teachers not only use Slovak, but speaking in the role leads them to use features of Slovak teacher talk register (for example deictic shift you > we, for example in the teacher's utterance *Prve mame pisanie* "As first we have writing"; see also the example from school lessons above in this article), pupils use Slovak politeness routines, which are used in school but not in the settlement and which don't have clear equivalents in Romani discourse. One of the first and most simple utterances used by the youngest players is addressing the teacher politely with *pani učiteľka* "Mrs. teacher", only after which they voice their requests, which can be expressed without words or with a little help from children, who are already more competent in Slovak. School children also practice and teach pre-school children to hold a pencil or to draw a line or a circle, i.e. practical skills which are examined already in school enrolment.

## Modes of Learning

From this brief summarization it is easy to infer that 6 year old children in Gav have experience with different modes of learning. They learn their mother tongue or how to take care of small children within "intent community participation" pattern. They have an opportunity to observe activities around them, they have some leeway to try new things not through some abstract exercises and words, but through their own participation in shared activity. People in their surroundings give children some confidence, which partially mirrors community or traditional aspects of the pattern in certain contexts. More experienced children can correct the other children, and children get direct assessment within shared activity.

Other examples mentioned above are close to the "guided repetition" model. The teachers recommend to the parents to teach their children Slovak nursery rhymes and sayings, children learn important Slovak words and phrases by repeating them after their caretakers and they can use them within school enrolment, teachers use the sayings at the beginning of lessons in preparatory classes as a foundation for further development of competence in Slovak and mutual communication between the teacher incompetent in Romani and children not competent enough in Slovak.

During school lessons children are participating in the "assembly line instruction" pattern—means of learning are basically words, the instruction is structured and led by the teacher, knowledge is divided into separate exercises that pupils have to fulfill.

I take this general categorization as a useful framework because it enables us to see one important feature of playing the books. The pretend play is working with the image of "assembly line instruction"—for example roles of teachers and pupils to a

certain degree paraphrase different power of these actors in reality. However, the children change the initial image into an “intent community participation” model. As opposed to the school, children who play the books have leeway to improvise, they participate in a shared activity (for example by keeping the rule to speak Slovak) and can change course of the play through their activity.

## Conclusions

In the text above I chose several ethnographical vignettes (child-structured pretend play, children’s caretaking routines, agency of children during school instruction) to point out the fact that children are not only objects of (primary and secondary) socialization, but also its subjects or actors with their own agency, which is sometimes overlooked.

For example, although the teachers noticed some aspects of peer group socialization (younger children from the same families often have better results; younger children from the same families often come to preparatory classes and already know some school activities), they did not view them as important. They took parents as the only actors of socialization and therefore they were trying to influence their behaviour towards preschool children, although they already experienced influence of peer group socialization. Child agency was overlooked also in cases when children were practically helping the teachers—for example when more competent children served as interpreters between the teacher and the children who were not able to understand Slovak. Although this was happening quite often during the lessons, teachers perceived the children basically uniquely as pupils “incompetent in Slovak” or rather as the only participants of mutual interaction who have communication problems.

The school in a segregated environment has a great potential to reach over the ethnic borders especially through its contact with school children, who are crossing these borders almost every day. On the other hand, there is also a potential of school to strengthen these borders. In case of Gav and the local school, this process can be identified in the fact that the school takes the settlement as “non-stimulating environment” and sets its goal of the instruction as to prepare the children for “real life” outside the settlement. The second example of this power imbalance is that Romani, the mother tongue of all of the pupils, has merely an emblematic function in the school. After all, the practice of playing the books can be interpreted as an evidence of the fact, that the children very quickly (even in a pre-school age) internalize the school environment as a non-Romani one—the books are played automatically in Slovak, the particular language is connected with the school in the same direct way as the books, which we can find in the name of this particular activity.

The play can be perceived as a child-structured means of resilience, or a way to cope with stress which results from leaving the safe ground of family relationships, language and culture and entering the “new world of school”. On the other hand, the play also shows that although the teachers by their ideology delimit the borders

between the settlement and the school, the school is part of the lives of the Romani children in Gav and it is incorporated into their everyday activities. The school and the settlement are not so strictly delimited entities.

Although I built this chapter to a certain degree upon my critical notes on ideologies of particular teachers in one particular school, it is important to note that the school serves here more as an image or self-reproduction of the system, within which the teachers themselves experience their socialization, primary (in their families) as well as secondary (in schools and at university departments). School is an integral part of the system and to overstep its paradigms would mean to overstep commonly shared values and hierarchies (for example who, what and from whom can learn something). In this respect, the telling detail is that the school with pupils who are all socialized in Romani has the same curriculum as if the children were native speakers of Slovak (although due to a large Hungarian speaking minority living in Slovakia, there exists a program for teaching Slovak as a second language). The teachers explicitly expressed their unwillingness to learn Romani and to overstep established power hierarchies. The school strengthens this hierarchy also by the fact that competence in Romani is not demanded even from pedagogical assistants, i.e. employees who should serve as mediators between teachers and pupils with any learning problems. Parents of the children on the other hand respect the hierarchy by not demanding instruction in Romani, which is their right in Slovakia (although it is possible they do not even know that such a right exists). In this respect, the language ideologies that can be found in one school only mirror more general language ideologies in Slovakia as a state where (only) Slovak should be spoken.

Despite all of this, I took the teachers in the school in Gav, and especially its headmaster, as people who were ceaselessly trying to find new ways of educating local Romani children, although they were facing very difficult conditions. As one of the ways that can be tested in future that I can offer on the basis of my experiences is to take advantage or seek inspiration from the socializing potential of peer groups in the Romani settlement. The other way that can open some new possibilities is to overlook the image of the settlement as a merely non-stimulating environment, or, more generally speaking, to try to see the life of the children outside the school (including their language) as something inspirational for the school curriculum.

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# Chapter 5

## From “Unsettled Fortune-Tellers” to Socialist Workers: Education Policies and Roma in Early Soviet Union



Jekatyerina Dunajeva

**Abstract** This chapter embeds Roma identity formation in the politics of early Soviet Union, by examining the role schools played in delineating boundaries of belonging and the sense of nationhood. I analyze education policies and politics towards minorities in the 1920s and ‘1930s through textbooks in Romani language from the time. I show that textbooks, often through educating basic grammar to children, sought to alter their identities from “unsettled fortune-tellers” to working Roma. Roma way of life was equated with oppression of the old, pre-revolutionary times, while new, Socialist life that Roma were to become part of was characterized by equality and work. What was seen as the traditional Roma way of life was incompatible with the goals of the state, and schools were to “transform” Roma children into productive Socialist workers. Socialism, therefore, was seen as the emancipation and empowerment Roma needed in order to leave their “backwards” habits in the past.

**Keywords** Roma · Soviet Union · Nation-building · Nativization · Education

### Introduction: Making a Nation and Building a State

State- and nation-building are inseparable developments that were linked together by mass education (e.g., Boli et al. 1985, 1989; Meyer et al. 1979; Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006), and public schools were a key institution and the primary homogenizing tool of the state (Gellner 1983; Foucault 1997; Mitchell 1988). In other words,

(...) the state contributes to the unification of the cultural market by unifying all codes (...) and by effecting a homogenization of all forms of communication [...]. Through classification systems (...) inscribed in law through bureaucratic procedures, educational structures, and social rituals (...) the state molds *mental structures* and (...) contributes to the construction of (...) national identity. (Bourdieu 1999, p. 61)

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With centralized and state-approved core curriculum, school can be considered “monopolistic, centrally controlled communication network” of the state (Azrael 1972, p. 318) and “the most important socializing institution” (Nogee 1972, p. 315). Internalization of attitudes towards the authority as well as teaching loyalty and discipline has been the perennial goals of the state. Universal schooling has been historically the mechanism “generating citizens” and managing identities through political and cultural socialization (Boli 1989) and “the road leading towards the eradication of non-conformity” (Crowe 1994, p. 76).

In the Soviet Union, schools also played a central role in creating a manageable, cohesive society, which can be more effectively directed by the “all knowing government agencies” (Stewart 2001, p. 78), and possess the necessary class-consciousness. The compulsory nature of education was important to “overcome considerable resistance” especially in more remote areas of Russia (Slezkine 1994, p. 224).<sup>1</sup> “Education involves considerably more than the developing of skills. . . it involves ‘molding the new Soviet man’. . . [and] pedagogic techniques are designed to foster discipline and respect for authority,” writes Nogee (1972, p. 315). There was “no education for the sake of education,” as Slezkine aptly put it, instead the “emphasis was on practical skills and ideological correctness” (1994, p. 222). The educational system “helped socialize a predominantly tradition-oriented population into the cultural patterns of an industrial society” (Azrael 1972, p. 327). Schools were mobilized as a tool for the state, where the students were taught “how to detect backwardness in economic, social, domestic, and spiritual life; (. . .) and then go back home and pull their kinsmen out of the proverbial swamp” (1994, p. 222).

Schooling, then, becomes an interesting area for research: How are citizens made through the educational system? How is nation-building reinforced in the process of education, and how are minority groups treated? For the examination of these questions I focus on the early USSR’s Nativization policies in the 1920s until the mid-‘1930s, which is arguably a unique education policy, promoting minority identities while instilling Socialist ideology and loyalty towards the state. Roma<sup>2</sup> at the time represented a challenge on many levels, as their lifestyle made a centralized decision-making more difficult they posed a continuous challenge to Communist thinking (Stewart 2001, p. 71).

In this chapter, I explore the role of schools and educational policy to shaping Roma identity in the early Soviet Union. I focus on the Nativization policies, which laid the foundation of institutionalizing Roma culture as part of the Soviet society. I look at policies focused on “civilizing” and “normalizing” Roma, as it was seen at

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<sup>1</sup>Education became compulsory in early Socialism, with the Soviet successful (state-run) *likbez* campaign (liquidation of illiteracy) in the 1920s and ‘1930s.

<sup>2</sup>The author wishes to acknowledge that although the term *Gypsy* better reflects historical and ethnographic realities of the time—policies were formulated about Soviet Gypsies and the language of the time referred to Gypsies as the name of the group, rather than Roma, nevertheless this chapter mainly uses the term Roma, reflecting the contemporary academically and politically correct way of calling the group.

the time, through the school system. I show that the Roma way of life was to be corrected and adjusted to the values of Communism.

To that end, I interrogate issues of nationhood, state power, belonging, and identity politics attempting to elucidate Roma identity formation in the early Soviet Union. I argue that nation and state building efforts informed policies towards Roma, and consequently how they were defined and managed by the state, primarily through schools. This chapter primarily builds on top-down analysis of state documents, state-issued textbooks, and various archival materials from Russia.<sup>3</sup>

## Nationality Policies in the Early USSR

As the aftermath of World War I and the October Revolution, Lenin embarked on a grand project building a new society: a state that was meant to become borderless and encompass the entire world and a nation that was united by ideology, rather than language, culture, race or history. Lenin firmly believed that every nation has the right to self-determination (Lenin 1967-1981, vol. 19, p. 212). Consequently, immediately after the formation of the Soviet Union, the question about social cohesion and nationality policy emerged. Lenin launched a brief but very important Nativization (*Korenizatsija*) program, according to which the state was to promote minority cultures and promote native cadres into leadership positions.

Some scholars argue that the nationality policy at the time had indeed a nation-building character (Von Hagen 1996, p. 297). Slezkine suggests a rather instrumental employment of national elites to assure loyalty to the state: “the virtues of the periphery and non-Russian nationalism were being loudly proclaimed by increasingly self-assertive ethnic elites [by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century],” and instead of repressing this national revival, the “revolutionary regime called on the former exiles to perform the task [of representing their nations]” (Slezkine 1994, p. 129).

Nativization was founded on the following principles: cultivating national identities and cleansing cultures of non-progressive, nationalist elements of Tsarist times; undoing past exploitation of non-Russian nationalities (Slezkine 1994, p. 136); and promoting the ideas of Marxism-Leninism in order to incorporate all ethnic groups into the fabric of a new Soviet society. Cultivation of national identity was necessary because the previous Russian exploitation of minorities could only be “undone” by

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<sup>3</sup>The chapter is partially based on two previous research projects: (1) research that I conducted for my unpublished dissertation manuscript (Dunajeva 2014), which was supported in part by a fellowship from the International Research & Exchanges Board, with funds provided by the United States Department of State through the Title VIII Program, and by a Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund graduate fellowship for international research. Neither of these organizations are responsible for the views expressed herein; and (2) research conducted together with Dr. Dmitriy Dunaev, entitled “The Question of National Self-Determination after World War I: Nation- and State Building Efforts in the Soviet Union” and presented at the Annual Conference of National Movements and Intermediary Structures in Europe (NISE) in May 2019 in Warsaw, Poland.

establishment of national governments, which through cultivation of their own lifestyles would “direct at the dark masses a ray of enlightenment” (Slezkine 1994, p. 136).

Institutionalization of national cultures in reality entailed a high degree of standardization of national languages, education in local languages, setting up of cultural and arts institutions to celebrate national cultures and traditions—all was done to conform to and contribute to the common idea of a Soviet socialist nation. In the case of Roma, top down management of group identities during this period also involved a form homogenization and standardization: one Romani dialect (Xaladitko) was pronounced as standard language and consequently taught in Roma schools:

the Northern Russian dialect was given the status of standard language in Romany schools of Russia and Ukraine. It was compulsory in the spirit of the Soviet state at the time: no alternatives, no comments, unless you wanted to be sent to Siberia. The 1925 decree had to be carried out. . .[and] adults Roma and Sinte and their children from all these groups [Vlach Roma, Balkan Roma, Ukrainian Roma, and German-influenced dialect speakers, Scandinavian Roma and others] strove hard to learn this standard Northern Russian Romani (Kalinin 2000, p. 145).

Standardization based on such criteria was far reaching, and even “Gypsy-like nomads” like the Liuli in Central Asia had to learn this selected dialect (Kalinin 2000).

There were also attempts to involve Roma as a national minority in building Communism. In 1925 the Soviet government recognized Roma as a national minority and besides granting them the right to be educated in Romani language, the Pan-Romani Union and Romani Congress were organized, and Romani collective farms were established in 1926–1927 (Kalinin and Kalinina 2001, p. 244).

Incompatibility of the Socialist vision to create a uniform working class and promotion of distinct cultural (or ethnic) identities as part of the Nativization program unmistakably created a paradoxical situation. For instance, the unique Romen Theater was built in 1931, and until today it is considered as the cultural center of the Russian Roma. However, Alaina Lemon shows that the Romen Theater while helped to preserve Romani culture was also created to help assimilation, sedentarization, education, and “transform[ation of] Gypsies from wild parasites into productive workers” (2000, pp. 130–131). The directors in the theater changed plays “to fit within both Euro-Russian theatrical expectations and the bounds of socialist realism” (Lemon 1998, p. 150). The establishment of the Romen Theater, in other words, embodies the tension between building a Socialist identity and the seemingly minority-friendly nationalist policies.

Even though non-Russian nationality continued to be equated with backwardness and Soviet policies aimed at “eliminating the backwardness. . .that the nationalities inherited from the past” (Slezkine 1994, p. 144), Lenin’s USSR was arguably known by the Russian Roma community as “the beginning of civil rights for Roma in USSR” (Crowe 1994, p. 174). Valdemar Kalinin wrote that “feeling thankfulness to the Russians is still vivid among Roma in North-Eastern Europe, especially the Russian Roma” (2000, p. 140). Russian Roma also remain the “symbol and model

for all Roma in the Romani commitment and dedication in the Romani customary code” (ibid.).

## Schools and Nation-Building in Early USSR

For the revitalization and institutionalization of the Romani language and culture while instilling values of Marxism-Leninism, schools were deemed as the most important state institution. “Marxist schools would have the same curriculum irrespective of their linguistic medium”—was the attitude at the time (Slezkine 1994, p. 142). To achieve Communism, everyone needed “special guidance” from a “special communist party,” which had to reach all groups in their native language (Slezkine 1994, p. 142). Thus, while national cultures were promoted, the goal remained to modernize nations and standardize cultures, as only modern, class-conscious groups can develop further into Communist and Soviet men and women, and, in turn, evolve into loyal Soviet citizens. Schools were used to manage group identities, but the goal was to change the content of “Roma,” rather than eliminate the category. Roma had to be modernized and civilized to join the Socialist working class.

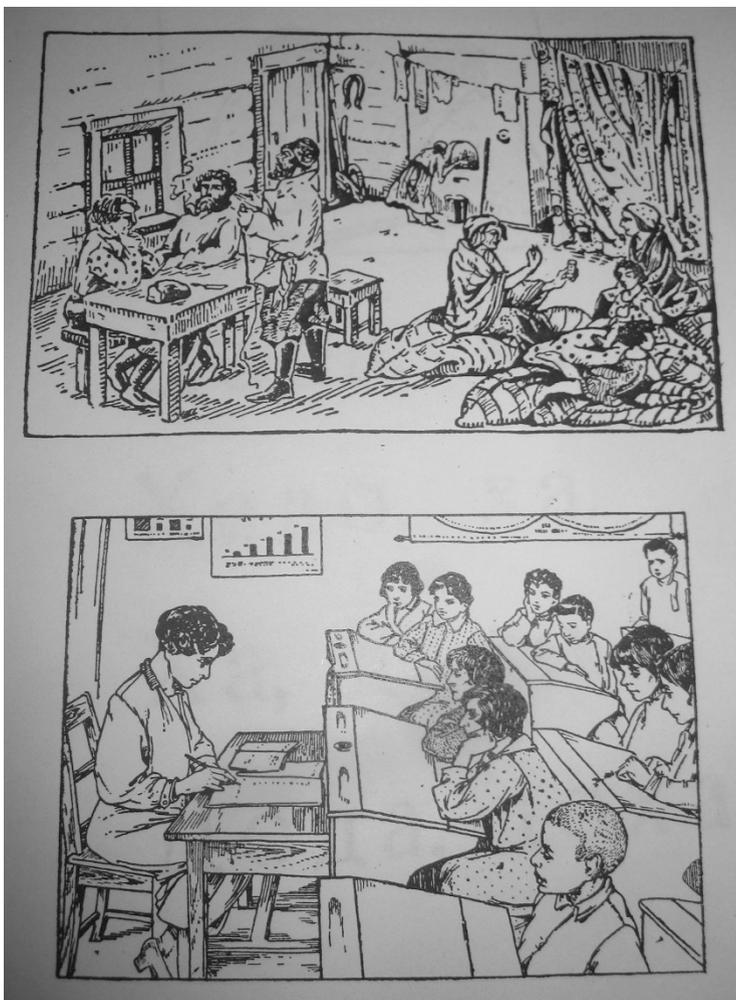
There has been only sporadic inquiry about Romani-language textbooks of the time, but to the best of my knowledge, an in-depth analysis of textbook content has not yet been done. For instance, Crowe described that Romani literacy books “include[d] articles explaining the new land tenure system, the five year plan. . .how to become atheists, live in houses and go to school (Crowe 1994, p. 177). Below I present my own textbook analysis conducted at the archives of the Russian State Library, and consider examples from textbooks at the time, translated from Romani language to English.<sup>4</sup> I show excerpts and the way those, through educating basic grammar to children, sought to alter their identities from “unsettled fortune-tellers” to working Roma.

Through textbooks, building on stereotypes about Roma the Soviet state strove to re-create Roma as part of the Socialist working class. I suggest that in textbooks there was an obvious attempt to juxtapose stereotypical Roma culture with desirable qualities of a Soviet citizen and teach values of Socialism. Textbooks taught discipline, work ethic, Marxist-Leninist ideology, and socialist values, while contrasting those with undesirable social elements, backwards traditions and lacking work ethic.

Image 5.1 is the cover of a textbook for first grade Roma students. It depicts a Roma home at the top, and a classroom at the bottom of the page. The former is a chaotic, filthy, undisciplined environment. The latter, however, is an orderly and disciplined atmosphere, with obedient children, clear hierarchy and defined social roles. The schools, thus, became not only institutions that teach these values, but the

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<sup>4</sup>Translation was done with the help of Kirill Kozhanov, hereby I thank him for his kind assistance.

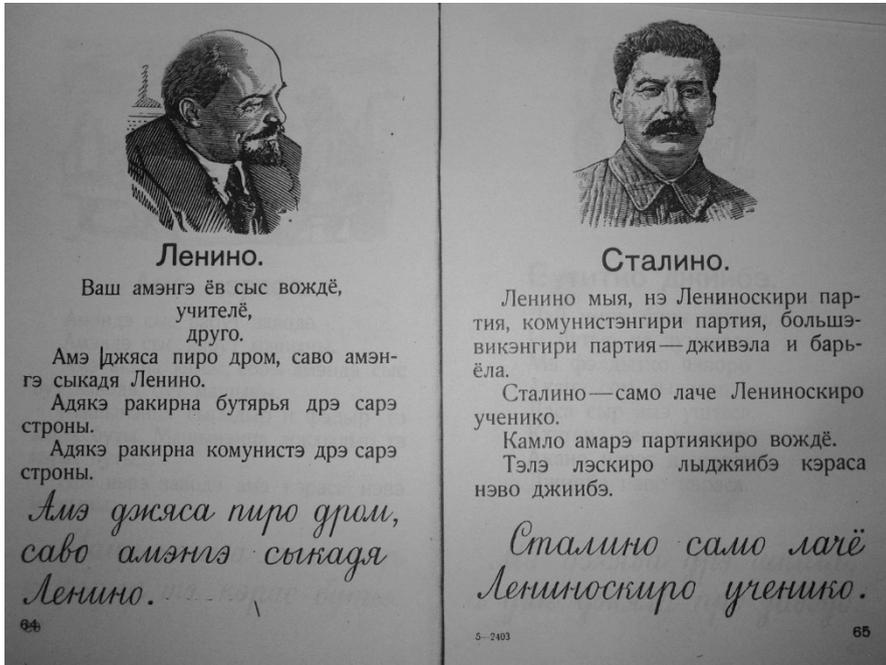


**Image 5.1** Inside cover of N.A.Pankov and N.A. Dudarova, “Dzhidi buty” («Джиды буты»). Moscow: Centrizdat, 1930. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)

very analogy to the Soviet society: a well-disciplined, homogenous society of workers.

Textbooks were also filled with political messages, educating Roma in Romani language about Lenin, Stalin, values of Socialism, and the Bolshevik Party. For instance, Image 5.2 translates from Romani as following<sup>5</sup>:

<sup>5</sup>N.A. Dudarova, “ABC book: your primary school” («Букварье: ваш начальна школа»). Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatelstvo, 1934, p. 64–65. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)



**Image 5.2** N.A. Dudarova, “ABC book: your primary school” («Букварь: ваш начальная школа»). Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatelstvo, 1934, p. 64–65. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)

### Lenin

For us, he was a leader, teacher, friend.  
 We are on the path that Lenin paved for us.  
 So say workers in all countries.  
 So say Communists in all countries.  
 We are on the path that Lenin paved for us.

### Stalin

Lenin died, but the Leninist party, the  
 Communist party, the Bolshevik Party – it lives and grows.  
 Stalin - the best student of Lenin.  
 Beloved leader of our party.  
 Under his leadership, we are building a new life.  
 Stalin - the best student of Lenin.

Similarly, “enemies of the people,” also referred to as the “enemies of the proletariat,” meaning political opponents of the Soviet regime, could be found among Roma, so educating the young Romani pupils to identify such traitors among themselves was imperative. Kulaks—affluent peasants—were seen as

remnants of the inequalities of Tsarist Russia and class enemies. Kulaks also posed an obstacle to collectivization efforts, which a crucial goal of the state's industrialization effort (Slezkine 1994, p. 188).

Collectivization was particularly important in the case of Roma because nomadism was seen as incompatible with collectivization. In addition, collectivization was also considered a way to manage the “backwards” peoples: it cultivated qualities such as of strength and determination and taught economic rationality and modern technology (Slezkine 1994, p. 205). Consider the following translation from a Romani language textbook<sup>6</sup>:

**Kulaks**

Gypsies have kulaks  
 Kulaks should not be admitted to collective farms  
 They are enemies of collective farming  
 Together with the priests,  
 We must drive them off,  
 They are the enemy of collective farming  
 And they are called kulaks

**On the collective farm**

Kulaks said that we will not have bread in the collective farms, that we will not have vegetables  
 Kulaks are our enemies. Kulaks told the poor peasants not to join collective farms.  
 Collective farms follow a plan. Each worker completes their tasks. . . .  
 Kulaks lied to us.

Working class identity assumed a certain attitude to labor as well. Textbooks instructed Roma about their participation in the labor market with clear message about women's contribution as well. Based on the images below (Images 5.3 and 5.4) it is clear that while women in the traditional Roma household are portrayed as subordinate to men and victims of patriarchal social order, their submissive status changes through work in a Socialist society. Joining the working class implied more autonomy for women. Roma women were shown fulfilling occupations previously thought as only for men (e.g., tractor drivers, factory workers).

“Civilizing” the Roma was also an explicit goal. Schools were seen as the most appropriate tool to achieve this goal. Consider the following abstracts from a Romani textbook<sup>7</sup>:

Masha works in a factory. Her husband works in a factory. Their children go to Roma kindergarten.

Masha doesn't have a father. The school gives food to Masha. Masha is given shoes and clothes. Masha goes to school.

My mother was a fortune-teller. My father was a trader. Now my mother is no longer a fortune-teller. My father does not trade. I go to school. My mother works in a factory. My father works in a factory. Find your happiness in work.

<sup>6</sup>N.A. Dudarova, “Amari buty” («Амари буты»). Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1932, p. 32-33. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)

<sup>7</sup>N.A. Dudarova, “ABC book with illustrations: Reader for adults” («Аваса лылваренса: Букваре ваш барэ манушэнгэ»). Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1933, p. 28–29. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)



**Image 5.3** N.A. Dudarova, “ABC book with illustrations: Reader for adults” («Авасалыларенса: Букваре ваш барэ манушэнгэ»). Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1933, p. 25. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)



**Image 5.4** N.A. Dudarova, “ABC book with illustrations: Reader for adults” («Авасалыларенса: Букваре ваш барэ манушэнгэ»). Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1933, p. 14. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)

Another aspect of the “civilizing mission” was undoing injustices of the past, characteristic of the Tsarist Russia and many “backwards” traditional cultures. Consider the following excerpt<sup>8</sup>:

(...) under the Tsar, Roma were not considered people, they did not work, were not taught...now they live like any other worker. (...) Under the Tsar women’s lives were bad. The women were oppressed. Now the woman can depart from her old life.

It was the school, in other words, that allowed Roma to transition into the new, desired lifestyle. The following excerpts from textbooks are telling of that<sup>9</sup>:

Lifestyle changes fast. Roma understand well that a house is better than the field.  
Those who work, eat. We won’t sit hungry, we are working Roma.

Through education and work Roma were to be liberated of their backwards habits and ultimately join the Socialist masses. Socialism, therefore, was portrayed emancipation and empowerment for Roma.

In the end, all ethnic or national differentiation was expected to disappear, according to the popular rhetoric of the time. “Oppressed nation nationalism” was not supposed to pose a challenge to the Soviet state as it was expected to “eventually lead to...the end of nationalist paranoia and therefore to the end of national differences” (Slezkine 1994, p. 142). This was necessary to the withering away of the state, the last stage of Communism. Lenin believed that the lack of national tension and national distrust would draw people together until the state fades away (ibid., p. 143).

## Conclusion: The End of Nativization and its Legacies

Nativization policy was short-lived: The national minority status of Roma in the USSR (along with national schools, newspaper and alike) was withdrawn in 1936, and the “Theater was simply a rather small hangover of the Bolshevik legacy” (Stewart 2001, p. 74). By 1938, a secret resolution discontinued (minority) national education and national classes for the Roma (Demeter et al. 2000, p. 207). The Pan-Romani Union lasted until 1928.

Nevertheless, the project promoting “socialist content” in “national form” had lasting consequences. For instance, in 1926, 64.2% of Roma chose Romani as their native tongue, compared to 1959, after the discontinuation and reversal of the Nativization policies, when only 59.3% chose Romani (Crowe 1994, p. 189). Also, some suggest that Russian Roma were able to preserve their culture in Russia and today “are a symbol and model for all Roma in their Romani commitment and dedication to the Romani customary code” (Kalinin 2000, p. 140). They

<sup>8</sup>N.A. Dudarova, “Amari buty” («Амари буты»). Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1932, p. 24–25. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)

<sup>9</sup>N.A. Dudarova, “ABC book with illustrations: Reader for adults” («Аваса лылваренса: Букваре ваш барэ манушэнгэ»). Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1933, p. 13. Book accessed from the Russian State Library (Khimki, Russia)

arguably feel rooted in Russia more so than in European countries (Lemon 1998, 2000; Dunajeva 2014).

In sum, this chapter discussed the unique Nativization policy in the early USSR. At the beginning of the chapter, two questions were posed: How are citizens made through the educational system? How is nation-building reinforced in the process of education, and how are minority groups treated? Based on the example of Roma in the early Soviet Union, I showed how schools were the primary nation-building institution of the state. Since the early Soviet nation was tied by the ideology of Socialism, this ideology had to be taught to all nations who belonged to the USSR, in order to form a coherent society of Socialist workers. Consequently, nationality policy had to take on a nation-building character.

The paradoxical nature of Nativization program is well illustrated through the educational realm: although Roma language and culture was supported by the state, nevertheless textbooks unambiguously served a “normalizing,” “civilizing function, written in a standardized Romani language. Through textbooks and school discipline, Roma children learned how elements of their culture were incompatible with values of Marxism-Leninism and needed to be corrected.

Furthermore, the top-down educational policies were vital for creating a manageable and coherent population, all in the name of equality. Everyone could become “an equal member of the family of Soviet peoples” (Slezkine 1994, p. 303), with the right ideological training in Marxist-Leninist ideology and socialist values, as well as appropriate work ethic. Roma, similarly to all other citizens of the Soviet Union, were expected to contribute to the labor force and join the collective effort of building Socialism. In theory, once Roma, or other “backwards groups” for that matter, reach the desired mentality and become “revolutionaized,” they will blend in to the Soviet working class.

The analysis of the early Soviet nation-building efforts with its experimental nationality policy teaches are valuable lessons, with much relevance today. What defined Roma in the early Soviet Union, and what continues to delineate Roma identity today, is a combination of political ideology and state policies. What was truly remarkable about the early Soviet nationality policy is the generated debate about national self-determination – a debate that is at the heart of contemporary (political) Romani movement – and its application to the Roma peoples living within the USSR. Another noteworthy feature of early Soviet society is its inclusiveness – perhaps a utopian myth, generated to hold the heterogeneous construction of the Soviet Union, but perhaps not more utopian than contemporary myths of national belonging. The totalizing identity of “the Soviet people” assumed that cultural development would lead to the eradication of cultural differences, and all people would evolve into the Soviet totality.

The presented research is a testament that ethnicities are constructed over time and categories of belonging are dynamic, fluid and flexible. This period in Soviet history showed how specific policies are used to construct citizens; Roma were “citizens in-the-making” and for the “New Soviet Gypsies” it meant being “socially useful laborers and striving towards full integration into Soviet life” (O’Keeffe 2013, p. 5). By extension, one can argue that today they remain “citizens in-the-making” of

their respective countries as well. Just like Roma threatened the ideal vision of a New Soviet citizens, they seem to pose a challenge to the relatively homogenous nation-states of Europe today.

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# Chapter 6

## Education of Roma and Educational Resilience in Hungary



Z. Attila Papp and Eszter Neumann

**Abstract** Originally, the concept of resilience refers to one's capacity to cope with unexpected shocks and unpredictable situations. Originating from ecological theories, the approach has gained ground in social sciences. In the context of education, the concept has been applied to explain how disadvantaged students can overcome structural constraints and become educationally successful and socially mobile (Werner, E. E., *Vulnerable but invincible: a longitudinal study of resilient children and youth*. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1982; Masten A. S., *American Psychologist* 56: 227–238, 2001; Reid, R., Botterrill L. C., *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 72:31–40, 2013; Máté, D., *Erdélyi Társadalom* 13:43–55, 2015).

This paper is based on the analysis of the Hungarian National Assessment of Basic Competences (NABC) database which has been conducted annually since 2001. We created a typology of school resilience based on the schools' social and ethnic profile as well as their performance indicators. We defined those schools resilient which over perform others with similar social intake, and we also identified irresilient schools which underperform others with similar social intake. The school types were created by correlating the socio-economic status index (SES) and school performance.

Since the NABC database provides us with data on the estimated rate of Roma students in each school, it is possible to take into account the schools' ethnic intake in the analysis of resilience. We conducted statistical analyses to compare the performance of resilient and irresilient schools in the light of the ratio of Roma students. Finally, we seek answers to the question whether ethnic segregation correlates with school achievement in Hungary. We could identify some crucial

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institutional factors contributing to resilience (or school success) in the case of schools with relatively high proportion of Roma students.

**Keywords** Roma education · Educational resilience · School success · Hungary

## Introduction

It is common sense to say that the school is not an “island”<sup>1</sup>: it is deeply embedded in its surrounding social relations and organizational environment. Therefore, it seems relevant to explore the ways in which schools and the communities they serve interact and mutually form each other. Of course, besides the local context, school level system specific, student and classroom characteristics are playing a crucial role in schools’ everyday life. (Creemers et al. 2013).

The factors behind school success and underperformance are widely discussed in literature. International school effectiveness research (OECD 2010a, b; Mourshed et al. 2010; Teddlie and Reynolds 2000) suggests that a well-established culture of data-based provision as well as formalized and institutionalized procedures can effectively raise school performance. The sociology of education has studied social redistribution processes within the sub-system of education for long (Jencks et al. 1972; Clotfelter 2006). From the late 1970s, a new research trend appeared in the school effectiveness literature which paid particular attention to students’ social background (Sammons and Reynolds 1997; Teddlie and Reynolds 2000). These studies define effective schools by their significant added pedagogical value in comparison to schools with similar socio-economic and socio-cultural background. Such researches pay particular focus to the schools’ impact on student attainment, development and future educational trajectories (Sammons 2007; Scheerens and Bosker 1997). Authors of these studies had argued that good leadership, achievement oriented staff communicating high expectations towards students, coherent and consensual institutional culture, high quality curriculum, safe and appropriate atmosphere, coherent assessment and feedback systems, high level of parent involvement, good classroom atmosphere, autonomous learning opportunities, and differentiated teaching are among the most important institutional, organizational and professional features of effective schools. School effectiveness research also identified the organizational changes necessary to increase student performance (Sammons 2007).

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In the Hungarian context, we are particularly interested in the situation of schools with a significant Roma intake. The underachievement or failure of disadvantaged and/or Roma students both stem from structural reasons (such as school and residential segregation and child poverty) and more subtle aspects such as the lack of emphasis on inclusivity in school cultures (Radó 1997; Szalai and Schiff 2014). However, the local interethnic conflict potential, that is the lack of successful interactions and role models which would be essential for Roma children to develop positive learner identities and to raise their educational aspirations, have not been systematically analysed in Hungary so far. Moreover, it would be important to analyse the emotional and other costs of the educational success and mobility of Roma young people and their remedies, as certain studies emphasize that upward social mobility causes identity problems and conflicts which can be transcended by assimilation or the emergence of a particular minority culture of mobility (Tóth 2008; Durst et al. 2016).

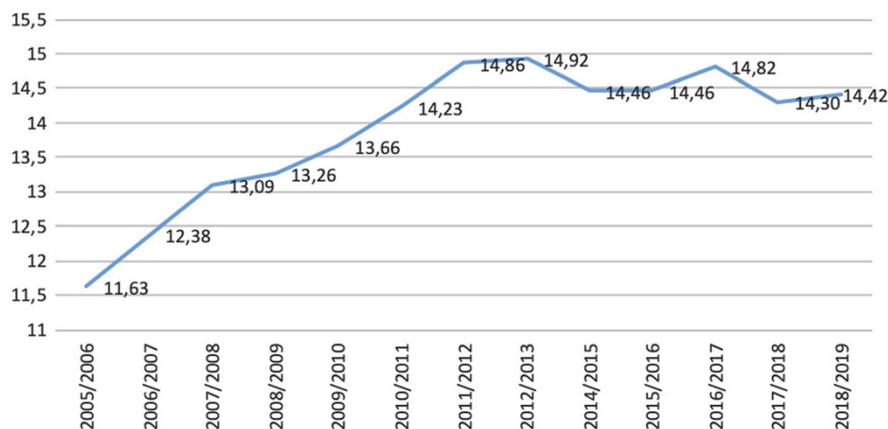
## The Hungarian Educational and Public Policy Context

In Hungary—similarly to some other European countries—research and policy regarding Roma education face a major challenge, namely the lack of officially collected data on ethnicity. The Hungarian educational administration stopped to collect statistical data on Roma ethnic origin since the 1992/1993 school year. In the ensuing decades, however, the statistical departments of the former Ministry of Culture (later the Ministry of Education and Public Education) created a so-called ethnic database which was based on annual teacher evaluations in school surveys regarding the Roma pupils' progress. This database reveals that the total number of Roma pupils grew from 60,000 in the late 1960s to almost 75,000 in the early 1990s (Kertesi 2005). Data is not available on the student population dynamics in the 1990s. However, from the early 2000s, the survey accompanying the Hungarian National Assessment of Basic Competences (NABC) comprises a question regarding the pupils' ethnic origin within the question block on the schools' social composition.<sup>2</sup> Of course this is an estimate based on local 'knowledge', but its enormous advantage is that, in principle, it is accessible at all school premises (it should be noted that not all school premises have answered this question, the rate of missing cases is 5–10% per year).

Based on NABC database, one may get a snapshot on the estimated rate of Roma pupils within the Hungarian education system. Furthermore, it is possible to assess how the estimated rate of Roma pupils, school performance, and the external and internal conditions of the schools correlate.

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<sup>2</sup>The question is formulated as follows: "In your opinion, at your school site, what is the PERCENTAGE RATIO of those elementary school students who can be characterised by the following features? ... Of Roma origin...?"



**Fig. 6.1** Estimated number of Roma pupils in the elementary schools (Source: own calculation from database of NCM)

It can be stated that in the long run the proportion of Roma pupils and the absolute values exhibit an increasing, while the overall elementary school population shows a decreasing trend. Currently, the proportion of Roma pupils is around 14–15% in Hungarian elementary schools (see Fig. 6.1). Importantly, a North-South slope characterizes the country: that is a higher rate of Roma students in the northern regions and a lower one in the southern regions. Long-term data collection revealed that the pace of growth is higher in those northern counties where the rate of Roma pupils was higher earlier. This foreshadows further increasing regional disparities. According to micro-regional/school district data, the estimated rate of Roma pupils is already above 50% at several locations.

Using the NABC databases, we could identify nearly 300 ‘ghetto schools’ (with a Roma rate above 50%, see Havas 2008) among school premises/locations over the last years, which are referred to as. Nearly half of these premises are located in Northern Hungary and three-quarters operate in villages. This also indicates that higher Roma rates, segregation and corresponding pedagogical challenges mainly characterize schools located in smaller settlements of the northern counties of the country (Papp 2011; Feischmidt 2013; Kovács 2012; Vidra 2012; Virág 2012).

One can establish an inverse linkage between the results of the NABC tests and the estimated rate of Roma pupils: the higher the ratio of Roma pupils, the lower the average of the aggregated test results at the schools. However, this correlation can easily lead us to false conclusions. If one takes into account the so-called family-background index of the school at the statistical interpretation, it will become evident that at a systemic level, low performance is not correlated to ethnicity, but to the students’ social background. Differences related to the social and family background override the rate of Roma in the school. Thus, schools with a higher rate of Roma pupils do not usually perform weakly because they educate Roma children, but

**Table 6.1** List of public policy paradigms (1993–2016)

Period	Paradigm	Main Public Policy Acts
1993-2002	<b>Cultural, essentialist paradigm</b>	Law on Minorities (1993) Minority education policy – improvement of social and ethnic disadvantages End of 1990's: review of the essentialist paradigm
2002-2005	<b>Desegregation</b>	Antidiscrimination Prohibitions and financial incentives National Education Integration Network (NEIN) Skill development and integration preparation, creating legal categories: social disadvantaged student and multiple social disadvantaged student
2004-2007	<b>Integration</b>	Extension of Integrational Pedagogical System (IPS)
2007-2010	<b>Equal Opportunities, Mainstreaming</b>	Equal Opportunities Attempt to eliminate territorial educational segregation
2010 -	<b>Inclusion</b>	Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, centralization NATIONAL SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY - Extreme Poverty, Child Poverty, The Roma - (2011-2020)

Source: Erős (2012)

because these pupils have a less supportive learning environment and more disadvantaged family conditions (Kertesi and Kézdi 2011; Papp 2011, 2013).

The increasing involvement and efficiency of Roma pupils in schools have continuously been the target of educational policy interventions, and the question of teaching Roma and non-Roma students together or separately, i.e. in integrated or in segregated classrooms, has re-emerged over and over again. Summing up the various public policy paradigms (Table 6.1), one can state that free school choice codified 4 years before the regime change had effectively strengthened segregation trends, as more affluent and higher educated parents were more motivated to search and find schools with children of similar backgrounds and, consequently, where the rate of Roma pupils was lower due to structural factors. The period of 1993–2002 is

interpreted by scholars as a “cultural, essentialist paradigm” (Neumann 2013) which was dominated by the view that the education of Roma children would be more successful by transferring minority culture, and therefore targeted classes and lessons should be organized for them. Subsequently, governments in power after 2002 focused on desegregation and launched several interventions dedicated to desegregation after 2004. This policy paradigm emphasized that pupils have to be educated in an integrated way, i.e. mixed Roma and non-Roma classes should be organized, and supportive experts argued that from this arrangement Roma pupils would only profit (will become more successful), and non-Roma pupils would not be harmed either (Kézdi and Surányi 2009). However, although schools knew what the ‘policy direction’ was, it did not automatically mean that prejudice against Roma declined and the Pygmalion effect typically prevailed in the daily practice of the schools. Some sort of double language developed: an official, politically correct ‘project language’ and an informal ‘language below’, and the two often being contradictory, an inconsistent spectrum of arguments characterized the schools (Erős 2012; Németh and Papp 2006; Neumann 2013).

Since 2010, Hungary has a new government which rejected the desegregation paradigm and started to frame its policies in a catching-up narrative arguing that those lagging behind should be taught separately. In the post-2010 period, the basic motive has been responsabilization, it has been argued that the Roma should also show their ‘own contribution’ in catching up to the majority, and educational officials underlined the expectation to catch up instead of being caught up. The new National Public Education Act was adopted in 2011 brought a high degree of centralization to the educational system, as school maintenance and operation was reorganized under the Klebelsberg Institutional Maintenance Centre (KIMC). Concomitantly, with generously supporting the Christian churches to take over schools, the rate of pupils in parochial schools increased significantly, while the rate of pupils in public schools decreased. The number of parochial schools primarily rose in elementary education, and especially in the poorer regions of the country and in smaller settlements. This also indicates that Roma pupils are increasingly educated in certain parochial schools. The newly founded parochial schools of historical churches are supported by the state budget, and they exacerbated local segregation processes. Ercse (2018) called this phenomenon state-motivated church-assisted segregation.

In 2011, the National Social Inclusion Strategy (2011–2020) came into force which aimed at improving the living conditions of the Roma and those in general who live in extreme poverty and child poverty. This strategy also embraces various scholarships (Útravaló Scholarship Program, János Arany Gifted and Talented Program, János Arany College Program, János Arany College and Vocational School Program) and extracurricular tutoring centres for social disadvantaged children (“tanoda program”—in Hungarian), as well as mentor programs for Roma students in higher education. However, one has to note that if the formal education system operated well, there wouldn’t be necessary to launch such complementary programmes (see Németh et al. 2013; Németh 2009).

In conclusion, we can state that the educational outcomes of Roma children have improved over the past decades, but this is primarily due to the structural and specific characteristics of the educational system. Roma students do increasingly complete elementary education and obtain a baccalaureate or a degree at growing rates, but compared to the whole population they are still the most disadvantaged group in education and due to the educational expansion inequalities have shifted to higher educational levels.

## The Role of Resilience

The concept of resilience originally refers to the individual's capacity to cope with unexpected shocks and unpredictable situations. Originating from ecological theories, the approach has been widely applied in social sciences lately, particularly in the analysis and critic of neoliberal governance (Chandler 2015; Joseph 2015) as well as in post-9/11 security studies (Székely 2015). In the context of education, the concept has been applied to explain how disadvantaged students had overcome structural constraints and became educationally successful and socially mobile (Werner 1982; Masten 2001; Reid and Botterill 2013; Máté 2015). However, more recent studies focusing on how neoliberal regimes worked their way into governments, the operation of organizations and the lives of ordinary people have broadened the scope of inquiry to organizations and communities (for an exciting social historical application, see Majtényi 2015). Hall and Lamont (2013) argue that institutional and cultural changes greatly structure the contexts in which people live; their self-concepts, orders of worth and criteria of evaluation are deeply linked to the changing dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in society (see also Albert-Lőrincz and Albert-Lőrincz 2015).

We define community resilience as the self-organization of groups of people into organizations, classes, ethnic groups, communities, which helps them to preserve their well-being and cope with environmental challenges (Hall and Lamont 2013). Although individuals need a certain amount of internal psychological strength to overcome obstacles, we aim to focus at the institutional, cultural and social sources of resilience (Hall and Lamont 2013, pp. 2–3), more specifically, at the local configurations of resilience in school-community relations (for a similar analysis in the social sector see Dániel and Deák 2015). Within this strand of the literature, we have been particularly inspired by researches that apply the concept to organizational and community settings and inquire the community social resources/capital mobilized in order to tackle, adapt, resist neoliberal change. Studies that explore the ways in which neoliberal hegemonic reforms and discourses may be subverted or may be innovatively capitalized on by using them for anti-neoliberal purposes have particularly shaped our thinking (e.g. Kymlicka 2013). Our interest is much similar to the perspective of Hertzman and Siddiqi (2013) who, by examining “trend-bucker” communities in Canada, inquired how local communities succeed in promoting young children's development when public provision and governmental

programmes have failed to provide sufficient support. Our interest in coping strategies during the radical social and public sector restructurings in Hungary after the economic crisis has also gained inspiration from the literature about the effects of and responses to austerity policies in the public sector and about the transition from welfare to workfare policy regimes (Clarke and Newman 2012).

Examining educational resilience in a multi-cultural environment, Morales and Trotman (2004) emphasized the importance of environmental factors such as the institutionalized contact between schools and families (e.g. tutoring, the presence of other developmental activities) as well as other less formal community programmes. Masten et al. (1990) identify three local characteristics that impact on the development of resilient children: (1) the availability of social organizations that provide an array of resources for resilient students; (2) the consistent expressions of social norms so that community members understand what constitutes desirable behaviour and attitudes; (3) opportunities for children to participate in the life of the community as valued members. Although our research project concentrates on community-school interactions as well, the following analysis focuses on the conditions of institutional resilience in particular.

## Hypothesis, Research Questions and First Results

By using the dataset of the NABC, we created a typology of resilient, ‘ordinary’ schools and ‘irresilient’ or elementary schools at risk (see below), and we have formulated three main hypotheses:

- (a) Effective and resilient schools are more likely to be found in smaller settlements because the effect of school choice on social segregation is greater in bigger settlements. Irresilient schools or schools at risk are more likely to be located in urban environments.
- (b) If the social economic status (SES) index of schools is under statistical control, the correlation between the estimated rate of Roma students and the schools’ ‘resilience’ typology status will not be statistically significant.
- (c) Resilient schools are more likely to have participated in innovative pedagogic programmes than ‘irresilient’ schools.

We define *resilient schools* as schools that significantly overperform in comparison to schools with similar social intakes. Irresilient schools are identified by being underperforming in comparison to schools with similar social intakes. The school types were created by correlating the socio-economic status index (SES) and the success index of the schools (SIS). The socio-economic status index (SES) is an aggregated standardized variable combining statistical variables which reflect parents’ education and the possession of material goods. The success index of schools

**Table 6.2** School types by the students' family background and level of achievement

		SUCCESS INDEX OF SCHOOLS (SIS)			
		1 quartile	2 quartile	3 quartile	4 quartile
SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDEX (SEI)	1. quartile	<i>ordinary (stable) schools</i>	<i>resilient schools</i>		
	2. quartile	<i>ordinary schools</i>			
	3. quartile				<i>ordinary schools</i>
	4. quartile	<i>irresilient schools</i>			<i>ordinary schools</i>

(SIS)—for the sake of the current analysis—is defined by the schools' overall performance.<sup>3</sup>

By using these two dimensions (SES and SIS), we identified *resilient schools* (effective, overperforming and successful schools according to the estimated SES). We also identified *ordinary schools* and *irresilient schools or schools at risk* (low SIS and underperforming schools according to the estimated SES).

Since institutional resilience is a multifaceted phenomenon, we aimed at capturing this complexity statistically. Going beyond the international standard calculation procedures, we differentiated between *three types of resilient schools* (see Table 6.2):

1. *irresilient schools (schools at risk)*: underperforming schools;
2. *ordinary schools*: schools with expected performance;
3. *resilient schools*: overperforming schools.

## First Results

In our calculations to test the hypotheses discussed above, we used the NABC database from 2013. First, we identified resilient schools, and then we compared resilient and irresilient schools. The statistical comparison of these two school types covers the dimensions available in the NABC database such as student social background, school climate, some settlement factors, features of school infrastructure, teacher characteristics and teacher activities.

Strictly speaking only 0.9% of all Hungarian schools can be identified as resilient (fourth quartile of performance and low SES index). Therefore, based on statistical considerations, we expanded the group of resilient schools by including all schools

<sup>3</sup>It is worth noting that we are aware of that a comprehensive SIS index should combine school performance measures, school marks which impact further study choices, secondary entrance exam results, entry rates to academic secondary pathways, and a school-level student motivation index.

performing above expected. However, in order to keep socio-economic background under control we only concentrated on resilient schools whose social intake falls into the lowest quartile of the SES index. Thus, we could compare schools with very similar socio-economic background. Another consideration that led us to constrain the analysis to this group was that this was the group with the highest Roma ratio, 33% (while it is 14% in the whole school population). It was theoretically easier to grasp the role of multiethnicity within this group than in the whole school system.

We analysed the effect of different factors in making ordinary schools to become resilient by using a multivariate statistical model based on logistic regression (see Table 6.3). Coefficients in the last column of Table 6.3 indicate the odds ratio of certain factors which may have influence on school resilience. The dependent variable of the model is a dummy variable which indicates the resilience category of a school (0—ordinary school; 1—resilient school). Factors included in the model explain the variance of school resilience in approximately 39%. Based on our statistical model, we can conclude that when keeping the effect of other variables under statistical control, multi-ethnic student composition does not have a significant statistical impact on school resilience. In turn, student socio-economic status (SES) does have a significant effect on school effectiveness, which is well-marked taking into consideration that the model only concerns the narrowed student population, that is, students or schools at the lowest quartile of the SES index. School climate also plays a significant effect, however the odds ratios in this case is quite low. We observed a somewhat positive correlation with discipline and negative impact of student motivation on school performance. The moderate negative impact of motivation on school performance which may contradicts common sense is actually not surprising: international assessments have also highlighted recently that student motivation does not necessarily have linear positive effect on school effectiveness (OECD 2016).

Settlement factors included in the database have threefold effects. First, urban schools were found to be significantly less likely to be resilient than village schools. Second, regionally speaking, the (rural or small) schools in the vicinity of Budapest seem to have a higher chance to become resilient. Moreover, resilient schools are more likely to be found where parents cannot choose between several schools in their neighbourhood. This is because where parents can choose between educational institutions, schools tend to become increasingly homogenous in terms of student social-economic background, which may affect school resilience negatively.

Amongst school environment characteristics, we should mention that school size has a positive effect: the bigger the student population, the higher the likelihood of resilient schools. While the number of computer labs also rose the likelihood of school resilience, the number of language teaching rooms decreased the likelihood of resilience. At the same time it seems that the good state of the school building increases the likelihood of resilience.

Among teacher characteristics some special activities seem to have the most powerful effect on school resilience: if teachers are active in publishing papers the chance of a school resilience is lower. In other words, the data suggest that in resilient schools, teachers mainly concentrate on teaching and not publishing. In

**Table 6.3** Factors pushing „stable” schools to resilience (logistic regression, Nagelkerke R: 0.388)

		Sig.	Exp(B)
Student	% Roma	0.401	0.998
	SES	0.000	2.940*
School climate	Discipline	0.000	1.100*
	Motivation	0.000	0.922*
Settlement factors	Type of settlement (ref. categ: Village)	0.000	
	Small city	0.054	0.528
	Bigger city	0.000	0.252*
	Budapest	0.002	0.349*
	School location inside the settlement (1—central area; 2—periphery)	0.033	0.834*
	Region (ref. categ: Budapest)	0.000	
	Central	0.997	0.999
	Central-Transdanubian	0.000	0.293*
	West-Transdanubian	0.010	0.637*
	South-Transdanubian	0.000	0.403*
	Northern	0.000	0.127*
	East-Northern	0.000	0.192*
	School-choice possibility (ref. categ: No choice)	0.000	
	At least two other schools	0.188	0.921
	Only one other school	0.000	0.731*
School infrastructure	School size	0.000	1.297*
	Year of school building	0.000	0.995*
	State of school building (1—very good; 5—very bad)	0.000	0.543*
	No. of classroom	0.000	0.946*
	No. of lang. teaching labs	0.000	0.648*
	No. of special classroom	0.000	0.947*
	No. of computer labs	0.000	1.554*
	Other labs (szükségterem)	0.130	0.967
	No. of gyms	0.209	1.082
	Development rooms	0.000	1.670*
	Number of 0–3 years computers	0.123	0.996
	Number of 4–5 years computers	0.116	1.005
	Number of 5 years older computer	0.000	0.989*
	Number of computers connected to internet	0.555	1.002
	Book titles in school library	0.000	1.000*
Teacher characteristics	New teachers (hired after 2011)	0.000	0.824*
	Teacher: Publish articles (1—yes; 2—no)	0.000	3.466*
	Teacher: Part. In manual writing (1—yes; 2—no)	0.956	1.008
	Teacher: Member of professional org. (1—yes; 2—no)	0.569	1.048
	Teacher: Member of civil organizations (1—yes; 2—no)	0.210	0.921
	Teacher: Mother tongue other than HU (1—yes; 2—no)	0.007	0.683*
	Teacher: Non HU citizen (1—yes; 2—no)	0.004	1.740*
Teacher: Roma origin (1—yes; 2—no)	0.000	0.643*	

(continued)

**Table 6.3** (continued)

		Sig.	Exp(B)
Teacher activity	In-service training—discipline based	0.000	1.034*
	In-service training for leaders of schools	0.113	1.040
	Personality development training	0.010	1.007*
	In-service training: Assessment	0.000	1.094*
	In-service training: Other	0.000	0.980*
School activity	Evaluation: head's observations ( <i>1—yes; 2—no</i> )	0.997	0.000
	Evaluation: maintainer's observations ( <i>1—yes; 2—no</i> )	0.003	0.833*
	Evaluation: External experts ( <i>1—yes; 2—no</i> )	0.303	0.938
	Evaluation: Colleagues' observations ( <i>1—yes; 2—no</i> )	0.000	0.283*
	Evaluation: Students' results ( <i>1—yes; 2—no</i> )	0.636	0.953
	Selection during student enrollment ( <i>1—yes; 2—no</i> )	0.407	1.071
	School program: Integrational, development program ( <i>1—yes; 2—no</i> )	0.822	0.985
	School program: Gypsy nationality program ( <i>1—yes; 2—no</i> )	0.000	1.364*
	Constant	0.995	1.677E+14
	Nagelkerke R-square		0.388

\*Statistically significant effect

the framework of our research, we were especially interested in whether the ethnic composition of the local teacher community would have a statistical effect on school resilience. Schools that employ teachers with Roma background or with a mother tongue other than Hungarian are more likely to be successful. Interestingly, employing teachers with foreign citizenship decreases the likelihood of resiliency. Although this latter fact seems to contradict our hypothesis about the beneficial effect of the inner multiethnicity of the teaching body, we think that this is because the “foreign citizenship” category often refers to people with Hungarian background who were born in neighbouring countries and who do not hold Hungarian citizenship. Thus, we can conclude that the “real inner multiethnicity” of the teacher community could have a positive impact on school success.

Two school-related development programmes had a significant correlation with school resilience. The so-called “Gypsy nationality” programme seems to have a negative effect on school performance, while the external control of teachers carried out by colleagues or authorities suggests a positive one. We argue that the negative effect of the “Gypsy nationality”<sup>4</sup> programme is due to the fact that these

<sup>4</sup>The “Nationality (minority) education” programme can be organized in several different forms: (1) mother-tongue education; (2) bilingual education; (3) language teaching minority education; (4) Roma/Gypsy minority education in Hungarian language; (5) and auxiliary minority education. [https://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=a1300017.emm](https://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=a1300017.emm)

**Table 6.4** Variance of resilience explained by student, settlement and school related factors

Factors	Nagelkerke R-square (variance explained by factors)	Observation
Student related factors: SRF (SES, %Roma)	<b>0.083</b>	
SRF + school climate	<b>0.088</b>	
SRF + school climate + settlement factors	<b>0.105</b>	
SRF + school climate + settlement factors+school structural features	<b>0.279</b>	
SRF + school climate + settlement factors + school structural features + teacher characteristics, practicies	<b>0.363</b>	Positive role of Roma and non-Hungarian teachers on resilience
SRF + school climate + settlement factors + school structural features + teacher characteristics, practicies + schools' activity	<b>0.388</b>	Roma student % effect on resilience has disappeared Role of SES

programmes are mostly run in Hungarian language, and their aim is to broaden the students' knowledge about Roma tradition and history. This is why these types of school programmes have no impact on reading or mathematics competences measured in the national tests.<sup>5</sup> The positive effect of external teacher professional control carried out by educational authorities or other teachers suggests that teacher effectiveness in Hungary can be raised by the external presence of other persons. We explain this with historical or pedagogical reasons; however, it suggests the necessity of feedback during the teaching process.

Factors included in the model explain the variance of school resilience in approximately 39%. However we should consider the level of cumulative impact too. According to Table 6.4 we can conclude that while student and settlement related factors only explain resilience in 8–10%, the effect of pedagogical work should be much greater. We argue that in spite of the fact that territorial or community characteristics could have significant effects in some instances, school and teacher activities matter most in school resilience.

<sup>5</sup>In an absolutely different context an official report of the Gypsy nationality programmes argues that this type of programme is not effective as it concentrates students with Roma background and with social disadvantages, and it also implies a selection among children at teacher level. Teachers working in this type of programme cannot cope with these challenges. See *Jelentés... 2014*.

## Conclusions

In this chapter we presented basic information concerning Roma education in Hungary, and some elements of a theoretical framework which aims to identify the main factors of school resilience in Hungary. Our core question concerned internal institutional and external school factors that can contribute to educational resilience.

We presented the first results based on the statistical analysis of the 2013 NABC database with particular focus on institutional factors.<sup>6</sup> Firstly we created a school typology, and then we tried to test some basic hypothesis. According to our first hypothesis effective and resilient schools are more likely to be found in smaller settlements because the effect of school choice on social segregation is greater in bigger settlements. We found that resilient schools are more likely to be located in rural areas and in localities where the school-choice options are more restricted. Moreover, a slight effect of the capital was observed: resilient schools tended to be located in the broad suburbs of the capital of the country, and not in regions where there is a higher Roma intake in schools (Northern, Northern-Easter Hungary).

With regard to the second hypothesis we expected that—if the social economic status index (SES) of schools is under statistical control—the correlation between the estimated rate of Roma student and the ‘resilience’ status of the schools will not be statistically significant. The hypothesis was partially confirmed. If the explanation model excludes teacher and school characteristics and only focuses on student background and regional aspects, one can observe that the estimated Roma student ratio has a negative effect on resilience: the higher the rate of Roma students the higher the likelihood of a school to be irresilient. However, in this case the model has a low explanatory strength. When the model was complemented with teacher and school related factors, the significant effect of Roma intake disappeared, and we could see that the multiethnicity of the staff and some other factors could push schools towards resiliency.

The third hypothesis concerned the role of school programmes. Our hypothesis was that resilient schools are more likely to have been involved in innovative pedagogic programmes than ‘irresilient’ schools. This hypothesis was not confirmed. According to the model, participation in local or nation-wide innovative pedagogic programmes (focusing on integrated education and professional development) had no statistically significant effect on the resiliency status of the schools. Moreover, we also found that the “Gypsy nationality” programme had a negative impact. This can be explained by the fact that this type of minority-centred school programme did not focus on the development of participating children’s skills and (reading and mathematics) competences.

It is difficult to formulate complex policy implications at this point of the study, not having completed the analysis of the qualitative case studies in resilient schools.

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<sup>6</sup>It is worthwhile to mention that this quantitative analysis is based on NABC database administered in the 2012/2013 school year. Future analysis will explore whether these statistical patterns prevail over the years.

However, it was striking how few low SES schools fell into the resilient category. If policymakers aim to improve the educational level of Roma students, multi-ethnic and segregated schools, good practices of resilient low SES schools should be closely analysed and upscaled and the teaching staff of these schools should be rewarded both financially and symbolically. In fact, by using the results of NABC in Hungary there is an opportunity to design systemic implications in order to narrow social and regional inequalities of education, and to foster the school success of Roma children.

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**Part II**  
**Obstacles and Key Factors**  
**for the Continuity of Education**

# Chapter 7

## The Multiple Stories in Finnish Roma Schooling



Marko Stenroos and Jenni Helakorpi

**Abstract** Regardless of the good reputation of the Finnish basic education system, Finnish Roma children fall behind the overall average in their performance of academic skills: Roma children face more challenges completing basic education and have more repeated school years. Furthermore, compared to the average, Roma youth apply less for upper secondary education and thus their general level of education remains low. However, looking at Roma education solely through problematic representations only provides a partial picture. In this article, based on two separate sets of fieldwork among Finnish Kaale Roma, we examine how teachers, Roma activists and mediators perceive the educational trajectories of Finnish Roma children and youth. The article seeks to scrutinize Finnish Roma schooling within the framework of the Finnish National Policy on Roma (NRIS). The analysis highlights the multiplicity of voices in the field, discusses the possibilities, and thus problematizes the single-aspect discourse on Roma education. Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe struggle with school and residential segregation, but Finnish Roma face different challenges.

**Keywords** Finnish Kaale Roma · Roma agency · Roma policy · Education · Finland

### Introduction

The Finnish education policy has many positive aspects: schooling is universal, free of charge, based on a universal idea of one school for all with no streaming, and has a strong ethos of equality and inclusion in its latest national curriculum (FNAE 2014). Furthermore, Finnish schools have been ranked as among the best in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment<sup>1</sup> (PISA). Research, however,

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>—23.7.2019.

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shows that practices in Finnish schools do not fulfil the ideals of the education policy; the separate sections in the Finnish National Policy on Roma (NRIS) in regards to Roma education indicate that Roma schooling needs more attention. The education system is selective in subtle ways and equality is not achieved in school outcomes, in which different factors such as race/ethnicity, social class, gender and disability play their part (Kosunen 2016; Juva and Holm 2017; Riitaoja et al. 2019). A selective and marginalizing mechanism also pertains to Roma.

According to various surveys, Roma families and children are eager to start school in the first grade (e.g. Rajala et al. 2011; Rajala and Blomerus 2015). But something happens towards the end of elementary school. National surveys indicate that Roma pupils obtain clearly different, negative educational outcomes in comparison to the national average, and Roma pupils study in segregated arrangements such as home schooling or special class units with adjusted curriculums (Rajala et al. 2011). Furthermore, Roma children are more likely to repeat school years and drop out of school than mainstream students. Consequently, after compulsory school, Roma pupils seek further education less often, i.e. upper secondary education. Thus, Roma do not actualize the assumed conduit from education to employment in the labour market.

There is a tendency in policy work, as well as in research, to look for categorical answers to questions concerning Roma and education (Helakorpi et al. 2018; Curcic and Plaut 2013). This can be understood from the standpoint of policymaking and minority rights: in order to devise and advocate policy measures and a categorical, collective definition of the problem, more effective actions and mainstreaming of the solutions must be found (e.g. Kostka 2015; Toivanen 2015). The overall objective of the EU's platform of National Roma Integration Strategies NRIS is to promote the inclusion and equal treatment of Roma in different spheres of life. The policy stands for the protection of the Roma culture and linguistic rights, and to this end, the approach could be defined as strategic essentialism (cf. Spivak 1996).

Helakorpi et al. (2018) have argued that the first national Roma policy (MSAH 2009) had three prevalent representations of problems regarding the basic education of Finnish Roma: (1) the special needs of Roma pupils, (2) Roma families and (3) the national minority culture in schools. Defining these problems in this way validates different measures, such as Roma mediators in schools. Furthermore, in these problem representations, the main focus is on Roma themselves, whereas the role of the school as an institution receives less attention and is problematized. The 'ownership' of problems is thus explained by learning difficulties among Roma pupils and their needs for special support. Furthermore, problems are blamed on Roma families and their inability to support their children in schools. The focus on Roma excludes the elaborations of different ideological premises. Schools formulate neoliberal subjects, preparing them for competition in neoliberal markets, but the Roma social orders are constructed differently (cf. Brown 2017; Convertino et al. 2017; Grönfors 1997). Instead of focusing solely on Roma students and their families as problems, the school authorities should try to find ways to incorporate different ideas of subject formulation.

Various policies (education, minority rights) should ensure that the language and cultural rights of Roma are promoted in schools. The NRIS suggests that Finnish

schools do not have enough knowledge about Roma. However, it remains unclear what type of knowledge is missing, who should generate and provide this knowledge, and how this knowledge should be used to support Roma pupils. Regardless, the third problem representation of Roma schooling still makes Roma, rather than the schools' obligations, the focus of attention (see also Helakorpi 2019). The new Finnish Roma policy came into force in 2018 (MSAH 2018). The education section was not drastically expanded nor were new solutions introduced, and thus the problem definition and representation remains the same.

In this chapter,<sup>2</sup> we seek to problematize the policy narrative on Finnish Roma in schools by combining the research data that we have gathered in different projects. Methodologically, our study includes interviews and participatory observations. Our research participants have many different positions within the field of education: Roma mediators, Roma parents, project workers, and teachers. The data are from multiple localities in Finland and the fieldwork was conducted at a time when the first Finnish Roma policy was in effect. We wish to draw attention to the multiplicity of actors and positions and to problematize the one-sided story of Roma education. These one-sided stories often display Roma as the passive receiving end of policy actions, whereas our data show the heterogeneity of the situations among Roma pupils, Roma parents and Roma activists, and thus shed light on the Finnish school system and its practices from several standpoints.

## **Background: Finnish Kaale Roma, Roma Policies and Education**

Finnish Roma are a national minority in Finland and their rights to culture and language are protected by the CoE Treaty 157 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the CoE ETS No. 148 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which Finland ratified at the turn of the millennium. Until the 1960–1970s<sup>3</sup> Finnish Roma were subjected to exclusion and assimilation efforts by the state. The school institution took part in these efforts (Pulma 2006, 2012). Furthermore, before the 1960s, many Finnish Roma had problems obtaining permanent housing, which made it difficult to take part in schooling (Stenroos 2019; Rajala et al. 2011). Roma children were also forcibly taken into custody and placed in children's homes designed for Roma children (see Ahvenainen 2014). In Roma children's homes the aim was to 'normalize' Roma

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<sup>2</sup>This research was funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland's ALL-YOUTH project (Decision No. 312689).

<sup>3</sup>At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, Roma activism led to changes in Roma politics in Finland and consequently the nature of Roma politics started to shift from assimilation towards participation. During this period, governmental bodies started to acknowledge Roma rights (Stenroos 2019).

children and thus eradicate the Roma culture and language (Pulma 2006, pp. 163–165).

Nowadays, Roma pupils are entitled to the same opportunities in schools as everyone else, but as already described, their school outcomes are still dissatisfactory. Roma pupils also report experiences of bullying and racism within schools (Junkala and Tawah 2009; Rajala et al. 2011; Rajala and Blomerus 2015). In Finland, the school starting age is seven and comprehensive school lasts for 9 years. The average drop-out rate in Finland is under 1% (OSF 2018), but national surveys estimate<sup>4</sup> that until now, about 19% of Roma pupils have not completed comprehensive school (Rajala et al. 2011, p. 58). Free pre-school starts at the age of six and has been compulsory since 2015. The latest Roma strategy, however, raises a concern about the irregularity of Roma children's attendance of pre-school classes (MSAH 2018). After comprehensive school, there are two types of upper secondary education: general upper secondary education and vocational education. General upper secondary education is more likely to lead to academic higher education. The percentage of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) in the age group of 15–19 is below the average of the OECD (6.0) in Finland at 4.2 (OECD 2018). Due to the lack of statistical data on this, the exact number of Roma NEET is difficult to show. However, the Roma Wellbeing Study, conducted by the National Institute for Health and Welfare (Weiste-Paakkanen et al. 2018), indicated that in all the age groups, 31% of Roma who participated in the study had received education after comprehensive school. Furthermore, in all the age groups, only 19% had a regular wage and 8% were studying at the time the study was conducted (Weiste-Paakkanen et al. 2018, pp. 31–33).

## Methodologies

The ethnographic material in this article was gathered during the two and half year-long Roma consortium (2016–2018), funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). This consortium was co-ordinated by the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (DIAK), whose headquarters are located in Helsinki, the capital of Finland. This consortium consisted of two different funding instruments, one of which was the *promotion of education, skills and lifelong learning*, and the other the *prevention of poverty and social exclusion*. This consortium had 16 different co-implementers and 30 different project workers, of which 21 had a Roma background. In the Finnish

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<sup>4</sup>Although the challenges of Roma education have been recognized, the lack of statistical data on Roma hinders development projects and researchers from gaining exact data on Roma education in different European countries (Messing 2014). However, the restrictions of ethnic registers are well justified (Petrova 2004). Due to the lack of exact data, many Roma projects and researchers conduct different kind of surveys in order to gain information about Roma. In Finland, survey studies are conducted by, for example, the Finnish National Agency for Education (Rajala and Blomerus 2015; Rajala et al. 2011) and the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs (MSAH 2009).

context, this was a large-scale project to promote Roma inclusion. However, although one objective during the project was to enhance Roma education, implementing the project plans was challenging. It was difficult to locate the Roma pupils in the different schools in Helsinki<sup>5</sup> and to determine the problems they had, if any, in their studies. The only possible way was to contact the school authorities and ask about their experiences and ideas of Roma pupils. Due to a lack of data, a survey was sent out to 130 schools in Helsinki, to which seventy-two (72) schools responded. This survey was a tool for project purposes and should not be considered as representing formal statistics.

One data set of the chapter consists of ethnographic interviews with Roma mediators in four different localities. This data, independent from the other project, were collected by interviewing Roma mediators and observing their work for 1–4 days in the autumn of 2012.

As ethnographical methodologies suggest, the purpose of this chapter is to expand the focus from the school premises to cover wider social spaces of young Roma, inside and outside of school.

## Numbers in Roma Education: And the Background Stories

In 2015, the National Agency for Education of Finland (Rajala & Blomerus 2015) conducted a study on the educational backgrounds of Roma. The study indicated that two thirds of adult Roma (age 18 to over 65) had completed their basic education. This is a clear improvement, as in the 1950s the respective percentage was only 25%. The study also suggested that only one third of adult Roma had a vocational degree. As it is more common for Roma to educate themselves in vocational institutes, fewer enrol in general upper secondary school (Rajala and Blomerus 2015). In 2018, the FNAE published a guidebook for Roma to promote upper secondary-level studies. General upper secondary education is more likely to lead to tertiary education, especially to research universities, where Roma are still highly underrepresented in Finland.

The FNAE established a unit to promote Roma education in 1994. The first report on the situation of Roma pupils in basic education concerned the school year of 2000–2001 (FNAE 2004). The problems that the Roma pupils faced in the schools were alarming: as Roma children did not formerly participate in pre-primary education, this caused a need to repeat the first or second grade. The development work that started in 2008 for the basic education of Roma pupils,<sup>6</sup> allocated more funds to

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<sup>5</sup>Due to personal data restrictions.

<sup>6</sup>The national development work of the basic education of Roma pupils began in Finland in 2008, as part of the development of the quality of basic education. For the first time, municipal authorities were able to apply to the Finnish National Board of Education for government aid to support the basic education of Roma pupils.

the municipality level to tackle Roma schooling challenges. These investments have gradually paid off and improved the situation, especially in regard to attendance of pre-primary education. According to follow-ups, the situation has improved considerably since the beginning of the 1990s and families have been willing to take their children to pre-school, which means that repeated school years in the first grade have decreased (Rajala et al. 2011).

The most recent reports (school year 2010–2011) indicate that the performance of about 30% of Roma children in basic education is weak. This, however, is an improvement from the first report (school year 2001–2002), which estimated that approximately 10% of Roma pupils were doing well in theoretical subjects (Rajala et al. 2011). Nevertheless, despite the gradual improvement in Roma education, Roma still lag behind the average in academic performance. The level of education among Roma is not adequate for today's labour markets.

The other set of survey data used in this chapter, gathered by the Roma project in 2016–2018, are separate from the studies of the Finnish National Agency for Education. This survey only covered schools in Helsinki. It is difficult to estimate whether it allows for differences in responses, as the authors of the survey were project workers rather than education authorities. The information attained through the survey was even more alarming than the surveys by FNAE. Most of the respondent schools were located in the eastern part of Helsinki, where also relatively more Roma families live. There were regional differences in the survey responses, probably due to smaller numbers of Roma pupils in particular school districts. The Finnish capital metropolitan area is covered by three closely located cities: Helsinki, Vantaa and Espoo. Many Roma live in Vantaa and some in Espoo, but this survey was restricted to the schools under the Helsinki city administration. Either a curator, teacher, student counsellor, or school rector responded to the survey. There were altogether 59 Roma students in both lower elementary school and upper elementary school in 36 different schools. The survey revealed two issues; the number of Roma pupils in Helsinki elementary schools is relatively small and Roma pupils are scattered around the city in such a way that one school might have one or two Roma pupils but seldom more than five. The setting is very different to that in Eastern and Central Europe, where the challenge has been school segregation.

The results indicate that only 25% of the Roma students' school grades were average or above, the rest had some difficulties with their studies. The biggest problem with some Roma pupils seemed to be absenteeism. The school attendance statistics indicated that 1/3 attended classes regularly, 1/3 had some absences, and that for 1/3 these absences were considerable. Twenty per cent of the Roma students in Helsinki studied in separate arrangements, smaller classes or similar settings. Half of the students had an intensified or special support system to foster their education. The estimation of Roma pupils in the Helsinki elementary schools depicted a harsher and more negative picture than the survey conducted by the National Agency for Education. According to their survey, school principals estimated that 70% of Roma students were doing well at school (Rajala et al. 2011, p. 92). A co-ordinator for the

government aid support<sup>7</sup> of the basic education of Roma pupils in the Finnish National Board of Education confirmed<sup>8</sup> that the problems of Roma pupils were accumulated and more severe in the capital region than elsewhere in Finland.

Comparing these surveys is challenging, as one is nationwide and the other focuses on one city. As the results depended on the willingness of the schools in Helsinki to respond, the survey can only be considered indicative. However, even though there has been a gradual improvement in the long term (more Roma complete their basic education), repeating a school year, absenteeism and not seeking further education immediately after elementary school continues to be a problem.

## Stories About Roma Education

The numerical data on Roma education represents only one dimension. In the field of Roma policy implementation, and particularly in projects aiming to enhance Roma education, it is common and in a sense logical that only those Roma who are in need of special support systems are the recipients of empowering and supportive actions. Consequently, the data cover only a fraction of Roma students. The research conducted in Roma inclusion projects is subsequently in danger of revealing only one single story about Roma education, which again fosters the idea of Roma self-segregating themselves, devaluing education and considering schools ‘alien institutions’, and this in turn strengthens the perceptions of the Roma culture as opposing mainstream culture (Brüggemann 2014; Curcic and Plaut 2013; Lee and Warren 1991). In order to avoid portraying Roma as passive bystanders of empowering actions, we wish to highlight their role in the processes of improving Roma education.

In Roma (education) policies, Roma have often been positioned as people (s) instead of individual subjects (Curcic and Plaut 2013, p. 71), in other words, Roma are understood as a coherent, homogenous ethnic group and no attention is paid to social and economic variations among the group’s members. This collective, coherent group identity is justified in the processes of advocating collective Roma rights, as experiences of discrimination and stigmatization are commonly shared. At the same time, the collective group identity plays a role in creating the danger of a single story. In both assimilation practices and integration policies, Roma are categorized and labelled as a homogenous group, and thus through categorization integration and assimilation practices, they are two sides of the same coin (Clavé-Mercier and Olivera 2018).

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<sup>7</sup>The national development work of the basic education of Roma pupils began in Finland in 2008 as part of the development of the quality of basic education. For the first time, municipal authorities were able to apply to the Finnish National Board of Education for government aid to support the basic education of Roma pupils. Based on the aid directed to the capital region, the situation in the metropolitan area is worse than in other parts of the country.

<sup>8</sup>Information received by email June 20, 2018.

A Finnish Roma woman who had worked for several years in Roma education remarked that: ‘We have 500 years of discrimination on our shoulders. It cannot be denied that it shows’. Balancing between the stories of discrimination on the one hand and the ‘success stories’ on the other is a tricky task. Barriers exist for Roma education, despite individual strategies to tackle them (Brüggemann 2014). However, the tendency is that these stories of challenges, barriers and struggles overshadow the ‘just-like-everyone-else’ stories. Roma in education constitute a sociocultural category which is not like ‘everyone else’. Public schools are cultural institutes and Roma children are in the juncture and the space of different demands addressed by mainstream society and by their own community group (cf. Ogbu 2008). This is also the point at which researchers walk on eggshells, carefully avoiding the essential approach yet not downplaying the efforts of Roma policies and the paradigms on which they lean. Tremlett (2014) offers the concept of ‘super-diversity’ to navigate in the Romani studies of ethnic grouping versus individual stories within the realm of ethnicity and multiculturalism. She argues that de-essentialisation is necessary, but that we must not lose sight of ethnicity, and here the concept of ‘super-diversity’ is useful (Tremlett 2014). Tremlett thus tackles the same problem as Spivak (1996): the need to accept a certain amount and type of essentialism. As we introduce the practices of Roma mediators in schools, we also approach the question from the perspective of super-diversity and intersectionality.

### *Mediators Outside and Inside Schools*

The Roma project’s co-implementers were located in multiple cities in Finland. Within the project, Roma as a categorical concept was not useful in practice; the diversity among Finnish Kaale Roma had to be considered in order to design the best possible practices for each ‘Roma clientele group’. Some of the co-implementers worked in elementary schools, some only with adults in education institutes, and others worked with both adults and young people. Some project workers worked with inmates in prisons to guide them onto the path of education after being released. There was also a group of people working to support Roma in higher academic education. To this end, the people with whom the project workers worked had multiple individual stories (see also Mäenpää et al. 2018). As a target group, the Roma were diverse: children, adults, prisoners, boys, and girls. Furthermore, they were from different social and economic backgrounds and from different regions in Finland.

As the figures from the surveys indicate, challenges in education persist despite the positive factors from both the aspect of Roma communities and the school system. The project’s steering group made the same comments in regard to the Helsinki district: the amount of school dropouts and studying in separate settings were large in proportion. The challenge of low education level also materialized in the recruitment of Roma to the project. Although, in total there were many Roma workers, the project report reveals that in the beginning it was difficult to recruit

Roma due to their low level of professional skills. This reflects the low pace of improvement in Roma education, although the number of Roma completing basic education has increased decade by decade, especially since the 1970s (Rajala and Blomerus 2015; Rajala et al. 2011), the level of education still does not match the skills required in professional life. One of the supporting measures for Roma schooling has been the process of introducing school mediators with a Roma background to schools.

The term ‘mediator’ simplifies the duties the Roma mediators perform in their work. A mediator in Helsinki explained how according to her work contract her title was assistant, but that the work she did in the classroom was much more than that of an assistant. Schools devalue the work mediators do as they often work with Roma and non-Roma children with learning difficulties and/or behavioural disorders. The mediators’ working conditions are challenging, as they do not normally work full time, but approximately 26 hours a week, their salary is small, and all school holidays are unpaid. Despite the working conditions, according to one mediator, Roma mediators do good work with children and their families. She also emphasized the importance of the visibility of Roma workers in schools, so that teachers can see Roma in their work environments. It is also important that the parents of non-Roma children can meet Roma at work. She further elaborated that the first time she went to the teachers’ room, surprise appeared on the teachers’ faces. She interpreted the surprise as being because she was Roma. The same sort of surprise occurred when she spoke English to an immigrant child who had just recently moved to Finland. The mediator thought this was genuine surprise at the fact that a Roma spoke English: ‘Oh you can speak English, OK’. Overall, she said she was well received in the schools, and had no problems with the teachers, parents or children.

In Tampere, located approximately 200 km from Helsinki, according to project reports, having a Roma person working for the municipality has attained significant results (Mäenpää et al. 2018). With a carefully planned support model and the right person; one who enjoys the trust of the local Roma, it was possible to help Roma children complete their basic education and reach secondary-level education. All the Roma children who participated in the project in Tampere were able to attain their primary school certificate (Perho 2018, p. 61). The role of the mediator is greater than that of the assistants at the school and the work cannot be done on the basis of a regular nine-to-five job. It is also important that the Roma mediator is somebody the local community trusts. One mediator reported that not all Roma families want support from the mediator and therefore it is important to start the process of supporting a Roma child with the parents, to include them in it. Building trust between a young Roma and a mediator takes time, and different professionals are involved in the support system. In the Tampere case, it starts with the Roma mediator visiting different schools in the region to survey the Roma children and their situations. After this, the school staff, the Roma family and the mediator create a more specific support plan for the pupil. The plan is clarified through co-operation between the Roma pupil, the Roma family and the school personnel. The mediators emphasized knowing the children and the families and working closely together with

them. Similar importance is placed on the permanence of the support model in the municipal structures (Mäenpää et al. 2018, p. 243).

In the other fieldwork conducted in four other municipalities in different parts of Finland, the researcher interviewed and observed the work of five mediators for 1–4 days, and interviewed two mediators without observing their work. The findings resemble the observations in Helsinki and Tampere. The work of the mediators was highly effective. Many of the interviewees emphasized the importance of developing these practices locally. Thus, the interviewees found it essential that the work of the mediators was not dictated from the outside but that the mediators and the related workers were able to evaluate and try out what was needed locally. This also indicates the diversity of the education situations of Finnish Roma and how locality is entangled in this. For instance, different municipalities have diverse local histories and different kinds of dynamics,<sup>9</sup> which play a part in the educational situation. Thus, no single narrative can provide a picture of the multitude of these situations, but the interviewed mediators reported good results regarding their support of individual pupils. Their encounters with schools and families also shed light on the ongoing discrimination against Finnish Roma. The mediators reported that one part of their work was dispelling prejudices against Finnish Roma in the schools (see also Helakorpi et al. 2019). As in the cases in Tampere and Helsinki, the work of the interviewees did not follow office hours; the interviewees organized camps, clubs and other events for Roma youth after school days. Furthermore, most of the interviewees were responsible for teaching the Roma mother tongue in their municipality.

To respond to the educational challenges, having Roma mediators at and outside schools appears to be an effective way of supporting Roma children. The mediators worked with families, children and school authorities. They had a holistic approach to their work which involved supporting the schooling, planning future perspectives and landscapes with the young person, intensively working with other professionals, supporting young people outside school, and supporting the whole family in the process. A mediator in Helsinki told us in the interview that sometimes the reasons why certain practices happen in the school environment need to be explained to Roma families, i.e. different standpoints of a bureaucratic practice may need explaining. A Roma mediator is one who strengthens the cultural and ethnic identity of a young person in a space that might challenge the sense of belonging of a young Roma.

The remedies to set the standards of Roma education at a higher level also encompass the actions for transitioning from basic education to vocational and higher education. The Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (DIAK) administrated the Roma project. They indicated two objectives for the project. The first objective was, through education, to lower the barriers to employment, to promote the equality of Roma in Finnish society, and to improve overall inclusion and wellbeing. The second objective was to increase the knowledge of the authorities,

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<sup>9</sup>For different dynamics, see Stenroos (2018).

decision-makers and teachers in regards to Roma culture and education (Perho 2018, p. 56). Within these objectives was preparation training for Roma to enroll at polytechnics and universities of applied sciences.

DIAK carried out the training and workshops in collaboration with Roma NGOs and Roma activists. The role of the NGOs was mainly to reach potentially interested people. Altogether eight people participated in the workshops, although not regularly. There were some challenges because the commitments and needs for the workshops varied. The workshops were held in Helsinki and this might have limited the number of participants. Most of the participants were adult women with families and children (Mäenpää et al. 2018, p. 142). This similar tendency among Roma to seek education in older age, has been observed in a study by the National Agency for Education (Rajala and Blomerus 2015). Another tendency is for Roma women to be more eager to seek higher education.

However, a few students started their studies in DIAK after the workshops ended. Although not many Roma currently have an educational background that is adequate for applying for a place in higher education, the attitudes and mentalities towards academic education have taken a more positive direction. One participant in this training believed that before, Roma mostly wanted quick access to work, which meant a short education, whereas today many Roma realize the importance of higher education.

Two issues can be noted in these stories. First, Roma tend to have a 'pause' in education to establish families at a relatively early age and secondly, there seems to be more interest in higher education among Roma women than men. The latter issue is not a Roma-specific issue and follows the tendency in Finnish society in general. If the common trajectory of the educational path among Roma does not follow the institutionalized trajectory, how can these two trajectories be merged for the best outcome?

### *The Different Life Courses of Finnish Roma Students*

Two teachers, one Roma and the other non-Roma, elucidated the different life courses of Roma in Finnish society. By describing an imaginary Finnish Roma girl and an ethnic Finnish girl they illustrated the challenges they encountered in their work. These two teachers had several years of experience training young Roma people and adults in courses aiming to educate Roma to become mediators in municipal and governmental institutions, i.e. in health care services and schools. Their story of the life courses of two imaginary girls is educative, as it paints viewpoints that are seldom considered when examining the educational challenges of Roma children in the Finnish basic education system. First, they pointed out the agency of the young Roma person in the context of establishing one's position in the Roma community. Secondly, they also pointed out that although it a young person establishing their position in their cultural terrain is a normal process, in the case of Roma this process is often considered by mainstream society as one of

marginalization. Thirdly, their story emphasizes the differences in the life courses, as Roma tend to start families at a relatively early point in life.

For a young Roma person, establishing a position in the Roma community is not an automatic process. It actually requires them to acknowledge the cultural norms and expectations of the Roma community. Entering into adulthood carries the duty to follow the behavioural norms of adults and this can sometimes be stressful for the young person. One young Roma said that sometimes he avoided situations with older Roma as he felt he did not know the rules well enough. In front of older Roma people one cannot express issues related to the body, sexuality or romantic relations: these issues are taboo. Roma taboos often stem from purity norms; a young Roma girl wanting to date a young man needs to 'elope' from the sights of older Roma, and this gesture is considered respect for the elderly, and shames dating practices (Markkanen 2003, p. 124). In Finnish culture it is typical for a girl to bring her boyfriend to hang out at home after school days. This is not the same case for a Roma girl.

A young Roma girl starts to make her path to Roma adulthood during puberty. They start to follow the norms, speak and dress accordingly and seek the company of other young Roma. They want to establish their position among the Roma and in practice this means spending time with other Roma. The number of young Roma in one school can be very few, typically in Helsinki one to five Roma in one school. Establishing one's position in the community cannot happen at school, as young Roma are scattered around the cities. This process becomes a meaningful priority and school becomes secondary. A young Roma works on becoming an adult member of the community to avoid inner group exclusion. Meanwhile this process, from the perspective of Finnish society and the school, looks as if the young Roma is being marginalized from Finnish society. Teachers lack cultural knowledge of this socialization. (Ethnographic interview August 2018).

The experiences of the two teachers reveal a deviation in the life courses of an ethnic Finn and Roma adolescents. Roma young people do not find peers in the school environment as the total number of Roma in Finland is estimated to be 10,000–12,000, of which a few thousands are probably teenagers. It is understandable that young Roma try to redeem their place in the community by seeking the company of other young Roma and start following their cultural norms as a manifestation of belonging. For the children and young people of the mainstream population, school is also a place to socialize, meet friends and possibly find someone to bond with romantically. Thus, Roma children and young people sometimes face loneliness and bullying in schools. Young Roma may experience a feeling of otherness in their lives, and it follows that the school does not become as meaningful a social environment for them.

This teachers' interview underlines the viewpoint of a young Roma. There is a tendency to forget the agency of young Roma in regard to Roma education, and furthermore to disregard how Roma establish their position in their own community. Researchers often look for explanations in parents' ability to support their children's education, in the opposing cultures, or focus on the schools as alienating institutions (Brüggemann 2014). However, the challenges and barriers in Roma education are

complex, multifaceted and should be examined as sociohistorical interplay between different actors, each one having an impact on other.

These reflections are similar to those noted by the Finnish National Agency for Education's Roma education unit in their studies (Rajala et al. 2011, p. 95). They observed that in the completion of basic education and in seeking further education, too many Roma still fail to gain their basic education certificate or do not seek further education. They suggest that the reason is the early assumption of adult status and starting a family early. In many cases, absences from school are the reason why elementary school is not completed. The critical deviation that impacts on Roma children is considered to take place around the age of ten (10), approximately during the fifth and sixth grades. This aligns with the two teachers' reports: 'when you first start family life, have some children and when you attain your place in the community, then the interest and commitment for education is higher'.

The narrative of the Roma girl and Finnish girl is essentialist but serves as an example narration of how these two teachers in the adult education institute make sense of their challenges at work. In their narration, they seek understanding of the social and cultural issues behind the stories. The education personnel in the municipal schools elaborate on the Finnish educational institute premises and neglect different premises.

### ***Teachers' Viewpoints on Roma Pupils***

The teachers and study counsellors noticed that in addition to systematic absences from school, communication with the family was almost non-existent, and consequently, providing support and guidance for both the pupils and their parents was challenging and irregular. One of the comments was that no single Roma pupil in their school had completed basic education and/or sought further education after elementary school. It was not clear how many Roma pupils they had had over the years, but as a statement coming from a school professional, it sounds alarming that no Roma students had succeeded in their schooling. It was also considered problematic that Roma parents do not seek support or guidance. Furthermore, absences due to different family-related events also occurred more often than with other students. Absences for family events were considered one reason why Roma students could not keep up with others.

One of the respondents wondered why 'culture' is given as an explanation for these challenges: 'How can culture be enough of an explanation for not needing education or for less education? What if educating oneself requires you to abandon some cultural traditions or you need to find new ways to perform and express your traditions?' A teacher stated that Roma pupils have prejudices towards majority Finns and towards how mainstream Finns live and think. Roma students have prejudices toward education *per se*. The same teacher continued to describe the situation: attitudes and ways of living are passed from generation to generation, and the old attitudes still show in the attitudes of Roma pupils.

By analysing the above statement through the positions of the people involved (agency), through structures (school as a cultural institute) and through discourse, we come across what Lauritzen describes as anti-gypsyist discourse, stemming from the essentialist idea of nomadism (Lauritzen 2019). She studied 55 research papers on Roma education and concluded that anti-gypsyist discourse is mainly based on the idea of nomadism and that this is 'ground for understanding Roma disadvantage in education based on apparent nomadism, thus making Roma too different for the regular education system' (ibid. 68). According to her, fictional characteristics are projected onto Roma. In the citation from the teacher in our material, the first sentence speculated on how a culture can be an explanation, but then the teacher goes on to say that one should abandon some cultural traditions or find new ways to express them. There are no indications of how schools as institutions could adjust to the different cultural backgrounds of students, or what a teacher could do to improve the situation.

The idea of abandoning some cultural tradition was only one viewpoint. Some of the teachers were flexible in finding solutions for challenging situations, and different arrangements, such as studying 2 days a week in a youth centre and the rest of the week at school, were allowed by the school. One of the rectors, whom the project workers contacted to ask whether there were Roma students in his school and whether they needed support in their studies, responded: 'We have one family here. They do not need your help, the parents work and are active in school activities and the children are doing fine with their studies. Not only that, the children have clear goals in mind.' Another project worker told us that the children attending Roma language courses did not need any extra support. One of them, for example, had top grades and was planning to become a doctor. This is not to say that the challenges of Roma education do not exist, only that the situation is not the same for each Roma child.

Although historical oppression and discrimination as explanations for the disadvantages of Roma students has been strongly criticized by some Roma activists in Finland, 'how long can we explain the situation using history?', some activists emphasize that history still appears in the interactions between the majority Finns and Roma. Consequently, it is necessary to examine Roma education in a larger societal context, as an interplay between the different actors involved. The involvement of Roma activists, Romani elite and NGOs in promoting education indicate that Roma recognize the importance of mainstream education as a social capital for involvement and inclusion (Trubeta 2013, pp. 22–24). There is still a great deal of work to be done with Roma education in Finland, but at the same time, there are people doing this work and examining the alternatives to enable the required adjustments.

Nigerian storyteller Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (TedGlobal 2009) warned us about the danger of a single story: 'Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story'. This is the same with the Roma education situation. If we only hear the numbers of dropouts or uncompleted basic education,

then it is easy to say Roma parents do not have the skills to support their children, and that Roma do not value the education system, that Roma self-segregate. Instead, when examining (through ethnographic methods) who does what, why they do it and where they do it, the elaboration of Roma education is in a complex, societal context. Roma schooling is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and as such, there is no single, simple, effective solution to solve the challenge of a low education level. What we suggest here is reconsidering the interplay between societal and community forces in schools or concerning the learning challenges of Roma children, instead of limiting study to a single topic, such as anti-gypsyism.

## **Concluding Remarks and Discussions**

In this article, we have represented stories about Roma education and schooling through the eyes of Roma mediators, teachers and Roma project workers. By doing so, we have aimed to expand the focus from schools as the sole unit responsible for education to cover other social aspects of young Roma students. The wider focus provides the possibility to avoid a single story of Roma education: the same single story that the Roma policies also recreate and maintain.

Finland as a country in which education is free of charge, universal, and has a national curriculum that supports diversity in schools, and yet where Roma students lag behind the mainstream students, provides a setting that calls for a wider focus. Having Roma mediators in schools is part of this wider focus. Their work does not only cover the children in the schools but also families, entire Roma communities, and school personnel. Through the work of mediators, the definition of challenges becomes wider – their work calls for examining both societal and community forces.

The multiple actors and multiple stories about Roma education further force us to look beyond the period of elementary school. There is a need to think about what motivates Roma to attend school, as it is not a straight conduit from education to work. We also need to look at the socialization processes of young Roma, as the interview of the two teachers revealed, to acknowledge that this socialization process does not necessarily happen in the school environment.

Our elaborations in this article indicate that there is no single, overarching solution to enhance Roma education. Regional differences further indicate that the challenge is structural; what has worked in Tampere has not worked in Helsinki. But at the same time, regional differences indicate that Roma communities are organized in different ways in smaller cities than in the capital area. To conclude, as nationwide policies support equality in schooling, the attention should be on regional implementation. With a wide focus.

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# Chapter 8

## Counteracting the Schools' Demon: Local Social Changes and Their Effects on the Participation of Roma Children in School Education



Stefánia Toma

**Abstract** The aim of the article (The empirical material leading to the present chapter results from the research effort “*MigRom—The Immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects, and future engagement strategies*”, a project funded by the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme under the call “Dealing with diversity and cohesion: the case of the Roma in the European Union” (GA319901). I also used the results and experiences of earlier fieldworks starting with 2000 in Bighal (the name of the localities were changed in order to respect the identities of the people) that were financed through Open Society Institute, Visegrad Funds, CERGE-EI through GDN and WIIW, respectively Inclusion 2007 through PHARE 2004. Earlier version of the article was presented at the GLS Conference in Nicosia (Cyprus) in 2017. The article was finalized in the framework of a visiting research programme at TARKI-POLC receiving funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 730998, “*InGRID-2—Integrating Research Infrastructure for European expertise on Inclusive Growth from data to policy*”). is to inquire into the interconnectedness of large number of factors that carry the opportunity and possibility of improving school participation of Roma children in Romania.

I argue that the inherent deficiencies of the educational system, starting with the structural constraints and ending with the psycho-social context in which Roma (or minoritized, marginalized, vulnerable) children learn, can be and are challenged by initiatives, strategies or processes that fall out of the immediate range of the strict framework of the educational system. Bourdieu used the Maxwell’s demon as a metaphor to illustrate the reproduction of socio-economic inequalities in the framework of school system. But this ‘demon’ might be challenged with more or less success if we step out and look for possible ‘tools’ to counteract this demon. Two such cases are presented in this chapter. One is a project implemented with and by

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the local Roma community using external financing and the other one is the participation of the members of the communities in international migration and use of remittances. I will emphasize that independently of the type and amount of the mobilized resources the individuals and/or communities are able to create and proactively make good use of path-departing opportunities through mechanisms of redefining and changing contextual constraints thus improvements can be observed in the school participation of the Roma children (PS. PS. The article was written before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world. Its effects seems to neutralize the positive impact of the above mentioned processes: the slow steps taken in improving the socio-economic situation of the Roma seems to be stopped; prejudices and ethnic hatred seems to be stronger; access to services for Roma communities get more difficult, including to education: in this context, a further research question is how on-line schooling changed or will change the participation of Roma children?).

**Keywords** School education · Interventions · Migration · Roma · Romania

Education—whether formal or informal—permeates all aspects of our lives beginning from our early existence. It is part of a complex system, the elements of which interacts with and mutually influences each other. It not only includes national level politics and policy, it also affects community relationships, and at a micro-level influences the lives of individuals and their families. Thus, almost every stage of life of a family is framed and structured by education and schooling, too. The daily routine of a family with children is deeply graven by the school programme. Education and schooling—implicitly everything that is connected to it—can offer prestige, success, feeling of completion and delusion, it can be the site of equity or injustice, it can design aspirations, can improve social relations, but it can have disruptive effects and can restrict access to different services and domains as well, especially if one does not participate in it out of various reasons.

Not coincidentally was the school system of primary importance for Bourdieu, who calls it Maxwell's demon,<sup>1</sup> using it as a metaphor for maintaining socio-economic inequality among students: it “maintains the pre-existing order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital.” (Bourdieu 1998, p. 20).

Ultimately, in some cases, irrespective of the fact that one participates or not, the school system might contribute to creating Catch-22-like situations. This is particularly true for marginalized, vulnerable children, specifically for the Roma children. If they are not enrolled in school or they drop-out earlier as compared to their peer-group, later they have to face the—many times insurmountable—disadvantages

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<sup>1</sup>Bourdieu borrowed the model from the physicist James Clerk Maxwell, who imagined a demon which controls the door between two chambers of gas selecting the faster and slower molecules, thus maintaining the difference in the system, thereby entropy decreases and the second law of thermodynamics is violated.

brought by having less or no school education. On the other hand, the social situation of Roma children in school is frequently described as lacking the same conditions as their non-Roma peers', for example: poorer nutrition, higher exposure to health risks, and poorer housing conditions (O'Nions 2007, pp. 146–155), which might otherwise lead to effective and successful engagement in school activities (Payne 2019), it rather emphasize the ethnic gap in education (Papp 2011). Hence the cumulated disadvantages would reinforce their already precarious socio-economic situation.

Bourdieu's "demon" goes beyond the lack of capital (whether economic, social or cultural). It also encompasses the attitudes of their peers and the teachers that Roma children have to deal with while being in school, thus the concept of equality of opportunities (Maclean 2003) gains more dynamic and complex substrata. Thus, besides the effects of the parent's background and wealth, the quality of school infrastructure and teaching practices, the lack or inadequacy of educational programs and policies (Walther et al. 2016), Roma children have to face stereotypical and/or prejudicial attitudes and behaviors based on their ethnicity, language and socio-economic position.

Consequently, to accomplish improvements in this complex life-arena might seem a Sisyphean task, however I will argue that it is not impossible. Improvements in the school education of the Roma children can be induced either from the top and/or from below by changing the characteristics of the interdependent factors that influence the way educational process unfolds. The implementation of policy measures and legislation frames the organization and practices of school education contributing to the creation of availability of the objective chances and opportunities (including infrastructures) needed for the success of particular social categories (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). People's strategies (including teachers', parents' and the children's) and community-based interventions may come in completion, reinforcement and improvement of the top-induced conditions and might also contribute to changes in participation in the educational system for disadvantaged children (Drown 2019).

Maneuvering, building strategies or even just drifting with the tide in order to make ends meet in this complex context both for children and parents is a demanding process that claims long-term financial, social and emotional investment with no guarantees of success. One out of the many strategies of the families that might influence directly or indirectly the Roma children's school educational attainment—among other aspects of their everyday life—is engaging in short- or long-term migration, investing remittances in goods or activities that might improve the school participation of their children.

This chapter aims at shedding light on the interconnectedness of factors that might affect the school participation of Roma children, focusing on an individual (i.e migration) and a community level (NGO project) strategy. Despite the fact that these are processes that develop outside the immediate school environment, they can both have a stimulating or thwarting effect on the school participation of Roma children. I will argue from a relational and processual perspective borrowed from Norbert Elias (1978, 1997), that improvements—even if modest—in the school participation of

socially and economically deprived children can be reached by mobilizing local community resources independently of the institutional context (legal, infrastructural and human resources) of schools, while the quality of the institution positively supports and consolidates the efforts of the individuals.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I will bring two examples of interventions that have had positive influence on school participation. I will emphasize that independently of the type and amount of the mobilized resources, the individuals and/or communities are able to create and proactively make good use of path-departing opportunities through mechanisms of redefining and changing contextual constraints.

Throughout the chapter, I will provide glimpses of statistical and ethnographic data on the initial context and what changes occurred in two Transylvanian villages over a more than 10 years period, focusing on the local conditions that generated those changes and answering the question of how these changes happened.<sup>3</sup> While the focus in this chapter is local, it should be highlighted, that during this period significant initiatives and events had happened in Romania, that have also inevitably influenced local level processes. The *Romanian Government's Strategy for Improving the Condition of Roma 2001-2010* was developed, later it was replaced by the *Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Inclusion of the Romanian Citizens belonging to Roma minority for the period 2012–2020*. Romania also participated in the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*, the *European Platform for Roma Inclusion*, the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies*, as well as other relevant strategic initiatives that aimed/aims at the social-economic inclusion of Roma minority in the fields of education, health, employment, housing, culture and social infrastructure and designed the direction of the interventions. With the 2007 EU accession of Romania, international travel (labor force migration) of Romanian citizens became easier. However it was immediately followed by the global financial-economic crises that penetrated the job market situation on an unprecedented level, as well as having impacted the local informal employment possibilities. This resulted in the growing number of Roma migrants seeking employment opportunities in Western European countries.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, I will present the case of an NGO initiative that was implemented at the beginning of the 2000s with the contribution of the local Roma community and its influence on the school participation of the

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<sup>2</sup>Hereby I express my gratitude to the people of the villages that starting from 1999 they accepted my periodical presence in their lives, and to Cristina Raț and Fosztó László for the reinforcing and enlightening conversations. I remain deeply indebted to Rosa Drown for her endless support, numerous advices and her efforts to improve my text. I am also grateful to Judit Durst, Gyula Kozák, Zsuzsa Plainér and my colleagues from the DICE-ROMA workshops at the RIRNM for their insightful suggestions. All shortcomings weight solely on my shoulders.

<sup>3</sup>In the MigRom project we surveyed 240 households in Baratca and 180 households in Bighal, comprising 1043, respectively 672 persons, out of which more than 80% live in compact Roma neighborhoods. The aim was to reach all self-identified Roma households from the villages (community census). More details on the socio-economic situation, demographic characteristics, migration experiences and patterns, generally more contextual data and methodology are described in Toma et al. (2018), Toma and Fosztó (2018a, b).

Roma children, contrasting it with the situation in another village from Transylvania. Then, I turn to another major moment in the lives of the local communities, that of when Roma started to participate in international migration in both villages and discuss how migration and remittances made its contribution to the improvement of school participation of Roma children.

## **Civil Society's Community-Based Interventions**

In the early 2000s during fieldwork in Bighal I woke up early in the morning on the barely distinct noises of some family members whispering and rustling around the kitchen that also served as living room. It was a usual kindergarten and school day for the children. Their father had already left for work, but the girls had to prepare their long hair in tresses, their mother tried to convince them that they have breakfast, at least a modest one, and at the same time check their school timetable, their schoolbag, their clothes, school supplies and maybe a favorite doll to be packed. One yawn came after the other for everybody. Eventually, they left. One of the girls was taken to the state kindergarten in the center of the village; the bigger child was left on the way at the elementary school. The scene is familiar for many who have school-aged children irrespective of their ethnicity.

But hardly can we say that it was typical for all Roma households in Bighal. There were other families who during those years had a different daily program. The early morning haste maybe was a constant for every family, but in the compact community the parents were waiting for the arrival of the educational practitioner to take the children to the recently built Roma community center for the morning hours of preparation, so that later that day they could go, already prepared, to the central state kindergarten that functioned in an old building. In the Roma community center, simply named by locals as "*Gypsy kindergarten*" those days, children were prepared to get used to the activities of the central kindergarten under the supervision of an ethnic Romanian educator who also knew Hungarian language and some Romani.

This community center was a project implemented by an NGO and functioned for 2 years. The project required the active involvement of the local community who contributed by producing clay bricks for the construction of social houses and the community center. At the beginning of this period, in 1999/2000 13 Roma children were enrolled in the kindergarten, out of them 12 were more than 6 years old (out of the 156 enrolled children from the village). While in the elementary school (grades I–IV) there were 16 Roma children enrolled at the Hungarian section and 40 at the Romanian classes. In the secondary school (grades V–VIII) there were 5 Roma children in Hungarian classes and 18 in Romanian classes, but with the majority of them only attending up to the fifth or the sixth grade. In the eighth grade only one Roma child was attending the Hungarian section.

More than a decade later, the oldest child of my host family already graduated university in a nearby town, the middle child is a university student in the same town and the third and youngest member of the family, the boy, is preparing to go to high

**Table 8.1** The school participation (the highest level) of Roma persons (men and women) in Bighal and Baratca according to the MigRom survey (2016)

	BARATCA				BIGHAL			
	Nr. of persons			% of Total	Nr. of persons			% of Total
	Total	Men	Women		Total	Men	Women	
Without any education	112	57	55	10.7	21	7	14	3.1
Elementary school (I-IV grades)	307	154	153	29.4	152	59	93	22.6
Secondary school (V-VIII grades)	352	168	184	33.7	297	149	148	44.2
Highschool	26	8	18	2.5	70	38	32	10.4
Professional school	9	3	6	0.9	25	19	6	3.7
Post highschool	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0.3
University	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0.2
Not school age (under 6 years old)	205	111	94	19.7	101	54	47	15
School-aged, but not attending	30	16	14	2.9	2	1	1	0.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1041</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>100</b>

Data source: MigRom project, RIRNM

school. The mornings are more relaxed from educational point of view. During the last few years their father used to work in construction in different countries being the member of an ethnically mixed local work-group. This opportunity greatly contributed to the significant growth of the household income. They were able to afford more school-related expenses parallel with the improvement and extension of the house (building additional room and a bathroom). Meanwhile the community center was transformed offering space for different community activities (public baths for example), depending on the available funding. The so-called Roma “kindergarten” was closed and never re-opened because it was considered as a separated educational space and that its programme overlapped with that of the state kindergarten. The old, small and not properly equipped central kindergarten was moved to a newly built, two-storey building with many facilities, extended programme and more employees. In 2015/2016 there were 65 Roma children enrolled in kindergarten between 3 and 6 years old. There were 88 Roma children in the elementary classes and 31 in the secondary school, and 2 Roma children were told that they should attend school but they dropped out. These years the number of Roma children enrolled in kindergarten and school remained stable at a relatively high level: during the 2013/2014 school year there were 57 Roma children in the kindergarten while 147 children in the I–VIII grades and in 2014/2015 50 children in the kindergarten and 155 in the I–VIII grades.

The most spectacular increase in attendance of Roma children was registered in kindergarten. As already mentioned in 1999/2000 school year 13 Roma children were enrolled in the kindergarten, 15 years later there were 65 Roma children, while there were no major changes in the size of the local Roma community.<sup>4</sup> Though not at the same pace, improvements were observed in elementary- and secondary school enrolment and graduation as well in this locality (see Table 8.1). Pre-school

<sup>4</sup>In Romania pre-school education is not compulsory yet, but a new Law of Education is in preparation that stipulates that until 2030 the latest, all levels of education, including preschool level, must be compulsory. <https://senat.ro/Legis/Lista.aspx?cod=21292>

attendance is viewed as crucial in ensuring further educational opportunities (Drown 2019) and in reducing not only early school drop-out<sup>5</sup> (Roth and Moisa 2011, p. 518; FRA 2018, p. 11), but also reduces dramatically of being MPI (multidimensional poverty index) poor by 12.9% (Ivanov and Kagin 2014, p. 67).

Table 8.1 shows the highest school level graduated by Roma comparing the two localities shown in the MigRom survey. We can observe that Roma in Bighal spend significantly more years in school than their peers in Baratca.<sup>6</sup> Although there is room for improvement in both localities as regards school education, there are a number of reasons why Roma in Bighal have a higher level of participation. While there are no significant differences between the socio-economic situation of the Roma households comparing the two localities, the broader social and infrastructural context shows some notable differences. For example, the most obvious one is that access to pre-school education developed differently in Bighal. It was already presented that in Bighal there was a specific program implemented that contained a component focusing on pre-school activities. There is a vocational highschool in Bighal and the distance to the nearest small town is also smaller compared to Baratca. Roma in Bighal speak at least three languages,<sup>7</sup> and although most of the Roma children are enrolled at the Romanian language section, they also have access to some programs that targets Hungarian-speaking pupils (events, excursions, scholarships, etc). By comparison, in Baratca, the Roma are Romanian speakers, there have been comparably less educational programs implemented, and there is no high school in the locality or in the closer region at all (the closest locality with any kind of highschool and easiest to reach is approx. 40 km far). This later puts an additional financial burden on families that in the context of severe poverty and marginalization just few households can afford. In addition, ethnic relations on locality level influences school-participation (Kruse and Kroneberg 2019). In Baratca the social distance between Roma and non-Roma is high that inevitably marks social interactions in any context. As a result, 'white-flight' of Hungarian students started to develop, leaving the local school resembling more and more like a Roma only school. On the other hand, in Bighal the interactions between Roma and non-Roma are more frequent and are not heavily loaded with prejudices and distance-keeping attitudes (Toma and Fosztó 2018a).

However this is just a cross-sectional image of the current educational context and we can only draw some already well-established conclusions at this point. The following paragraphs will try to present a more nuanced analysis on the educational

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<sup>5</sup>In 2015 it was adopted a Strategy for Reducing of Early School Leaving in Romania, though it is too early to see whether it has been implemented effectively. <https://www.edu.ro/strategia-privind-reducerea-p%C4%83r%C4%83sirii-timpurii-%C8%99colii-%C3%AEn-rom%C3%A2nia>

<sup>6</sup>Chi-square = 0.000 with Cramer's V = 0.299. The variables were recoded and those who were not school-aged were excluded from the analysis.

<sup>7</sup>They are Romani speakers, but fieldwork revealed that they use both Romanian and Hungarian in home and community context as well. Children thus have the opportunity to learn basic Romanian and Hungarian at home before being enrolled in school system. This is important, because language barriers affect academic achievement in schools (Feischmidt 2014).

**Table 8.2** The highest graduated school level of Roma persons born between 1982–1987, 1988–1993 and 1994–1999 comparing Bighal and Baratca (%)

	BARATCA			BIGHAL		
	% of persons			% of persons		
	1982-1987	1988-1993	1994-1999	1982-1987	1988-1993	1994-1999 <i>The kindergarten generation</i>
Without any education	4.0	10.6	45.5	5.2	6.2	2.8
Elementary school (I-IV grades)	42.6	56.1	21.1	6.9	10.8	4.2
Secondary school (V-VIII grades)	47.5	33.3	21.1	74.1	46.2	38.9
Highschool	5.9	0	12.2	12.1	33.8	54.2
University level (any type)	0	0	0	1.7	3.1	0
<b>TOTAL (nr. of persons)</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>72</b>

Data source: MigRom project (RIRNM)

situation of Roma children in these two localities highlighting that this present situation displayed in Table 8.1 stemmed from the complex combination and interaction of different factors and contexts that generated transformations in the local society and through this the educational situation as well.

To gain a more accurate image of how participation in schooling has changed over different periods and generations, we grouped the persons based on their year of birth into different categories.<sup>8</sup> More precisely, we selected the generation of children who were pre-school aged (between 4 and 6 years old) in the period when they had the chance to be part of the program implemented in Bighal and compare their school participation to the previous generations in both villages. We use data from Baratca as well despite the fact that there were no comparable programs implemented at that time in the village, but, to some extent, the data are comparable to the results in Bighal. As Table 8.2 shows, the differences are striking, and not only when comparing the two villages, but when comparing the school participation of different age-cohorts in Bighal as well. The ratio of persons without any education in Baratca among those born between 1994 and 1999 is very high—almost half of that generation skipped schooling, but those who did enroll they stayed more in school compared to the previous generations (more persons graduated some kind of highschool). That was the period of structural rearrangements and political repositioning when it became clear that most of the Roma found themselves as unemployed and hadn't found viable alternatives yet, integration programs and NGO projects were not present, while the effects of the global economic crises started to make themselves felt, thus the Roma felt into the institutional dead spot for a while. But it is also the period when, in the wake of EU accession, authorities renounced at the school-registration conditionality of the universal child allowance between 2006 and 2009 (Raț et al. 2020), and this period covers more or less the generation of children that ought to begin school during those years (children born

<sup>8</sup>Though there are more or less (less) rooted conventions on generation panels (e.g. X, the Millennials, Z and so on), we chose to ignore the global conventions, and to generate cohorts that better reflect local situations.

between 1994 and 1999). In Bighal the education data denotes a better situation. More than half of the children born between 1994 and 1999 graduated some form of highschool (including vocational schools as well) considerably improving the situation compared to the previous age-cohorts.<sup>9</sup>

These children were of pre-school age at the time of the functioning of the community center in the Roma neighborhood, and even if our data does not permit to identify individually those who participated in the program and those who did not, we can assume that among others there is a generational model-following effect. This is illustrated by qualitative data, as well. The narratives of both Roma and non-Roma about this community project underline the positive effects of it, as the local Roma experts put it at several years distance:

Many don't go to school after a year or two, because they fail and they can't continue. Now, it's better that we did this day-care through the association (the local Roma NGO), that children attend before entering elementary school and they learn how to draw, to handle a pencil and anything they need to know. The educator works nicely with the children, she teaches them Romanian, they receive food, as well. Hope that it will be better from now on. (...) But now people realize that school means something. That those who have school [education] think better, can talk to each other. Not like the savages. School is very important, like in the past – if you had school, you had profession, too. (interview, Roma expert, 2003, Open Society Institute project, Bighal)

[the Gypsy kindergarten]. . . but that was good from some point of view, because there the children learnt something. . . they learnt Romanian, because there they used the Romanian (language), and learnt a bit how to behave, and they learnt. . . something. . . how to eat. When they enrolled in the first class, they already knew a bit to write, or what to say. . . how to handle the pencil, to draw, to count. . . something, anything. (interview, Roma Health Mediator, 2005, CERGE-EI project, Bighal)

Exactly there were in kindergarten, all my children [the Roma children from the elementary school]. And it counts enormously, very much indeed, that they went there. The socialization has already started, that is very important, and anyway they have a vocabulary already. And they speak Romani at home, they don't speak Hungarian or Romanian. And [because of this] their vocabulary is poor, reduced [when they enter school]. (...) But with this kindergarten is much easier. Because they already have some knowledge, you have something to start with. It is much easier at the kindergarten because you work with games, images. . . so, it counts a lot for the children if they attend kindergarten. (interview, Romanian elementary school teacher, Romanian section, II. grade, 2005, CERGE-EI project, Bighal)

While in Bighal the externally financed (by an international foundation) and community-based intervention—at least partially (because it was needed for the interplay of other factors as well, as we will see later)—explains the improvements in the school participation of these children, how can we explain the relative improvement in Baratca?

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<sup>9</sup>Chi-square = 0.000 with Cramer's  $V = 0.276$  for Bighal and Cramer's  $V = 0.381$  for Baratca. The variables were recoded and those who were not born in these periods were excluded from the analysis.

## Evolving Migration Patterns and Impacts

The migration of Roma in increased numbers started later than the migration of their non-Roma co-villagers in both localities due to the declining formal and informal work opportunities after 2007. In both villages approximately 60% of the surveyed households<sup>10</sup> had at least one member of the family who worked abroad for shorter or longer periods of time (most of them between 3 and 6 months during the summer). Almost all households declared that they spent money received or brought back home from abroad in the year preceding the survey. Most of the spending went into buying consumer goods (food, clothes, home appliances), improving, building or buying houses, spending on health, only a few families (five from Baratca) managed to invest financial remittances into small businesses. But there are significant differences both in the way migration patterns unfolded and in its effects. The migratory patterns of the Roma communities in these villages were shaped by the degree and modes of maintenance of social distance between the Roma and local majority. The hierarchically organized ethnic categories and networks built along these categories shaped the way remittances were spent and invested at home (Toma and Fosztó 2018a). This resulted in either competitive or cooperative relations between ethnic groups, depending on the local symbolic hierarchies that were challenged or reinforced (Toma and Fosztó 2018b, p. 43). The migration and remittance induced changes are visible on local level in both villages, but in Baratca these changes are not always perceived positively by the local non-Roma. While they acknowledged some aspects as beneficial changes (new skills learned, improvements in the lived spaces, changed mentalities, etc.), some locals interpreted the geographical desegregation process of the Roma community (moving in the center of the village) as a threat, as “invasion of the village” and expressed their fear that the Roma eventually will become the numerically dominant population. Local Hungarians interpret these processes as feeling of “loss of own space” that individually was translated into “white flight”-like decisions. Because there are more Roma children in the local school, some of the parents had decided that they rather take their children to the all-Hungarian school in the nearby village.

Another significant difference worth mentioning is that, comparing to Baratca, a considerably higher number of households in Bighal declared that they spent the remittances on the education of their children. This means also that they invested more in the clothing of the children, bought school supplies and were able to contribute more to the constant needs of the school (contributing to the class money, paying for excursions, buying the necessary books and other school supplies). Conway and Cohen (1998, p. 28) underlined that in the case of poor households/communities the importance of consumption expenditure should not be underestimated, as it has developmental effect on long term, because better food, more clothes or any other consumable contributes to the overall improvement

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<sup>10</sup>240 households in Baratca and 180 households in Bighal, comprising 1043, respectively 672 persons (Data source: MigRom Project).

in the households' general well-being (for example, health). Similarly, investment in health and education should be defined as productive investment. So far, we have seen that in Bighal more households spent remittances directly on education, than in Baratca. That does not mean that in Baratca the spending of remittances does not have a share in the improvement of continuation of schooling. As Bloem and Brüggemann put it, simply the possession and access to different resources at home, such as desk, computer, books, better and fashionable clothes, independently to the school infrastructure might influence as well school participation and attainment (2016, p. 19). Though statistically there was no association between the spending of remittances and finished school levels, mostly because almost all families received and spent money (and we did not ask about the amount received), remittances are more likely to have greater effect on the transition to higher secondary education, when there is greater tendency for older children to leave school to work.

Few of them graduate highschool, but this is I think a problem on national level, if you have 8<sup>th</sup> classes you are finished, in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade rarely see one [Roma pupil]. (...) because in many cases when a children reaches a certain age of 14 they have to work already, as daily-workers in agriculture and who knows where else. So this is it...the life conditions, but this is all up to the family. (...) They also go abroad for work...many of them...sometimes even the 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys are missing from school, because they went to work [abroad]. (interview, school teacher, 2015, MigRom project, Baratca)

There are a spectrum of factors whose interplay can equally influence educational outcomes, remittance spending being just one of them. To this is closely connected the migration experience, that beside financial inputs, can contribute more with social remittances to changes in schooling practices. We compared those households that had migration experience with those who had not, to see whether there are significant differences.<sup>11</sup>

Table 8.3 shows the highest school level graduated by Roma persons that were born before 2005 comparing those who live in households where none of the family members had ever worked abroad with those where at least one family member had migration experience. There is a strong positive association ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) between migration experience and level of education, slightly stronger in Bighal than in Baratca. Those who live in households that had at least one family member working abroad seem to stay longer in school. In Bighal though we cannot separate (statistically speaking) the effect of migration from that of other influencing factors (like the effect of the community day-care, the educational projects implemented in the school, the remittances or the more tolerant and inclusive atmosphere in the village), but all in all, during our fieldworks the interviewees acknowledged that remittances (be that financial or social) contribute a lot in managing their relationship with the educational system: they can invest more in home milieu buying for example computers, can contribute more to the regular expenses required by the school, can

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<sup>11</sup>We are aware that there might intervene the endogeneity effect as well (i.e. to separate the combined effect of migration and educational aspirations), but our data does not permit to separate these effects. Instead, we put the data in the light of the personal experiences of the participants themselves.

**Table 8.3** The highest graduated school level of Roma born before 2005 comparing households without and with migration experience (%)<sup>a</sup>

	BARATCA		BIGHAL	
	Without migration experience (%)	With migration experience (%)	Without migration experience (%)	With migration experience (%)
Without any education	25.6	13.1	6.7	3.1
Elementary school (I–IV grades)	30.8	28.7	25.8	12.8
Secondary school (V–VIII grades)	39.8	52.3	55.1	60.9
Highschool	3.8	5.8	11.8	22.3
University level (any type)	0	0	0.6	0.9
<b>Total persons</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>327</b>

Data source: MigRom project (RIRNM)

<sup>a</sup>Level = 0.000 with Cramer's V = 0.175 for Baratca and Cramer's V = 0.211 for Bighal. The variables were recoded and those who were born after 2005 were excluded from the analysis

buy more diversified food and more fashionable clothes for the children, and the list could end with greater ability to accommodate to strange situations with greater confidence. Sometimes there are contrasting interpretations on the reason why Roma children drop out from school at a younger age, consequently on the reason why there might be sensed improvements. When speaking about improvements in Baratca, one social worker said:

If you would have come few years ago, I would have said that there is a huge problem, because many of them are dropping-out, but right now I see that there are youngsters that graduate from school, even at the Bacalaureat level [12<sup>th</sup> grade], but we have more with 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> classes now than earlier. But few years ago you could rarely see Roma children in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade because they fell out somehow. Some of them started to work, they found something. . .so to say, and everything has an advantage also, because if there are no work opportunities, than children won't go to work, but come to school. But in the last years, I have to say that I see that both the children and parents realized that it is better to go to school, because they would have a better future, if they have a certificate in their hands. (interview, social worker, 2015, MigRom project, Baratca)

Some of the families are very poor, but these children are really in a more difficult situation, but the school for example helped them a lot, because there are some programs, they have access to computers. . .I like that they come, every day, they want to come, the parents are coming, too, to ask about things, some of them can buy the necessary things. . .but some of them. . .so, there are possibilities, but you should make use of them. . .because there are parents, that don't let the children to come. . .not many, but there are. (interview, Roma school mediator, 2014, MigRom project, Bighal)

In many interviews with non-Roma teachers, educators and representatives of local institutions it is mentioned that Roma parents do not recognize the importance of schooling, they do not help at home because they are not educated on their turn,

they don't have the right mentality. This attitude was documented in other schools as well. For example, Drown also found that while some teachers acknowledged the difficulties faced by Roma, they still consider that parents are not interested enough in education or children do not have the ability to succeed in school (Drown 2019). It is illustrative how the attitudes of some Roma parents are expressed—and even better reflected—in the complaints of a teenage girl from Bighal when asked about reasons of conflicts with her parents:

They told me to learn more, because I am not a good student. . . .She [my mother] told me, baby, you will be what you will be, just don't be such a bad student like now, that you are the last in your class. Because she said that if we learn a bit better and I don't know what, then we can do something with it. (interview, girl, 2009, Bighal)

Parents describe the perspective of a better future for their children:

I ask my children: what do you want? To go to the field with the hoe? No. . . .don't laugh [says to one of her children present at the discussion]. To have an easy job, a good employment. . . .to have a better life than we had. I can't complain myself. . . .but if we had more money, it would be better. . . .but we are satisfied with what we have now. School for them should be the priority. To be good students. Where is my boy? Here. . . .he is 4 years old. When I ask him what does he want to become, he says policeman. . . .ah, that would be good. . . .He can be, if he really wants. Because he is clever. . . .he already speaks 3 languages almost. . . .and he is just 4 [years old]. . . .Ah, their only job [childrens'] is to learn better.(. . .) (interview, woman, 2007, Bighal)

The discordance between the attitude of Roma parents regarding schooling and attitudes attributed to them by institutional representatives (speaking about failing children and failing parents) emphasizes the educational problem (Delamont 2014) and the lack of attention on inclusivity in school (Szalai and Schiff 2014).

## Conclusions and Ideas for Further Research

Exploring my experiences on the field and the data collected through qualitative and quantitative methods, I decided that is worthwhile to focus more on aspects that fall out of the immediate range of the strict framework of the school educational system, because in this way it can be shown that despite the inherent deficiencies of the system and the insufficient and inadequate policies, there might be initiatives, strategies or processes that challenge the constraints of well-established structures.

Most contributions to the literature on the education of Roma children highlights mostly discriminatory factors and contexts—be that intentional or not—along with well-intended affirmative actions and policies that contribute to the disadvantaged presence of Roma children in educational settings and processes (O'Nions 2007; Rostas 2012; Timmer 2017).<sup>12</sup> Policy papers, recommendations in response address

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<sup>12</sup>For a rich empirical and theoretical incursion in this topic you may see the Special Issue of Race, Ethnicity and Education 20(5) edited by Brüggemann and D'Arcy (2017). An overview of the

the absent or deficient needs and as a result interventions are designed, but these usually address immediate and short-termed needs or these are focused only on a restricted area ignoring the complexity of the problems.

The literature on the effects of migration on education presents a multifaceted situation depending on the focus of the analysis but also on the type of the community that was analyzed. For example, in some communities remittances raise school attendance, regardless of whether they have migration experience or not (Amuedo-Dorantes et al. 2010; Adams 2005; Zhunio et al. 2012), but sometimes factors that shape these outcomes are not conclusive (Viera 2018, p. 2; Lu 2014, p. 1095). There were case studies that found that migration and remittances had disruptive effects (Halpern-Manners 2011), despite their overall positive contribution to the well being of the household. Migration imposes an additional burden on the left-behind family members. Sometimes even contributes to the decreasing school attendance of school-age children because they had to take over the roles of the absent family member and to contribute to the household work. These may interfere with schooling even if financial remittances are available. So, in some cases, the investment of remittances does not have always a positive effect on the educational outcomes and social and economic mobility (Rao 2010, p. 142). Some other studies, on the contrary showed that financial remittances positively effect school participation especially in low-resourced areas and on poor and rural children, reducing drop-out rates and increases the probability of grade completion and/or continuation of schooling (Cox and Ureta 2003; Elrick 2008; Acharya and Leon-Gonzales 2014) in a number of ways (Zhunio et al. 2012, p. 4606), like increasing disposable income available for consumption, making possible to spend more on education and health, changes the composition of the household, so it might have both direct, but also indirect effects as well (building a bathroom, an additional room, investing in heating, clothing, and so on).

The panoply of factors, practices or mobilisable resources in improving educational system and process is large enough for one to get lost. In this chapter we identified two interventions or social processes that triggered perceptible change in the school participation of Roma youth, of which one is less entrenched in the existing literature on the education of Roma children. One is a project implemented with and by the local Roma community using extrinsic resources and the other one is the self-empowerment of the members of the local community who started to participate in the international migration in order to countervail the vanishing local job opportunities.

Both the Roma community center and the migration process contributed to the evolvement of mechanisms that worked as a kind of substitute to the lack of good school infrastructure, and deficient inclusive and minority sensitive education. The program of the community center contributed to the growth of sentiment of *familiarity* of both the children and parents with the pre-school program making easier the

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dominant discourses in academic literature was published by Lauritzen and Nodeland (2018) in Educational Research Review.

transition to the more inflexible school program. While the remittances and migration experience itself made it possible for the families *to conform* with greater confidence to the formal and informal expectations of school requirements.<sup>13</sup> Otherwise, evidence showed that there is weak identification with the school as an institution and its norms (Voelkl 1997). Although it would be a hazardous hypothesis to conclude that these were the two factors that resulted in the improvement of school participation of the Roma children, their contribution to school participation—among other local processes or on the contrary the lack of it—is undeniable. Both processes contributed to relative improvements in the life conditions of families and these improvements could positively influence the school participation of poor and vulnerable children. Data showed that in the case of the older generation there was an association between living in segregated area of the village and school participation. Those who before 1990 lived in mixed neighborhoods had higher educational levels as compared to those who lived in segregated areas. While later in the case of the younger generations it seems that living in segregated areas (but still close to the village school) does not influence school attendance and attainment, but the effect of implemented projects and migration/remittances grew significantly. Even in the case of Baracca where otherwise we found that the social distance between locals and the Roma is high and there are strong prejudices and stereotypes against Roma.

Despite the fact that the school educational system has some lacunas and it contributes to the reproduction of inequalities and even to the reproduction, reinforcement and interiorizing of prejudices, I argued that it is important to identify contexts and factors that although not immediately and directly but ultimately positively influence the school participation of Roma (minoritized, marginalized, vulnerable) children contributing in the longer term to the recognition and empowerment of Roma families.

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<sup>13</sup>Unfortunately, the word limits of this publication does not permit to enter into more details, but it is worth mentioning that Ogbu's 'acting white' theory does not have empirical support in this context: high-achieving students are likely to gain prestige, rather than lose it and being excluded (Ogbu 2004; Brüggemann 2014), with the careful note that it might contextual.

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# Chapter 9

## Key Factors to Educational Continuity and Success of Ciganos in Portugal



Olga Magano and Maria Manuela Mendes

**Abstract** The goal of this article is to analyse the impact of specific public policies on the school trajectories of socially vulnerable Ciganos (Gypsies/Roma) who reside/live in the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto. Through carrying out qualitative research, the analysis of key factors will allow us to understand the reasons behind school continuity and educational success of Ciganos, as well as the identity (re)configuration processes associated with the education paths of these individuals. We find that trajectories are not only intertwined with public policies and programmes, but also with other explanatory factors inherent to the individual, to the type of support he/she receives from his/her family, the presence of key figures in their lives, and the importance of peers and institutional factors inherent to the way public schools operate.

**Keywords** Ciganos/Roma · Education · Public policies · Social inequalities · Portugal

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## Ciganos<sup>1</sup> and Education: the Background of a Mismatch

The right to education, along with providing equal opportunities for all to access and succeed in school, as embodied in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (Articles 73–77), is of paramount importance in Portuguese society. The Basic Law of the Educational System (Law no. 46/86, of October 14) establishes the general framework of the Portuguese education system, advocating universal, compulsory and free basic education. Deriving from this educational reform, it was originally established that it be compulsory for all to attend schooling up until the ninth grade, or the age of 15. Law no. 85/2009, of August 27, however, changed this, making the completion of school up to the 12th grade, or the attending of school up until the age to 18, compulsory. Furthermore, all children would be required to start their pre-school education at the age of 5.

According to the National Education Council (2014, p. 22), “in 1991 the average schooling of Portuguese nationals was still close to the primary school level (grade 4), and still far from the ninth grade (obligatory since 1986) by 2011”.

To tackle these issues, the programmes Educational Territories of Priority Intervention (TEIP) and the Integrated Education and Training Programme (PIEF) worth to be highlighted, created in 1996 and 1999, respectively. Currently under operation, the TEIP programme supervised by the Ministry of Education is guided by the main objectives of promoting educational success, combating indiscipline in school, early school leaving and absenteeism, offering educational guidance, helping transition from school to active life, as well as the articulation between school, family and community. The PIEF is a special measure that seeks to promote compulsory education.

Also worthy of being pointed out is the *Escolhas* (Choices) Programme, which, since its first generation inaugural work package in 2001, is currently carrying out its seventh generation package (2019–2021). The main objective of this programme is to promote the social inclusion of children and young people from vulnerable socio-economic contexts, aiming to provide equal opportunities and to reinforce social cohesion. These measures are promoted by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, falling under the supervision of the High Commission for Migrations. Many projects focus on the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon (MAL) and Porto (MAP).

Also worth highlighting is the importance of the Social Integration Income (SII), a social policy instrument. Having the ultimate aim of reducing extreme poverty in Portugal, both of these measures were designed to support individuals or families in situations of serious economic need and at risk of social exclusion, providing a financial subsidy aimed at giving a person/family a means of purchasing basic needs. The SII is also meant to serve as an insertion programme that favours the social, professional and community integration of individual’s/family members.

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<sup>1</sup>We maintain the term in Portuguese, as it is still recognized and used by the Portuguese Ciganos themselves. In international context, the term can be understood as Portuguese Roma.

Concerning Ciganos and their social and cultural identities and ways of being, there is often a lack of knowledge on the part of society-at-large, including teachers and social intervention professionals (Mendes and Magano 2016). With the onset of democracy in Portugal (April 25th, 1974), a new era began in relation to how the State started recognizing Ciganos, providing citizenship rights and dealing with matters pertinent to Ciganos. However, public policies are universal and there was no recognition of the Ciganos issue in Portugal. The first time that a reference to the situation of Ciganos is made National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2008–2010) and as the target population in the Ethics Committee Parliamentary Report (CPESC 2009). Later, the National Strategy for the Integration of Ciganos Communities (ACIDI 2013) which for the first time placed this population on the political agenda,<sup>2</sup> due to the imposition of the European Union on Member States (European Parliament 2011).

Despite the profusion of social and educational policies, the Ciganos in Portugal continue to have low levels of schooling and educational success, having high dropout and illiteracy rates. It is a population that possesses very low rates of education advancement when compared to non-Ciganos. The results from a survey applied to 1599 Ciganos living in mainland Portugal carried out in 2014 (Mendes et al. 2014, 2016) reveal the fact that 52% of the respondents did not complete or did not attend primary school at all. Also worthy of being highlighted is the fact that 27.1% did not know how to read or write.

In 2018, according the survey of Ministry of Education (DGEEC 2018) there exist high retention rates among Ciganos children and young people. In the universe of 10,349 Ciganos and specifically in academic year of 2016/2017, 48% of Ciganos students have one or more retentions. and the high number of school drop-outs is very visible.

Building on the above, results deriving from a qualitative research project<sup>3</sup> carried out between mid-2013 to the end of 2015, will be discussed in the sections to come, permitting the identification and understanding of some of the key factors for school continuity and educational success of Ciganos in Portugal.

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<sup>2</sup>According to Marques (2013), given that the primary victims of racism in Portugal are the various “communities” of Ciganos found throughout the country, this implying that we are facing a sociological issue not only centring on Gypsies as victims of racism, but also the issue of problems associated with this “historical community’s” participation as citizens within the broader society. It is what Bastos et al. (2007) describe as “Ciganofobia”, carried out both by the State and by civil society, and reflected in the refusal to face the issue as a historical problem of discrimination directed at the Ciganos.

<sup>3</sup>Results presented are part of the research project Key factors to the success and continuity of schooling of Ciganos: individuals, families, and public policies, funded by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (the Portuguese National Funding Agency for Science, Research and Technology), ref. PTDC/IVC-PEC/4909/2012, developed in the context of a partnership between CIES-IUL (ISCTE-IUL) and CEMRI, Universidade Aberta.

## Qualitative Approach to a Complex Social Phenomenon

In carrying out this investigation project, the first step taken was to map the social intervention projects in progress and to establish profiles of the Ciganos living in the municipalities that compose the MAP (Metropolitan Area of Porto) and MAL respectively. This was followed by the selection of six neighbourhoods, three in each Metropolitan Area. A survey of local organisations, projects and interventions was carried out in each of these neighbourhoods and we also contacted the mediators and other technical coordinators responsible for local projects. A period of participant observation along with 36 in-depth interviews with these individuals were then conducted during an initial fieldwork period between November 2013 and March 2014.

The ethnographic work carried out in each neighbourhood was aimed at establishing a relationship of proximity and trust with the Ciganos who live in the respective neighbourhoods, and to participate in their individual/family daily lives. It was our intention to delve in an in-depth and comparative fashion into the living conditions and ways of life of our participants, as well as to observe relations established by them with local intervention institutions, schools and with their neighbours, be them Cigano or otherwise. We also set out to explore how they approach the places where they live, be it public or private, and the institutional spaces they frequent. Furthermore, we set out to ethnographically draw on the relations between the past and present in order to show changes and continuities in the lives of the Ciganos we accompanied and their families, this primarily in relation to learning and the valorisation of a school education. A particular look was also given to difficulties experienced by these individuals, and ways of overcoming them, focusing specifically on the support received, be that economic or otherwise. Our choice for this ethnographic method is justified by the fact that it allows a greater immersion in to the field and the people (Beaud and Weber 1997).

In the studied neighbourhoods, ethnographies were also carried out in selected number of schools. In the MAP, ethnographic work was carried out at a series of multi-grade level schools [*agrupamento de escolas* (AE)<sup>4</sup>] in 2 Group of Schools and 3 in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon.

During our first fieldwork period, 73 semi-structured interviews were thus conducted with Ciganos who resided in our studied neighbourhoods (37 in the MAL; 36 in the MAP). The interviews focused on individual and family relationships, and education. A second fieldwork phase (between November 2014 and February 2015) was used to conduct nine focus groups (four in the MAL and five in the MAP). In total, 71 people participated in these groups, among them mediators, teachers and Ciganos. The objective of the focus groups was to gather participant's

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<sup>4</sup>The Portuguese term *Agrupamento de Escolas* (AE) implies a grouping of schools with its own administrative and management bodies, consisting of multi-grade level, often based on a common pedagogical project.

opinions and to discuss issues related to the schooling of Ciganos residing in our studied neighbourhoods. Data obtained through previously carried out interviews and observation work was used as the primary base of discussion.

## **Representations of School and Schooling**

The ethnographies and interviews carried out with the selected Ciganos have shown that there have been important changes in the midst of this minority group in the last few decades, especially in the case of women. Concerning education, collected narratives show that, today, Ciganos parents accompany their children's schooling more closely, making it known that they will attend school meetings when called upon and make a point of accompanying the evolution of their children's schooling. In general, parents show that they are attentive to and interested in the development of their children's reading and writing capacities and abilities to do mathematics. Other school subjects, on the other hand, were often given little value by the parents.

The data collected points to generational differences when it comes to giving value to school attendance. Many of the parents of school-aged children interviewed also attended school until the secondary school years, thus they dedicate themselves to follow their children's schooling more so than previous generations.

It should also be noted that none of the Ciganos interviewed, who had either completed secondary education, or attended or completed post-secondary education, pursued their pathway straightforward regular schooling.

As far as expectations concerning their children, respondents claimed to value education for it is seen as a way for their children to get a job, permitting them to have a better life. Staying in school is, therefore, understood as a way to access work in the future. In conclusion, school and work combined are perceived as factors of social mobility, a finding that falls in line with results gathered in previous studies on non-employed Ciganos workers (Mendes and Magano 2016; Brüggemann 2014).

Reflecting upon themselves, our participants highlighted that, in many cases, school continuity occurred during adult life, outside the context of the normal schooling age—it occurred at different stages, as opportunities arose, revealing a connection with public policies and projects these individuals and their families were, or continue to be, involved in. One of the interviewees who recently finished his undergraduate degree, revealed how specific measures and public policies were decisive in his pursuit of further studies:

Up until the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I did normal schooling without ever failing. By 10<sup>th</sup> grade, my father had died and my mother got very depressed so I left school. She could not go on and had to take care of her. I ended up going a long time without studying. Then, a few years ago, as I always had this desire to study, since I wanted to continue my studies, I did the New

Opportunities programme<sup>5</sup> having the perspective that it would help me advance professionally. (...) I didn't have grade 10 completed yet, I completed that and went on to complete grade 12 and went on to do psycho-technical tests to get into university. (Male, 28-years-old, undergraduate degree)

Even those Ciganos who never learnt to read or write, attended some type of training course at least once—indifferent of age or place of residence—of the courses provided by the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) or as part of the SII were most common. So even though various attempts have been made to bring these individuals closer to schooling and/or training, these have not played a structural role in the lives of these Ciganos. Manifestations of discontentment concerning the training programmes offered to them are frequent, and are often described as being of short duration, often either below or too far advanced of their knowledge and capabilities, or lacking the diversity in themes and content. More than that, the interviewees complained that they were not evaluated, neither positively nor properly, by the training placement workers (making them waste time and money, creating family friction, etc. and often not contributing to bettering their education or providing them with qualifications). It is also referenced the fact that these short training actions do not give diploma, that's why they often understand these sessions as a waste of time. In a study carried out by Pereira (2016) it is pointed out that in one specific Employment Centre in Portugal it was found that there had been Ciganos registered for periods of over a decade and had never been called in for a job or vocational training course. Parallel to this, the technicians interviewed equally acknowledged the lack of employment and training opportunities that fit Ciganos registered in Employment Centres (who often don't possess the minimum compulsory education) and the lack of openness of employers to accept these individuals. This situation is similar to what has been found in other European countries as well (Vincze 2006; IRS 2008).

Another aspect that is negatively perceived by the Ciganos interviewed is the concentration of this population in the same course or course type on the part of the IEFP. They reported cases in which Ciganos with different school and professional competences are all placed in the same class, where teaching is homogenised, most often levelled off at a more basic level of instruction, not accompanying the increase of acquired formal qualifications. As Bereményi (2011) argues, although educational policies focus on the issue of intercultural inclusion and education, in practice this is not the case. Cultural diversity, although often defended and referred to, is often a mere discursive rhetoric. Debate often focuses on students' academic competencies and not on global knowledge of culture, language, geography or different religions. The Ciganos, as "a different other" (otherness), is rarely described as someone who benefits from the learning process (Bereményi 2011, p. 362). Expectations on the

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<sup>5</sup>The initiative New Opportunities was implemented in 2005 as a joint action of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Education, having as its goal the diversification of educational and training paths, the strengthening of professional positions, and the promotion of a school courses and educational success. The New Opportunities program was replaced in 2014 by the Network of Centers for Qualification and Vocational Education.

part of teachers towards this population is low, with Ciganos students almost always being placed on the lower ranks of hierarchical scales established by teachers; scales often constructed according to the preconception of perceived attitudes possessed by Ciganos towards school in which families are blamed for the lack of school success and disinterest. This may be the result of stereotyping on the part of the actors who work with the Ciganos in this realm. It is very plausible that unemployed Ciganos registered at Employment Centres are directly linked to SII benefits (and because of this, are often impelled to register). As well, work proposals are almost non-existent and training proposals are rare. Pertinent to training proposals, those that do exist are often considered undesirable or of little significance in terms of knowledge and skill acquisition, this along with the fact that their respective diplomas often holding little value (are often not recognised as school diploma or a professional or a diploma) (Pereira 2016).

Some of the Ciganos interviewed who possess more scholastic education (most of them men), stated that, presently, schooling is worse than it was in their time, and that in the case of their children they feel that school does not prepare them as well for the future, highlighting their children's learning of content they deem unnecessary. Greater expectations, therefore, are expressed regarding the schooling of their children, highlighting the need for better preparation when it comes to making professional choices in life. For these individuals, the need for school continuation and the value of a scholastic education is seen as a means to achieve a "good job" and not as an end in itself. Getting a job is thus considered a form of upward social mobility that ensures some economic stability.

When it comes to changing such perspectives and promoting the valorisation of schooling, certain public policies (such as compulsory education, the SII, etc.) as well as people of reference (family, friends, neighbours, mediators, etc.) are key actors/factors in encouraging school continuation. As mentioned, school continuity often takes place in stages, as opportunities arise. For some, especially males, schooling routes are only seen as important if there's a professional component. Still, it is important to emphasise that there is often a great amount of difficulty in placing students and trainees into internships upon course completion.

### **(Mis)Matches of Perspectives on Schooling**

Brüggemann and D'Arcy (2016) synthesize two perspectives as put forward by much of the literature on the schooling of Ciganos: (1) some studies present theoretical assumptions concerning the educational disadvantages of minority group students (their parents and communities), centring theorisation on cultural and socio-economic differences and marginality; (2) other studies argue that inequality is triggered by features associated with policies and school institutions (institutional discrimination). The results of our fieldwork in the neighbourhoods and schools, relying especially on the interviews with the institutional actors, are included, above all, in the first group of studies.

From a general perspective, the Ciganos known to the technicians interviewed are characterised by them as having low levels of education, high dropout rates and high levels of school absenteeism in the case of school aged children, the majority of which attend primary school. The main causes of high drop-out rates among Ciganos—as revealed by studies carried out in other countries as well, for example Bulgaria (World Bank 2014) and Romania (Ilisei 2013; Surdu and Surdu 2006)—is marriage, which among Ciganos takes place at very early ages; the social control and extreme concern of girl's education, especially after menarche; and, thirdly, the successive failures that often occur in primary school which frequently leads to the maladaptation of young Ciganos students when advancing to the next level of schooling. This is often due to the advanced age many find themselves at when completing primary schooling, in comparison to their non-Ciganos peers (Mendes 2007, 2012; Magano 2010; Nicolau 2010). Such poor results and consequent school failure are owed to a series of causes namely: poor socialisation skills; deficient cognitive stimulation; poor language resources; lack of motivation for learning; lack of expectations in relation to school; lack of role models and having no knowledge of Ciganos peers who have effectively completed certain levels of schooling, be it grade 9 or 12 (as evident in a small number of cases identified in MAP and MAL), or post-secondary education (in the cases we identified—all of which in the MAL—Ciganos with university studies have one non-Cigano parent); as well as being aware of the often lack of opportunities and impacts of schooling on professional life.

As pointed out in previous studies (Mendes 2007; Magano 2010; Nicolau 2010), girls tend to drop out of school earlier than boys. Still, signs of changing attitudes and behaviors concerning gender relations among Ciganos are becoming visible. Here they revealed the increasing participation of adult women in literacy courses (actions carried out or in progress at the time of the interviews), while other women were seeking to obtain Recognition, Validation and Competence Certificates<sup>6</sup> (RVCC) with the aim of increasing their schooling levels.

Lifelong learning opportunities (Gomes 2013) are often stimulated by the SII teams and are very important for improving the living conditions of Ciganos—particularly that of Cigano women, as education, training and qualification may enable them to enter the labour market, to achieve greater social mobility, and to assist in establishing a departure from their traditional way of life (Magano 2010, 2014).

Regardless of the aforementioned changes, there are still numerous obstacles, such as the fact that men do not allow women to leave the neighborhood (Lopes 2006), just to name one. The obstacles identified require innovative and proximity

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<sup>6</sup>The National System of Recognition, Validation and Competencies Certification (RVCC) was created in February, 2001, alongside with the National Agency of Adult Education and Training, through Ordinance no. 1082-A/2001 of the 5 of September. This initiative was made extinct at the start of 2013.

solutions, in particular through the promotion of education and/or training at the local level and in partnership with credible entities who work with this population.

In the discourses provided by teachers and mediators, there is, on the one hand, a certain tendency towards stereotyping the Ciganos, while, at the same time, expressed difficulties in valuing the singularities and the positive aspects that can come from cultural coexistence in a school context, are evident. They are aware of gender differentiations when it comes to parents supporting their children's school continuity: girls are not encouraged to continue their education from a certain age or certain grade onward, instead are encouraged to abandon their studies in favour of cultural traditions associated with young Ciganos and the preparation for their marriage. This triad of gender, marriage and educational aspirations needs to be further analyzed, and new elements of cultural change must be considered by the younger Ciganos (Bereményi and Carrasco 2015).

As far as scholastic success is concerned, there are no great differences between Ciganos and non-Ciganos students during the primary school years. However, during grades 5 and 6 (second cycle), Ciganos students' absenteeism grows exponentially for reasons teachers cannot explain. Absenteeism contributes to school failure, the main factor given by for dropping out of school—often out of frustration of not being able to understand what is being taught to them. Ciganos students have little home study habits; learning is mainly carried out in the classroom context.

Some of the social policies that directly impact upon schooling, are, however, considered positive. For example, solutions like ETPI<sup>7</sup> are seen as contributing to promoting school continuity and are positively perceived by Ciganos, even if the programme offers no prospects for the future. There is a tendency to perceive ETPI classes as classes consisting of and conceived for Ciganos, where ethnic concentration is the outcome (often perceived as a congregation of problems as well).

As previously mentioned, all schools that participated in this study had ongoing ETPI projects. However, in practical terms, the direct positive inputs associated with this programme are not very visible. The ETPI Programme is considered to be an important programme for Ciganos families and for the communities where they're implemented. Still, across the territories, the same two primary constraints in the programme's implementation are often mentioned: the lack of financial and human resources. This perspective is corroborated by the National Education Council (2014, p. 38), which equally defends that: "The contribution of the ETPI programme is considered moderately positive given the fragility of its results. This points to the need of re-evaluating the applied strategies, in favour of an intervention at the social and family (school-family articulation) levels."

All of the interviewed technicians referred to the importance of the SII when it comes to the school attendance of all Ciganos up until the end of primary schooling.

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<sup>7</sup>Educational Territories of Priority Intervention Program is a government initiative, implemented in economically and socially disadvantaged territories, marked by poverty and social exclusion, where violence, indiscipline, dropping out and school failure are most evident. Central objectives of the program are the prevention and reduction of early school leaving and absenteeism, the reduction of indiscipline and the promotion of educational success for all students.

Likewise, the majority of the Ciganos we interviewed stated that school is important for their children, claiming that it's important that they attend irrespective of the existence of the SII or not.

The truth, however, is that in stating this, they are referring to the once required basic schooling when they were at that age. At present, basic education is up to the ninth grade and the compulsory schooling was extended up to the 12th grade (18 years old, secondary school). Many Ciganos, however, still believe that mandatory school continues to be up to grade 6 (first and second cycles). So, there exist a big gap between the real compulsory school and the expectations of Ciganos in relation to the frequency.

The high levels of absenteeism and school drop-out rates are also of no surprise for the technicians and teachers. The majority pointed out the importance of the IETP courses, as well as the alternative school routes when it comes to children's and young people's school continuity, highlighting the importance of how course syllabuses can be more easily adapted to the interests of Ciganos students, and how students themselves can develop and discover new interests and motivations. The main limiting factors in the development of these measures and programmes are once again the lack of financial resources that have been reduced from one year to the next. As a consequence of this limited capital, this leads to a lack of human resources resulting in poor dedication given to programmes and students. Furthermore, schooling alternative measures are not always understood as positive: some teachers consider policies such as the IETP programme, the alternative schooling routes to be forms of segregation.

Due to mutual fear and misunderstanding, teachers admit that it is difficult for schools and teachers to deal with Ciganos families. This situation is not unlike what takes place in the Spanish context, inasmuch as according to Gamella (2011, p. 381): "the low expectations of teachers, especially in the first years of schooling, in relation to Gypsy pupils, leads to a complex interaction of prejudices, real experiences, both in school, in the relationships with families and with the students themselves. In any case, this has a decisive effect as self-fulfilling prophecies". Portuguese Ciganos children, no different from Ciganos children in other contexts, often learn in unfit, segregated environments, are frequently discriminated against by teachers and are often victims of hostile environments. There is a lack of a stimulating learning environment for these individuals, as well as positive reference models, factors that lead to high rates of school drop-out and failure. Consequently, in the case of Cigano women, for example, the lack of qualifications means that they often can't compete on the labour market, resulting in their outright "disempowerment" (Bitu and Morteau 2010). But it is also very important to ensure the attendance of pre-school education as a way to stimulate the acquisition of previous skills such as language, mathematics and other areas by children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Luksik 2019). From the perspective of teachers and mediators, the very little value attributed to schooling and the negligent attitude towards school continuity on the part of the Ciganos, often leads to the validation of absence of the children—motives not permitted if used as a justification by non-Ciganos, therefore, are taken for granted when applied to this youth minority group. Consequently, this

becomes a very difficult issue to understand and accept on the part of teachers, who see their efforts weakened by differences and cultural singularities difficult to overcome.

The majority of the teachers who participated in our study attribute the responsibility of grade failure and school abandonment to factors external to the school, blaming primarily on the family as is evident in the above testimonies. Many, therefore, do not see the scholastic lack of success of Ciganos children as a structural problem that can be solved by the schools and the educational system (Doubek et al. 2015). Parental responsibility (or lack thereof), along with the attribution of neglect and disinterest in relation to school, is a rhetoric transversal to a number different countries as has been made evident by Rostas and Kostka (2014) in their observation focusing on Central and Eastern Europe countries.

## **Key Factors for Ciganos Educational Attainment**

Writing on the success stories of young Gypsies in Spain, Gamella (2011) presents a rational, interactive, dynamic, and procedural interpretive model, involving five crossover levels, to measure such success. These are: the individual/personal; the family environment (home, relatives, networks); school and teachers; the surrounding community, including peer groups, neighbours and community members (of which family and school are an integrated part); and last, but not least, the broad social level, be it of a local, regional, national and global scale. A previous study by Abajo and Carrasco (2004) suggested a very similar scheme. In addition to personal characteristics (e.g. school success, tenacity and personal commitment, social skills, among others), a socio-economic dimension is also added: residing in integrated, urban contexts, having a cohesive family and socio-economic stability; having access to social resources; as well as a school dimension: an integrated school context, positive school environment, family involvement in the education of the children, and a relational and associative dimension—e.g. a positive relationship with an intercultural context, having a peer group that surpasses the co-ethnic environment (neighbours, friends, etc.), among other aspects.

Our results show that school continuity paths are not dissociated from the greater importance attributed to the support and continuous personalised guidance on the part of those whose role it is to intervene, such as family support, incentive of teachers, support of “Godparents”, etc. In addition, in some cases, there are individuals and/or families that give true value to schooling, to positive results, that care if their children miss classes or not, that the children possess a positive attitude, correct behaviour, and have that capacity to socialise and be motivated. As well, there were also cases of family support provided by parents who did not study but would have liked to, by parents who did study, by parents who are self-employed, those who employed by others and those who aren’t employed at all. But there was also

evidence of greater support given to boys (gender differentiation), where, in the case of girls, there is greater tolerance for school drop-out and often very little incentive is given for them to go to school.

School continuity differentiation among the gender groups (boys and girls) (Gamella 2011) is an issue of significant importance for the Ciganos s interviewed. It was highlighted the tendency for simultaneous school leaving by Ciganos children, for example (*"I left (school) and they all followed me"*) (woman, 22-years-old, fifth grade). As a justification for this situation, the issue of gender in regards to the age of marriage and efforts made to protect girls from having contact with boys, be them Ciganos or otherwise, continues to be a highly referenced reason.

In relation to the Ciganos interviewed with more years of schooling, the progress was made in stages, through transitions between "cycles" from regular to alternative schooling (for many, there was always the possibility of taking advantage of measures that allowed grade advancement, namely professional courses, New Opportunities programme, RVCC). Among the adults there were no cases of school continuity through regular education to the 12th grade. The regular path, however, is becoming more common among Ciganos youth currently enrolled in the school systems.

The arrival of "the age of marriage" is referred to as a factor that leads to fortified friendships taking place with other Ciganos, leading to greater ethnic clustering. As a result of this, in conjunction with the fact that most have failed more than one grade up to this point, many don't go beyond the 2nd/third cycle of schooling. Very few remain in school after the age of 16, be them boys or girls, the age often referred to as the crucial age of marriage preparation. There are some cases in which school continuation takes place through professional courses or training, routes that highlight the importance of such measures in permitting school continuity, be it in or outside of school. Ciganos often see school as a space to be frequented when one is a young child, not as an adolescent or as an adult. Although Ciganos mediators are seen as important when it comes to trying to do away such beliefs, in attempting to improve the relationship between Ciganos and school, and in supporting the building of bridges as attempts to safeguard and defend Gypsy culture, their function should not be one of "extinguishing fires", but, instead, to build relationships based on continuously intervention, something that is rarely takes place due to the precarious contractual nature and short-term durations of intervention projects.

A positive school environment and absence of local level conflicts (e.g. neighbourhood disputes) allow for greater continuous intervention when it comes to promoting incentives for going and staying in school. The same argument applies when a high concentration of Ciganos students in one classroom is non-existent. According to Abajo and Carrasco (2004), more positive are results in ethnically/racially mixed learning environments in which programmes are equally established for all, following a pre-established education programme for the respective level.

The need to actively search for work, due to ever-growing constraints in terms of developing more traditional professional activities (of a self-employed nature), along with the fact that many are beneficiaries of the SII, leads to some searching out more

education or training, given that it's a requirement, not only in order to access gainful employment, but to keep receiving SII benefits. In order to frequent education/training courses at the adult age, given that we are here talking about a group of people who get married and start families at a very early age, these individuals are then given access to an additional source of income (food and transport subsidies) that permits attending classes. Beyond these measures, however, it is important to point out that there's a gap between the real needs of unemployed Ciganos enrolled in the Employment Centres, the vocational training possibilities at offer and referrals for work proposals (Pereira 2016; Gatti et al. 2016).

To conclude, it is worth emphasising that certain perspectives regarding school are now taking place. For example, in the present day, the conclusion of primary school (first cycle) is a generalised phenomenon among younger generations. There has also been an increase in children enrolled in nursery and pre-schools. The persisting problem sits in the transition period between the first and second cycles (fourth to fifth grade). At this stage of education, children will sometimes transit from one cycle without having acquired the basic skills needed to succeed at the next level, thus hampering their chances of further advancement beyond this cycle, creating other problems as well such as limiting their diversity of disciplines and teachers. According to the National Education Council (2014, p. 38), the national early school leaving rate in Portugal (19.2%) is very high when compared to that of the European Union (11.9%), adding as well that the European targets for 2020 will be a great challenge for Portugal. This situation implies that there's a need to develop strategies, on one hand, to avoid abandonment, on the other, to reintegrate those who have abandoned the system. Taking into consideration the results of some of the strategies developed, it is advisable that actions to reduce school leaving be approached from various fronts in order to prevent the risk of abandonment (ensuring quality of education from the earliest years of life), to avoid it from happening (responding to warning signals and providing support), and to compensate those who desire to return to school (allowing easy re-entry into the system by recognising previous qualifications). In order for national strategies to be implemented, they should thus take into account data on disaggregation inequalities according to sex and region (CNA 2014).

It should also be noted that the levels of schooling established by law are very distant from the scholarly objective defined by the Ciganos interviewed. On this topic, basic skills acquired in primary school—e.g. the ability to read and write, essential in the carrying out of certain functions such as getting a drivers license—are often valued. Opposite of that, what is perceived as the need for so many years of schooling and school attendance is not fully understood. As well, our Ciganos interviewees made reference to the fears often felt concerning school “insecurity” and the school environment, especially in relation to schools found in neighbourhoods marked by a history of conflict or a high presence of immigrant population.

The reasons given for early school leave relate, above all, to the issue of marriage and the preservation of women's “purity”, letting it be known that Ciganos are generally at issue with certain teachings and syllabus content (for example, that of

reproduction). That said however, there is also a clear differentiation when it comes to supporting school continuity on the part of the parents, a differentiation defined by gender. In general, early marriage and the birth of children interrupt a life of going to school and its continuity. Thus, once upon that stage of their lives, a regular schooling format is substituted by compensatory measures, professional courses/training, a route often only taken when there are social protection benefits to be gained; in other words, when they are “forced” into such programmes.

In some Ciganos with more school education, the existence of disenchantment was made evident in the narratives collected, this owed to the lack of opportunities available to these individuals. Our interviewees explained that such difficulties were met in entering the labour market due to discrimination against Ciganos (Magano 2010; Mendes and Magano 2016).

## Conclusion

The policies introduced in Portugal since the implementation of democracy contributed to the improvement of living conditions of Portuguese Ciganos, especially in the fight against extreme poverty and housing. There are, however, significant differences between the living conditions of Portuguese Ciganos and the Portuguese population in general, with old and new forms of social inequalities persisting in the form of poverty, poor living conditions, low levels of schooling, difficulties in accessing the labour market, uncertain ways of earning an income which often implies dependence on social benefits, among others. Ciganos in Portugal particularly continue to show marked levels of disadvantage, vis-à-vis other national citizens, especially when it comes to accessing and staying in school, accessing vocational training, employment, housing, public services and justice.

In Portugal, Ciganos continue to possess low schooling and professional qualification levels, well below the national average. Although younger generations now possess more school education and qualifications than that of their parents, they still experience strong constraints in accessing the labour market. When they do find work, often accomplished by hiding their ethnic identity, the majority still occupy unqualified posts. To teachers and mentors, however, Ciganos students and their families continue to be held accountable for the lack of interest, failure and school drop-outs. For the Ciganos, the issue of alternative school programme structures, methodologies and other pedagogical frameworks are not perceived as an exercise of power affirmation that benefits them. In fact, measures of applied educational policies (PIEF, TEIP, New Opportunities, etc.) are in large part seen as a way of agglutinating and segregating students into specific groups in which processes of learning and their evaluation are not worthy of much investment (Bereményi and Carrasco 2015).

The continuity of school trajectories often depends on public policies and programmes, yet other factors also emerge—it is important to consider the multiplicity of interactions and complex factors that are more specific to individuals, to the

support they receive and outlook towards schooling on the part of the family, to the presence of role models in their lives, as well as the role of gender and institutional factors in the functioning of the public school. As Gobbo (2011, p. 39) highlights, “schools’ and classroom’ changes are also produced by educational rules and expectations, as well as by students’ and teachers’ coping strategies’ namely in (not always positive) interaction with the cultures of schools, which are themselves culturally and historically situated”.

According to Powell and Lever (2017), based on Norbert Elias and Loïc Wacquant theories, the present and contemporary Roma situation can overshadow the historical continuities in terms of the collective treatment of Roma as an *inferior* group, which is a central issue to understand their constant and severe stigmatization. That is invariably dependent on asymmetric power relations and the effective construction of Roma as an inferior and different group. Even when Roma pupils are educated in an ‘inclusive’ school or classroom, their position continues to be that of outsiders.

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## Chapter 10

# Roma at School: A Look at the Past and the Present. The Case of Portugal



Lurdes Nicolau

**Abstract** The schooling process has become more widespread among the Portuguese Roma population since 1974, with the end of the Estado Novo dictatorship and the establishment of democracy. Nevertheless, the Roma nomadism or semi-nomadism, financial shortcomings and the absence of social/cultural/family stimuli are some of the reasons that explain their low school attendance rates. Only in the last decades has such attendance increased, as a result of the implementation of several public policies, particularly of the Social Integration Income. This social policy, implemented in 1996, introduced important changes in this population, especially in areas such as schooling, personal hygiene, housing, health, or sedentism.

Recent research has shown an increase in the educational level of the Roma population, but school dropouts and failure remain high. This tendency was also studied in the northeast of Portugal, in a PhD thesis about the relationships between the Roma and school. In the present research work, a qualitative methodology was adopted, using direct and participant observation, as well as interviews to some Roma parents and non-Roma teachers. Both groups emphasize the main difficulties of Roma children at school.

The conclusions show that several factors affect these students' schooling nowadays, especially poor housing conditions, parents' illiteracy or low schooling, lack of daily study monitoring at home, absence of models in their environment, non-attendance of pre-school, and discrimination against them.

**Keywords** Roma · School · Education · Social policies · Northeast of Portugal

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## Introduction

Over the centuries, the Roma have suffered constant persecutions, as shown in several historical documents (Coelho [1892] 1995; Nunes 1996; Fraser 2005). In Portugal, this population was subject to forced nomadism (Bastos 2012), mostly living off begging and trading donkeys and mules (Alves 1982; Coelho [1892] 1995; Nunes 1996) until recently. Such factors have conditioned this population's relationship with school.

The presence of Portuguese Roma in schools started to be emphasized after the 1974 Revolution (Bastos 2007). However, the number of Roma children enrolled in state schools only increased significantly from the mid-1990s, mainly due to the implementation of the Social Integration Income in 1996.

This economic support measure brought about great changes within the Roma communities all over the country, namely regarding health, hygiene, housing, schooling, and sedentarism.

Despite the increase in the number of Roma children at school in Portugal, many difficulties have been observed regarding their educational path, attendance, attainment and integration (Bastos and Bastos 1999; AAVV 2001; Casa-Nova 2002; Bastos 2007; Mendes 2012; Lopes and Costa 2016).

This reality was also found in the northeast of the country, where a research work was conducted for a PhD thesis aiming to study the interethnic relationships between Roma and non-Roma in rural and urban settings, as well as in the school environment (Nicolau 2010). The empirical study was conducted in the municipality of Bragança, by means of a methodology which was essentially ethnographic, comprising direct and participant observation, as well as interviewing Roma and non-Roma population.

The aim of this research work is to bring to light the schooling situation of the Roma children, both at a national and regional level, as well as the reasons for their school failure, thus contributing to widen the existing knowledge of this issue.

The data presented in this article is based on a chapter of the above mentioned PhD thesis in social sciences (2010), which contains data regarding the school attainment, attendance and integration of the Roma children in the council of Bragança, but also intends to give voice to these pupils' parents and teachers in an attempt to understand the difficulties felt by both parties regarding these children's schooling process.

The results of the study reveal high rates of school absenteeism, dropout and failure, as well as several factors which negatively impact these pupils' educational path, among which are precarious housing, parents' illiteracy or low schooling, lack of daily study monitoring at home, absence of models in their environment, non-attendance of pre-school, and discrimination against them.

## Roma at School: An Overview of the Past and the Present

In the late nineteenth century, Adolfo Coelho ([1892] 1995) published an academic work on the Roma population in Portugal. It is a historical, ethnographic and linguistic work containing several legislative documents from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, which make proof of expulsions, convictions, prohibitions and deportations which, as referred by the author, “could not make the Roma nor their inveterate customs disappear” (Coelho [1892] 1995, p. 239).

In the 1970s, Nunes (1996, p. 36) stated that there was a “marked contrast: on one side, the consumer society, increasingly more advanced technically and culturally, and on the other side, the more and more glaring Roma paralysis, enhancing their marginalization”.

The majority society’s persecution and discrimination towards the Roma is also emphasized in several studies conducted nationally wide (AAVV 2001; Bastos 2012; Magano 2012; Mendes 2012; Mendes et al. 2014), showing that they have been forced to nomadism, a situation which is still observed in the Alentejo region nowadays (Correia 2012).

In the northeast of the country, the local communities were wary of the Roma, and there are reports of persecutions and bans throughout time. Their main means of livelihood consisted of begging, exchanging services for food in rural communities, trading donkeys and mules, and doing some craftwork like basketry and pack saddle making (Alves 1982).

All the aforementioned aspects helped determine the interethnic relationships between the Roma and non-Roma, leading to their distancing from school since they arrived to our country, as their primary and main concerns were survival and subsistence.

The number of Roma pupils in Portuguese schools started to rise in the 1970s, and as stated by Bastos (2007, p. 42), this was mainly due to “a change in the mindset after the 1974 revolution, associated with the process of sedentarism and the extension of compulsory education to nine years”.

However, despite the increase in the number of pupils in public schools, multiple reasons contributed to a moderate schooling process. We can highlight the following:

- (i) The fact that the Roma children’s education process was always conducted within the household, as “basic social, educational and economic unit” (AAVV 2001, p. 39), and that the parents “are wary of school and of its educational function, which might be disruptive to their culture” (AAVV 2001, p. 40);
- (ii) Roma’s nomadism, which according to Machado (1994, p. 58), “was highly stimulated by the persecution (or simply intolerance) which they suffered” as well as by the “rural impermeability”, which hindered their sedentism and integration;
- (iii) Financial shortcomings, since as stated by de Almeida et al. (1994, p. 57), it is from families “with lower incomes that the vast majority of pupils who drop out of school come”;

- (iv) The lack of stimuli within their social/cultural and family environment, since the high illiteracy in their milieu reflects on their disinterest in children's schooling;
- (v) Their generalized conviction that school does not give them any advantage for entering the labour market (Nicolau 2010).

In a study on the various ethnic minorities residing in national territory, Bastos and Bastos (1999, p. 62) claim that the Roma's situation "was a lot worse than that of the immigrant ethnic minorities entering Portugal since the 1970s, in all the indicators available (living conditions, literacy, school failure and early dropout, imprisonment rates)."

The same authors state that in face to Roma the Portuguese reveal the most serious and blatant racism and xenophobia recorded in Portugal (Bastos and Bastos 1999, p. 155).

Such reality is also expressed in a recent work by Mendes et al. (2014, p. 19), where the Roma population is stated as continuing to be highly excluded, "considered to be the poorest ethnic group, with the worst housing conditions and the lowest schooling rates, and the main target of racism and discrimination within modern societies."

In 2001, Costa (2001, p. 30) reported an improvement in Roma children's schooling, which the author considers progressive, though slow. However, she highlights that "compulsory education attendance, attainment and completion remain, in most cases, little more than a mirage."

Magano concluded that their educational levels "are low, working conditions are precarious, housing conditions are insalubrious or inadequate to the household type and size, some have chronic illnesses and many do not have any support from Social Security." (2012, p. 238–239).

In the view of Mendes (2012, p. 308), the Social Integration Income had positive effects on "the return and continuity of children, adolescents and adults at school", although the effectiveness of this measure remains flawed and limited.

Besides promoting Roma's schooling, this social measure, implemented in 1996, favoured other aspects of this population's life, through local services established in the Integration Programmes. With regard to health, personal hygiene and house sanitation, actions were taken for awareness raising and monitoring towards the improvement of Roma's conditions, also contributing to many families' sedentism.

Nevertheless, although some social and educational policies led to an increase in the number of Roma pupils in schools and to the improvement of families' living conditions, "most Roma continue to show low educational levels, high rates of school failure, dropout and illiteracy, and low indices of higher education graduates compared to the non-Roma" (Magano and Mendes 2016, p. 10–11).

Casa-Nova (2009, p. 179) found "very low educational levels when compared to the global Portuguese population" in a Roma community residing on the outskirts of Porto.

The data published by Bastos and Bastos (1999, p. 146) reveal that at the end of the fourth grade, i.e. primary school, the Roma children's school attainment rate is

extremely lower (55,4%) than that of all the other European, African, Asian or South-American socio-cultural groups living in Portugal.

According to Bastos and Bastos (1999, p. 147), this extremely low attainment rate is indicative of “the cultural shock experienced by the Roma child when starting school and by many teachers (despite relevant exceptions) when having these pupils in their classes.”

Carneiro (1997, p. 41–42) puts forward various reasons to explain their school absenteeism and failure, namely: (1) families’ nomadism and semi-nomadism, as well as their conditions of extreme poverty, incompatible with study routines; (2) the low predisposition to go to school due to long distances and lack of transportation; (3) parents’ illiteracy and disinterest in their children attending school; (4) the poor hospitality experienced at school, the school environment and the fact that teachers see them as a hindrance to the normal functioning of their classes.

Magano et al. (2016, p. 5) also report that the highest rates of illiteracy and early dropout—before completing primary school—are still found among the Roma, despite the efforts made through some social and educational policies, namely the extension of compulsory education. The number of Roma people who complete the ninth grade, i.e. third cycle of Basic Education, is still minimal, and cases of Roma completing Secondary School or Higher Education are extremely rare.

Magano and Mendes (2016, p. 18) state that primary school teachers do not point out any major differences between Roma and non-Roma pupils regarding school attainment. However, in the fifth and sixth grades, i.e. elementary school, Roma pupils start skipping classes without teachers clearly understanding why, since the pupils are often to be found within the school premises. One of the main factors leading to school failure, and eventually to dropout, is absenteeism, oftentimes caused by the frustration felt by pupils for not understanding the contents of the subjects.

According to Magano et al. (2016, p. 6), the prevalence of these educational and life paths “largely depends on public policies and programmes, but also on other individual factors, the kind of support within the household, the presence of role-models, the importance of peers, and on institutional factors inherent to the functioning of state school.”

Currently, the Roma population’s perspective towards school has somewhat changed, as the completion of primary school is a generalized phenomenon among younger generations and the increase of attendance rates in nursery, kindergarten and academic support lessons seems to have become a reality (Magano and Mendes 2016, p. 22).

## Roma and School in the Northeast of Portugal

The study of the Roma population in the northeast of Portugal stemmed from the research conducted for the aforementioned PhD thesis, which aimed to assess the interethnic relationships between the Roma and non-Roma in rural and urban settings, as well as the educational situation of Roma children (Nicolau 2010).

The non-existence of scientific research works on this ethnic group in the region of Trás-os-Montes and the shortage of studies on rural Roma triggered a need for the production of scientific knowledge which would bring to light an unstudied reality, thus contributing to widen the existing knowledge of the Roma in Portugal.

The study was conducted both in rural and urban areas in the council of Bragança, involving a total of 170 sample subjects living in six villages and a total of 85 sample subjects living in three neighbourhoods in the city of Bragança. Despite the existence of other Roma families living in villages or neighbourhoods within the municipality, these specific settings were chosen for the conduction of the study because of the significant number of Roma subjects living in these particular places.

As far as methodology is concerned, the work was conducted by means of a set of specific and diverse research techniques, which were appropriately combined so as to enable analysing and understanding the reality under study.

A thorough data collection took place in Bragança archives such as those of the Town Hall and local newspapers.

In total, 75 interviews were conducted, 30 of which to Roma individuals and the remaining 45 to non-Roma subjects (teachers, parish councillors, priests, employers, neighbours, among others).

Direct and participant observation took place in the three neighbourhoods in the city over a period of one year and in the six villages of the council over a period of 6 months.

Surveys by questionnaire were also used to obtain data regarding Roma children's schooling path, as well as photographs, maps and census of the Roma and non-Roma populations, from both the urban and rural areas.

With regard to the data collected concerning the school setting, we will start by giving the numbers of Roma pupils enrolled in the different educational levels in the whole municipality of Bragança. Subsequently, we will present the data regarding the school attainment/failure, absenteeism and dropout of the Roma children enrolled in primary school in the rural and urban settings where the empirical study was conducted, totalising a number of 53 children. Furthermore, we will list the difficulties regarding Roma children's schooling, according to the testimonies obtained from these pupils' teachers and parents.

Table 10.1 contains the total number of Roma pupils enrolled in the different educational levels in the municipality of Bragança in the school year of 2005/2006.

The data presented above shows that the vast majority of Roma pupils in Bragança council were enrolled in primary school. Also, there is a significant decrease in the number of pupils as the educational level increases. The number of pupils in pre-school is also exponentially lower than in primary school. Eleven

**Table 10.1** Gypsy students, attending public schools, in the municipality of Bragança 2005/2006

Pre-primary (3–5 years old)	Primary (6–9 years old)	Elementary (10–12 years old)	Elementary (13–15 years old)	Secondary (16 years old)	Technical	University	Total
13	84	18	19	3	2	2	141

Source: Nicolau (2010), P.249

children attended kindergarten in several villages in the rural setting while only two siblings attended kindergarten in the city.

However, it should be said that years later (2009/2010), this situation had changed, with an increase recorded in the number of pupils attending pre-school in the urban setting. This was due to several factors, among which some delegations included in the Integration Programmes, all within the Social Integration Income policy.

The trend recorded in 2005/2006 is in line with those recorded in other settings nationwide, according to data published by Bastos and Bastos (1999, p. 142), obtained from the database Entreculturas. Such data showed that in Portugal, there was a sharp decrease in the number of Roma pupils attending pre-school and higher education when compared to the number of Roma children in primary school.

As far as school attainment is concerned, the chart in Fig. 10.1 shows the data regarding the 53 sample subjects of our study enrolled in primary school in the 2005/2006 school year.

According to the data presented, at the end of the 2005/2006 school year, among the 53 sample subjects enrolled in primary education, 29 (55%) passed the year they were in, while 24 (45%) failed, which represents a high percentage of school failure. Among these 24 children, 11 did not manage to achieve positive outcomes in their learning, and 13 were not evaluated due to a lack of evaluation elements. About these, the information provided by the teachers was that eight had dropped out and their whereabouts were unknown, and the other five were cases of school



**Fig. 10.1** Roma pupils’ school attainment/failure in the northeast of Portugal, 2005/2006. Source: Nicolau (2010), p. 258

absenteeism, having the children missed one of the three school terms. These were cases in which the families moved on a seasonal basis, either to Spain or to other regions in Portugal, to perform agricultural jobs, moving back to their permanent residence when such seasonal jobs ran out.

Data obtained on the non-Roma population attending primary school in the municipality in the school year of 2003/2004 showed that there were 1103 pupils enrolled and that among these, there were 42 cases (4.0%) of school failures and 19 cases (1.7%) of school dropouts (Câmara Municipal de Bragança 2006, p. 37). Therefore, when compared, the data shows that school failure and dropout are exponentially higher among the Roma population than among the non-Roma.

In light of this, the conclusion drawn is that the data obtained for the regional context is in line with the reality described nationwide regarding both the number of Roma Pupils enrolled in each educational level and the rates of school absenteeism, dropout and failure.

In order to assess the reasons for such numbers and the main difficulties related to Roma pupils' schooling, interviews were conducted with Roma parents and also with the teachers working in the educational institutions inserted in both the rural and urban settings where the empirical research was carried out.

By interviewing the parents, we intended to know their opinion regarding the school environment which was part of their children's daily life, the practices and activities held there, and the difficulties faced within the institution. By interviewing the teachers, we aimed to assess the difficulties felt daily when teaching these pupils, the rapport established with parents/guardians, and to understand how the Roma pupils socialize in the school setting.

According to the teachers interviewed, the main struggles when teaching Roma pupils were: (1) the fact that they had not attended pre-school, which hindered the acquisition of basic skills that might improve their performance when starting primary school; (2) the pupils' underachievement, due to their low motivation levels and the lack of support and monitoring of their school life by their families; (3) the low participation of parents in the school dynamics, generally only going to the school when asked to collect the pupils' end-of-term evaluation report; (4) the poor hygiene of some families, which led to the rejection/distancing by other pupils. This situation stemmed from the families' poor housing conditions and household sanitation, as most of these pupils lived in very run-down houses or shanties, oftentimes without a bathroom.

On the other hand, when interviewed, the Roma parents' referred the following: (1) Roma children's schooling is necessary, but it is enough for them to learn to read and write, since literacy is an asset for "getting a driving licence", "reading road signs", or "reading the mail", so attending primary school is enough as it is when children learn the desired skills; (2) the precarious housing conditions contribute to worsen the humiliation suffered at the hands of the whole school community, which created an unpropitious atmosphere to the children's wellbeing and learning, potentially leading to their demotivation and dropout; (3) The discrimination which, in their opinion, still prevailed, especially in the city schools, where teachers' attention was focused on the non-Roma pupils.

When analysing the other educational levels, we can see from the data shown in Table 10.1 that after completing the fourth grade, the rates of school dropout are very high in the fifth and sixth grades and in the following levels. Such rates might be justified by a number of reasons, which may vary according to the pupils' gender.

Boys are allowed to continue their schooling if they wish so, but their dropout is mainly due to the following: a lack of support and monitoring within the household (family members are oftentimes illiterate or have a low educational level); the increasing complexity of the curriculum contents; financial shortcomings; prospects of an apprenticeship "near the adults"; a generalized idea that school does not bring them any advantage because discrimination prevails in society and they feel disadvantaged compared to the non-Roma when trying to enter the labour market; parents' inability to monitor their school life due to the distance between home and school; the inner family/group pressure of a dominant cultural pattern concerning the level of education that a Rom needs; the lack of successful schooled role-models within their community.

As far as girls are concerned, besides the aforementioned reasons, there is a family concern with the preservation of their virginity when reaching puberty, and the fear of a possible emotional or sexual involvement with non-Roma boys or with Roma boys from families which do not live up to the desired standards.

With regard to the non-attendance of pre-school education, the parents (1) considered that children were too young to stay away all day and might need their care; (2) revealed some fear towards non-Roma children and adults and other Roma children attending the same institution because their children did not have defence mechanisms in the event of unexpected situations such as fights; (3) viewed the four years of schooling in primary education as sufficient; (4) could perfectly look after their children since they did not have a stable job.

Despite all these reasons, fear was mostly reported in unknown settings and in the settings where the interethnic relations between the Roma and non-Roma were somewhat tense. In some villages in the rural setting, where the level of acceptance towards the Roma population was high, Roma children started their schooling process at the age of three, like any other child.

## Conclusions

The aim of this work was to give an overview of the Roma population schooling situation in Portugal, especially of the reality observed in the northeast of the country, thus contributing to widen the existing knowledge of this issue.

Over the centuries, the Roma population has suffered numerous persecutions, a situation which currently prevails, since they are the most discriminated ethnic group (Bastos 2007). Such factors have contributed to their distancing from the education system.

Despite some progress, both nationwide and in the council under analysis, Roma children's schooling is still meagre, since school dropout and failure remain very

high and the number of pupils who complete compulsory education, i.e. secondary school, remains low.

Various factors have contributed to the increase in the enrolment of these pupils in Portuguese schools. Among such factors is the implementation of some public policies, namely the introduction of the Social Integration Income.

According to teachers, the main difficulties felt in the schooling of these pupils lay in their non-attendance of pre-school, the lack of monitoring by their parents, parents' disinterest in school, and the fact that some pupils' poor hygiene kept other children away and led to discrimination issues.

From the Roma parents' point of view, children's schooling is necessary for a number of reasons. However, they considered learning to read and write to be enough for their offspring. Their poor housing conditions were believed to be a factor which negatively impacted children at school and contributed to the prevailing discrimination, especially in the schools located in urban areas.

Furthermore, other aspects contributing to Roma pupils' school failure include the lack of models, in other words, successful schooled people in their close community; the distance between home and school; and cultural aspects, mainly leading to girls' school dropout when they reach puberty and to feelings of fear when the relationships established with non-Roma are not trustworthy.

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**Part III**  
**Education Strategies: Success and Social**  
**Mobility vs. Reproduction of Inequalities**

# Chapter 11

## Duality of Humans: The Wish to Learn and Not to Learn



Andria D. Timmer and Máté Erős

**Abstract** The segregated nature of education for the Hungarian Roma has been well-documented. Solutions to overcoming this segregation are often focusing on adding education interventions tailored to Roma youth. We argue that although education can be empowering, it can also be used as a tool to maintain the status quo. Education is dualistic and paradoxical in that it can both empower and enslave. In this chapter we use a philosophical lens to examine how the dualistic nature of education and humans can cause impediments to equal access to quality education for the Hungarian Roma. We identify some of the real obstacles to providing education to Hungarian Roma and disadvantaged youth, outline the philosophical underpinnings of these obstacles, and propose potential solutions. We use a school that has had success in providing educational tools for Roma and disadvantaged youth, MÁV School in Budapest, as a model to explain both the paradoxes and the solutions to overcome these paradoxes. Our goal is to provide insight into the educational situation for the Hungarian Roma and to make space for the reader to implement different attitudes and strategies to succeed in creating a sustainable model of education for Roma and other marginalized youth.

**Keywords** Roma · Education · Dualism · Segregated schooling · Hungary

The segregation of Roma youth in primary and secondary schooling throughout Europe has been well-documented by academics (Danova 2004; O’Nions 2010; Timmer 2017), governing bodies (European Commission 2004; EUMAP 2007), and non-governmental organizations (ERRC 2004; Rorke 2016). The reason for and the nature of segregated education is complex and multifaceted but often incompletely and inadequately explained as a factor of segregated and isolation living created by

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and exacerbated by discrimination and distrust between Roma and non-Roma. For the past few decades, there has been a great influx of educational programs and interventions designed to extend schooling resources to Roma and other similarly disadvantaged youth based on the premise that once armed with an education, they will be more employable and better able to integrate into mainstream society. In Hungary, these interventions include funding and support for integrated classrooms, afterschool programs to help Roma students who have been left out of the education system to catch up with their peers, and segregated schools which teach Roma (and similarly disadvantaged) youth separately from their peers but with a focus on quality and student-focused pedagogy.

The premise behind all of these interventions is that education is empowering. That is, through education marginalized people will be armed with the tools to fight against discrimination and throw off the shackles of their oppression. We do not deny the power of education to do just this. However, we must also contend with the reality that the schooling system largely maintains social inequalities and hierarchies and does not break them down. Schools, more often than not, reify class differences by teaching students their prescribed social roles and their duties as citizens (Anyon 1980; Willis 1977). They “impose the legitimate forms of discourse and the idea that discourse should be recognized if and only if it conforms to the legitimate norms” (Bourdieu 1977; see also Foucault 1977). In practice, what this means for the Roma is that school serves as a tool to prepare them for the low skill, blue collar jobs they are likely to procure if they are able to find employment. As a result, Roma youth do not feel valued in the classroom personally or culturally because they are both explicitly and implicitly taught that the only choice they have in order to be successful in life is to conform to the “legitimate discourse” and suppress their unique identities.

Given the constraints of the education system, those who wish to intervene by providing accessible quality education to Roma are faced with two challenges. The first is how to work within the system to subvert the system. That is, how can educators make education truly empowering? The second challenge relates to the specific issues involved in working with Roma. As a segregated and discriminated against population, Roma youth do not speak the “language of school” (Derdák and Varga 1996) and have not been socialized into being “proper” students. Moreover, and more importantly, education as the reproduction of the status quo holds little value for the Roma community until it results in discernable positive results. In this chapter, we examine some of the real obstacles to providing education to Hungarian Roma and disadvantaged youth, outline the philosophical underpinnings of these obstacles, and propose potential strategies for solutions that have been tested at one school located in a segregated Roma neighborhood in Budapest, Hungary. We propose that in order to meet the needs of Roma and disadvantaged youth, educators and activists must be willing to abandon traditional means of instruction and strive to find new and innovative ways to engage students who heretofore have been left out of the educational system. Our goal is to provide insight into the educational situation for the Hungarian Roma and to make suggestions for different attitudes

and strategies necessary to succeed in creating a sustainable model of education for Roma and other marginalized youth.

## Who Are We?

The authors of this chapter have several years of experience as educators and activists in the field of Roma education. The first author is an anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic research on and in education interventions for the Roma in Hungary since 2004. Timmer conducted 18 months of field research at Roma educational institutions and also worked as an English teacher at a school with a largely Roma student body. The second author is a philosopher who worked as the headmaster of MÁV school, a segregated school in Budapest. The challenges and examples identified in this chapter largely emerge from Máté Erős's direct experience in building a school that will do what it sets out to do—provide quality education for Roma (and similarly disadvantaged) youth. Using a philosophical understanding of how humans learn and come to education, Erős and his team developed an institution that provides a sense of achievement for the students who attend through alternative “guerilla” pedagogies and methods (Mizsur 2018). In writing this chapter, the authors draw upon their experiences as field researchers and educators. We present this analysis as a critical insight into some of the challenges those working with Roma face on a daily basis and some potential ideas on ways in which educators can work to overcome these challenges. Philosophical theory enables us to articulate why education provides such a challenge to Roma and educators alike; ethnography enables us to elucidate strategies that have been effectively implemented.

The challenges we discuss in this chapter emerge from experience in several educational institutions in Hungary that provide schooling for Roma youth as well as an extensive review of the scholarly literature and governmental and non-governmental documentation. The strategies we propose emerge from our experiences providing instruction in these institutions as well as through observation and conversation with educators of disadvantaged youth. During his time as headmaster at MÁV school, Erős experimented with different techniques to engage and excite students who would otherwise be disengaged from the learning process. Since leaving MÁV school, Erős has worked to implement the skills he developed there in a variety of different institutions working to address educational disparities and social, ethnic, and economic minorities. Together, Erős and Timmer have visited several schools and spoken with many educators who strive to create the best possible resources for disadvantaged students, the majority of whom are Roma. Through our experiences, we conclude that in order to best serve the needs of the Roma populations, educators must (1) employ a positive method of education that focuses on reward rather than punishment, (2) accept their students where they are rather than attempt to mold them into an uncomfortable and unfamiliar model of the

“ideal student”, and (3) be willing to apply methods of teaching that do not conform to the state curricular ideologies.

Much of the inspiration for this chapter comes from Erős’s work and Timmer’s observations at MÁV school. As headmaster, Erős had greater freedom here to be experimental because the school is a church funded institution. According to the Hungarian public education law, churches have the ability to use state and private funds to establish and run schools. However, with state funding comes the obligation to work in strict accordance with the state-defined curriculum and use state-sponsored curricular materials. This is exceedingly problematic in that it hinders one’s ability to offer the alternative pedagogies that researchers and practitioners have found essential for the education of disadvantaged populations, for reasons we will explain below. What makes MÁV school most intriguing, is that the church is not approved by the state. In 2010, Viktor Orbán was elected prime minister of Hungary and his election ushered in an era of right-wing populism. Shortly after his election, Orbán created new church legislation which deprived legal status to several established churches, including the church which oversees MÁV school, the Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship (MET). MET has not been an officially recognized church since 2011 and as a result has been starved of many necessary state subsidies (Kingsley 2019). Obviously, this lack of funding has led to financial difficulties within the church and the schools, homeless shelters, and nursing homes the church oversees. However, the lack of government oversight has enabled the church and its members to work in more flexible, responsive ways. As a result, the church attracts young intellectuals and researchers who have a deep passion for experimenting on how to make a better society. MÁV school came under the direction of MET when the mayor of the district decided to close the state-run school. Erős began working as a volunteer and became the director in 2017 and stayed in this position for 2 years. Under his leadership, the goal of the MÁV school was to create a family-like community where equality and freedom for students and staff members. We will discuss what we mean by freedom and how this freedom plays out in our school and among our students later in this chapter, but in short it manifests in two ways. First, students are involved in the decision making of every single detail of school life. Second, the leadership of the school is collective.

The school is located in a district of Budapest characterized by high levels of poverty and inhabitants who identify or are identified as Roma. Thus, the students who attend this school are suffering from a complex array of social disadvantages which include poverty, lack of access to adequate food resources, lack of access to safe play spaces, and entrenched societal discrimination. When Erős first began working at MÁV it in many ways resembled the kind of school one would expect in such a neighborhood. It functioned according to “prison rules.” Students were not allowed to move freely throughout the school grounds and, due to a locked gate, were not permitted to enter and leave the school at will. Police presence was a constant. Through a coordinated effort to (1) identify the specific challenges inherent in working with this unique population, (2) devise clever and implementable strategies to overcome these challenges, (3) build a team that is dedicated to flexibility and creative thinking when it comes to reaching a goal, and (4) work to engender

trust among the student body, the school under Erős's leadership was re-envisioned as a welcoming neighborhood intuition. Bathrooms, laundry facilities, and a doctor were available on the premises. Most employees demonstrated a positive and familial attitude towards the children. The children had autonomy and felt that the school is theirs, not simply a place that they go. All of these factors made the school a safe place and a positive environment where both students and staff went gladly. Erős left the school in 2019 and began a nonprofit educational organization. We cannot speak to the current conditions at the school.

## Roma Education

Most of the students at MÁV school are Roma. This is significant because of the long history of segregated education in Hungary in which children who are identified as Roma are sent to schools for the “mentally disabled” on the basis of their name alone, placed in “catch up” classes where they never effectively catch up, or are positioned at the back of the classroom where their needs and contributions are ignored (Farkas 2004, 2007). Because of a long history of segregated education, there are some unique challenges to providing quality education to Roma students. Here “quality education” refers to lessons that are relevant for the students and create discernable, measurable results.

As scholars of philosophy and anthropology, our work with Roma students has required us to directly confront the dualistic nature of humans—always present, but more readily apparent and visible among those who, owing to their marginalization and discrimination, have not been socialized into the norms of education as standard practice rooted in uniformity and non-contradiction. The concept of dualism highlights the way aspects of reality can be separated into two categories. The philosophy of mind-dualism, for example, provides the framework within which the Western biomedical system functions (Gendle 2016). That is, the mind and the body are treated as functionally separate and independent entities. Implicit in our understanding is the recognition that categorical realities are often contradictory. It is in the sense that it is possible to both love and hate someone with equal ferocity. It is only possible to create the remembrance of a hero if certain elements of their life are strategically erased. Sometimes posited as paradoxes, philosophers have long taught us that life is dualistic and contradictory. Education itself provides an example of the dualism of which we explore in this chapter. It provides a paradox in that the same institution can be both the source of disempowerment and freedom. If we teach to transgress, as bell hooks calls upon educators to do, learning can be a place “where paradise can be created.” She continues, “The Classroom, with all of its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility, we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom” (Hooks 1994, p. 207).

Education has long been touted as one of the best methods to alleviate poverty and disadvantage based on the presumption that education leads to greater understanding, respect, and empowerment, and can provide individuals with the tools necessary to improve their livelihoods. According to this ideology, people once armed with an education have an enhanced ability for social betterment, increased access to employment opportunities, and are empowered with knowledge that can protect their community by preventing future discrimination and exploitation. It seems obvious that education should empower due to the knowledge that the lack of access to adequate schooling has severe negative effects. Those without education are more likely to experience “early parenthood, homelessness, poor health, involvement with the youth and adult justice systems, poverty, and unemployment” (Westcott 2005, p. 273). They are more likely to work dead-end, low paying jobs with little chance for advancement or work in the black market or illegal economy.

It stands to reason, then, that if a lack of education is the problem, then the addition of education would be the solution, but the results of the additive model of education have been less than promising research. There is a strong link between low socio-economic status, minority identity, and lack of academic achievement. Historically, this fact has been used as evidence for genetic or racial inferiority (Bond 1981). Such an ideology, for example, underlies the long-held practice of sending Roma children to school for the “mentally handicapped” (ERRC 2004). Although this practice is now largely discouraged, the idea that Roma are somehow naturally mentally disabled or unteachable is a pervasive one in society. Such thinking prevents investment in quality education and exacerbates the segregated systems.

The problem is not with the students themselves, but with an unequal system that treats them as inferior. Schools for low-income, minority students are often lacking in resources and have overflowing classrooms and inadequately trained teachers. As a result, students in these schools have little opportunity to advance their education. The inequity in the education system serves to maintain class divisions. Students are taught their prescribed roles and kept in their prescribed social place in the classroom. Teachers are unconsciously transmitting class and cultural rules to their students, and therefore, the classroom environment reifies the social hierarchy. It does not break it down. It is for this reason that education has often been used as a tool of colonial power. Residential schools for Native Americans, for example, were advocated as a means to “save” and assimilate indigenous groups, produce cultural conformity, and ensure “a homogenous body of ‘educated’ men and women who would be well-suited for their particular roles” (Kelm 1998, p. 58).

Given this, education following the standard model will not lead to societal change. Paulo Freire (1968) labels this the “banking model” of education in which “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those who they consider to know nothing” (p. 58). He proposes a “pedagogy of the oppressed,” which “must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (p. 33). The teacher does not simply teach but engages in a dialogue with the students. In a Freirean pedagogy, learning happens through the posing of problems which teacher and student challenge through discourse and debate. As such, rather than replicating the oppressed/oppressor

dichotomy, education is a subversive force, which provide the oppressed with an awareness to initiate societal transformation. In this chapter, we provide the theoretical basis for understanding the paradoxes implicit in the effort to education drawing upon our work with disadvantaged students, most of whom identify as Roma. We explore iterations of this dualism that present challenges to the aim of providing equitable education to the most disadvantaged youth who have been largely excluded from the education system.

## Dualism and the Challenges to Equitable Education

### *The Paradox of Hedonism*

If Aristotle's postulate is true that "ALL men by nature desire to learn," then the job of the educator would be easy. The pupil desires to learn and is open to the knowledge that the educator imparts. Learning, then, brings pleasure, and, as early hedonists assert, all people seek out pleasure and avoid pain (Annas 1993; Feldman 2004; Lampe 2015). Any teacher, however, knows this description does not match what actually happens in the classroom, particularly educators of marginalized students. For many Roma youth, because of their experiences of discrimination and segregation, education brings with it the promise of pain. For very apparent reasons, they have come to hate the education system, the rigid structure of schooling, and the process of learning. This hatred does not come from nothing. Students identified as Roma are forced to sit in the back of her class where, if not being ignored by classmates and teachers, are ridiculed. Worse still many who are identified as Roma are erroneously sent to a school for the mentally handicapped when young, deprived of any opportunity to learn in a nurturing environment. Almost every Roma student has similar stories. It is no wonder, then, that education is pain and they do not desire to learn when they come to schools like MÁV school.

If the students feel that education is pain, then we must accept that they feel pain. Their truth is not an intellectual or linguistic product, but it is based on raw experience. It is the same way that one will recoil in pain if they touch fire. Given this, we cannot work from the assumption that "by nature they desire to learn." That is, we cannot follow the standard models of education and expect that the students will meet us. In an experimental classroom, the student will feel pain due to the extreme difficulty of the theoretical tasks they are given, so in many cases they capitulate, which leads to conduct often interpreted as "behavioral problems." Thus, begins a vicious cycle. The way to counter the vicious cycle is to engage students as active learners such that they can relate their own experiences to their learning. When they do this, it will become obvious that using knowledge *can* bring pleasure.

The paradox of hedonism is that the desire of pleasure can make pleasure impossible. Simply put, having knowledge increases one's ability to experience pleasure but if the process of gaining knowledge is unpleasurable, it will be avoided. As such, learners need a rational calculation of interests to be able to assess the

manner in which deeper and lasting pleasure can come out of pain. Experimental pedagogy is focused exactly on this. For a successful educational philosophy, it is necessary to accept, not dissolve the paradox of hedonism.

There are two methods that can assist the educator in accepting the paradox. The first is to make learning as pleasurable as possible by focusing on the practical applications of knowledge. Math lessons, for example, should focus on money skills. Language arts should come from reading newspaper articles dealing with events of direct importance and interest to the student. Another possible solution is to attempt to reduce the distance between the pain and the pleasure of knowledge. A simple gifting system can provide a dopamine release that enables the student to have a pathway through the pain to pleasure. The reward does not have to be large. Both authors have experimented with this method by enacting a point system. Points are relatively easy to earn and can be cashed out for rewards that are desirable. Such a system increases class attendance and engagement, and, of course, provides the direct pleasure of learning rather than the abstract pleasure of which most philosophers concern themselves. Thus, their experience changes and they can be opened up to the world full of exciting things to learn.

### *Monadic Structure of Empirical Data*

According to Erving Goffman (1959) dramaturgical theory of performance, societal interactions occur on a stage in which actors meet each other in the frontstage region and are uninformed about the preparations that occur in the backstage region. Essentially, whenever we encounter another individual, we are basing our impression of that person based on the character they embody in the frontstage region. In these interactions, people are in control of some of these aspects—this is what they “give.” However, the aspects of self that people “give off” are unconscious and indirect. An individual can be stigmatized or “discredited” for the impressions that they give off (Goffman 1963).

Goffman’s theory provides a useful framework for understanding how individual encounters cannot be understood out their societal context. In the case of the Roma, much is already “known” about them. In public discourse, they are commonly known to be criminal, dirty, and, in the case of our children, unteachable. The Roma, according to Edward Said (as cited in Nicolae 2006), are the only people about whom anything can be said without challenge or demurral. Thus, Roma, due to what they “give off” through their skin color and mannerisms, are discredited. As educators of Roma, we are trained not to base our assumptions on stereotypes, but we are not immune to being affected by what our students “give,” or in other words, their managed identities. Working with Roma youth, we constantly get impressions from them. We receive data and use this data to form a working understanding of who that individual is. The hidden conceit of our intelligence is that the data we receive forms a coherent schema of the person.

In our work with Roma and disadvantaged youth, we are constantly receiving impressions about who they are and of what they are capable, which can, if we are not careful, lead to a monadic structure of empirical data. That is, we collect observable data in our interactions with them, and we run the risk of using that data to form a unified, static image of the person. However, the constant flow of the pieces of pictures and senses will not necessarily show us a unified picture. The data we receive is not immutable, but fluctuates, develops, and changes. A personality is constantly changing. In our interaction with Roma youth, we are largely basing our estimations on what the individual “gives.” Here the theoretical framework of frontstage and backstage helps. Presumably, one is relatively in control of what they give. It is erroneous, however, to assume that this managed identity represents one’s true self. Rather, this is still a performance that takes place in the frontstage region, and this performance can change over time. If educators base their estimation of a person based on a static notion of who they appear to be, they are working from a flawed model.

In order to address this challenge, educators should recognize that they form presumptions about students. Recognizing this, it is essential to fight against the natural tendency of rigidity and instead be open to the possibility of change. We must always assume the possibility of change while taking seriously the data input coming from students on a daily basis. We must assume that each child is unfinished and their personality if unfinished. This premise focused on possibilities, not on the challenges. When we expect our children to fail, they will fail, but when we open ourselves to the possibility that they can change, they are able to change and succeed. The goal, then, is acceptance, or as one educator in Hungary explained, acceptance toward the personality, not the deeds (personal communication, March 2020).

### *The Paradox of Freedom*

Educational institutions for Roma must teach to transgress (Hooks 1994). Freedom should be the primary goal. It may seem that the children, especially those in the lower grades, are not ready to be able to take on the responsibility of engaged dialogue. However, it is possible for education for freedom to be put into practice by taking the students’ decisions seriously and supporting them in their endeavors. The practice of freedom is not without its challenges and presents yet another paradox. On the one hand, real pedagogical advancement is only possible if we regard freedom as the primary goal in order to assist in the creation of democratically minded citizens. On the other hand, freedom brings with it great responsibility. Freedom is a burden that often even the most educated are often unable to carry.

For many young students, particularly those who have not been socialized into the rigid structure of schooling, freedom is defined as the unlimited access to pleasure. How is it possible to work with someone whose actions resulting from this definition of freedom are unacceptable? Freedom defined as the access to unlimited pleasure is counterproductive to a healthy society. Rather freedom is the ability to promote

capacities to the greatest extent possible in order to breed fulfillment of human life in the direction of progress.

It must be noted that the extreme desire for freedom is one often associated with a life on the margins. In their book *Lilies of the Field: Marginal People Who Live for the Moment*, Day et al. (1998) bring together ethnographic works of peoples, who due to their marginalized position in society, often defined by poverty, eschew “mainstream notions of work, productivity, and long-term economic planning” choosing instead “to take a ‘natural’ abundance for granted and to forage their own subsistence” (p. 1). For the Roma, this presents itself in the manner in which Roma “harvest” from the non-Roma while existing in a kind of “brotherhood” amongst themselves. To non-Roma, this living for the moment appears at best to be laziness and at worst criminal. Oscar Lewis (1966) labeled this behavior as a “culture of poverty.” Emerging from an ethnography of impoverished Puerto Rican families living in New York, Lewis posited this theory in order to explain why poverty persisted from generation to generation. Immediately and rightly critiqued, the “culture of poverty” framework assumes capitalism as the norm. That is, it assumes that all peoples should endeavor to be productive and contribute to the capitalist economy. The strength in the metaphor of the *Lilies of the Field* is that it does not assume that marginalized people should endeavor towards productivity and, instead, find contentment in a life defined by its immediacy. In this, freedom itself makes it impossible to reach a higher level of freedom, the level afforded to those recognized as full members of a society.

In practice, the act of living in the moment is defined by behaviors deemed abhorrent by the general public. Roma are thought to be lazy, unmotivated, and, in many cases, criminal. Educators, then, are tasked with the burden of sharing with Roma youth the pleasure of education when pleasure for them has been defined by a kind of freedom that until now has removed them from the responsibilities of and trappings of societal expectations. Educators should not force upon the students one vision of the future deemed worthy of saving; rather, they should take into consideration that there is more to the fulfillment of human life. Education offers freedom, but it is freedom with responsibility. Pain of learning can turn into pleasure; the unbearable freedom of life can be pleasure of life. This can only happen, however, if lessons are directly applicable. The institution of schooling is often focused on abstract lessons. Such abstraction does not work with a student for whom learning is painful and freedom is within one’s grasp.

In order to address the paradox of freedom, we suggest three pragmatic solutions. This first is to remove the visible reminders of servitude. In MÁV school, police presence and the optics of prison life were removed. In addition, murals and colorful artwork were exposed to make the school a comforting place to be. A second solution is to offer non-abstract lessons. Students should be able to understand the direct relevance of lessons. Finally, a third solution is to involve students in decision making. Although the final decision lies with the headmaster, students’ input is gathered, valued, and taken into consideration.

### *The Paradox of the “Morality of Helping”*

The final challenge that we will explore in this chapter relates to the educators and staff rather than to the Roma students. The biggest paradox in any helping profession lies in the demand for reciprocity. Those who help, such as people who make the conscious decision to enter the field of social work or work at a school for disadvantaged youth, are often seeking greater emotional fulfillment than they would find in other professions. They expect that their workplace will give more than it will take away. This is a reasonable expectation as it is selling point of these professions—help others, help yourself. We must, however, ask the question: what if this is not true? What if the work is not gratifying? There are many reasons why this could be the case—those whom we seek to help may lie to us, attack us, and cause unanticipated and seemingly insurmountable problems. What if those we help, rather than expressing gratitude, express ambivalence, or even anger? These are the most troubling questions of our work and it draws into question the motivation of our work. That is, are the helpers really seeking to help the needy or just themselves? The tragedy of our work is that oftentimes the latter is the answer to the question as we see many people leaving the work and the profession due to lack of fulfillment. Thus, if we cannot address this paradox with merciless honesty, we will be unable to move forward in this work.

In thinking of solutions for how to deal with this paradox, we suggest approaching the act of helping in the similar vein as responding to a potential emergency situation. Pilots, emergency room physician, first responders—all of these professionals are constantly preparing for emergencies. It is for this reason that many of us survive our interactions with them. Of course, someone in the helping profession should be glad when their love is reciprocated, but helpers should consider their work as being constantly in emergency mode. That ensures that professionals in these positions are able to continue their work even when the unexpected happens. Another way of thinking about this is to use the model provided by the philosopher Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was a contemporary of Hegel who was lauded as the greatest philosopher of his time, but Schopenhauer hated Hegel. In defiance, he announced his lectures at exactly the same time; therefore, no one showed up. Regardless, he kept presenting his lectures to an empty room. We can learn from this apparent exercise in futility. Do not cease to function, even when receiving nothing in return.

Another paradox related to the morality of helping relates to the character of the helpers who must be flexible, caring, and responsive, while at the same time maintaining rigidity in the face of defiance and be unfazed when directly challenged. They must be able to deflect potential violence in a calm manner. This is the only effective attitude when it comes to working with children living in extreme poverty. Character development, then, is an extremely important part of this work. It is intangible, but a basic condition of success. So, what is this character? It is the thirst for an ability to fight for knowledge. It is the ability to profess, redefine, or create one's own identity paired with self-confidence and conviction that one can make the

world a better place. It is the ability to work for the best and most positive outcome even if it means staring into the face of an angry mob.

Finally, the most important aspect of helping is often the most overlooked because it is considered unempirical (Domínguez 2000). That is, it is only possible to perform fruitful work in an affectionate environment. Love is not passivity, but, rather, a positive acceptance of reality. Love is what provides helpers with the ability to move through mistakes. It is what tells students that we are truly there for them.

## **In Practice**

Most of the students at MÁV are ethnically Roma, but the few of them are not. The common denominator of the two groups is that both are underprivileged in Hungarian society. Throughout this chapter, we have highlighted many of the challenges unique to educating marginalized students due to the intrinsic dualistic nature of humans, evident in educational institutions. We have also proposed potential solutions to addressing each challenge. The team at MÁV school applied an experimental approach and, thus, the suggestions have been put into action. In this final section, we outline some of the strategies that have worked for in this school. It is important to note, that the work is never considered done. That is, the most important aspect of the program is to continue innovating and remain flexible and open to new possibilities. Thus, the teachers and administration are constantly researching best practices and evaluating the current learning outcomes.

During the time that Erős served as headmaster, four basic subjects were taught at MÁV: Laws and Nature, Space and Time, Money Science, and Sports. As discussed previously, teachers sought to make the knowledge imparted in these classes as applicable and as hands on as possible. That is, students learned math by counting money and history by building models of ancient weapons. In addition to these subjects, students were also exposed to music therapy through an Austrian partner and English classes taught by native speakers. Education was not bound to the classroom. Instead, every Fridays were built around integrated learning. Students built knowledge on one theme by rotating through several stations with teammates. In addition, students are more frequently learning in a one-to-one mentoring situation rather than in a full classroom. This intensive model of education is made possible through a dedicated staff, including social workers, a large pool of volunteers, and a small student body.

The hands-on lessons meant that knowledge was accessible and addressed all of the dualistic challenges posed above. The interactive nature made it pleasurable for both students and teachers. As such, learning was pleasurable, and educators received immediate reward for their work. Learning, then, became an activity in which students and teachers could participate in and enjoy together, thus laying the groundwork for an environment that unleashes the emancipatory potential of education.

When MÁV school began, the children were fairly resistant to learning. The experiment at MÁV began with the knowledge that they would not learn until they started to desire knowledge. We recognize that the successes that have been seen at the school are not necessarily available to most education institutions, but we reject the notion that Roma students, due to their marginalization, are unreachable. Both authors have worked in and made connections with educators in numerous educational institutions that teach disadvantaged youth. Without fail, we have seen that in order to be successful, the school administrators, staff, and teachers must create new models. In many cases, these models do not look like education as usual. Nor do they follow to state-sponsored curriculum.

We can propose, based on our experiences and our observations, five strategies that educators can implement to provide a successful educational framework. First, it is necessary to break discipline reciprocity. In Hungary, as in much of Central and Eastern Europe, educational disciplinary models tend to be punitive. When working in this model, it is logical for educators to perceive negative behavior and respond negatively. Educators with whom we spoke claimed that such disciplinary measures do not work with their students. Rather, the students can be reached through reward and positive reinforcement. Second, it is important to view the institution as a unified entity. Teachers and students should work together to understand the whole school as a referent group without sides, castes, or factions. As such, when the institution benefits, its members benefit. Third, educators should work on repairing the students' perception of the "school as enemy." In a successful model, students should understand the school project not, as they often do, an alien invasion counter to their identity, but as a holistic approach designed to work with them to build a better future. The fourth implementable strategy is to concentrate on the process of learning instead of focusing on trying to produce documentable knowledge. In practice, this means that teachers must focus their energies on teaching the language of school and the movement of learning rather than recitation of study materials. Using this framework, anything can be subject matter since the goal is learning to learn and encouraging students to be open to the learning process. Finally, the above four strategies are possible if schooling is imparted through interchangeable and open subject matters. This enables a student to drop in and out of the schooling environment with greater ease because they can predict the directions of study. It also enables to educator to teach through hidden curriculum, such as providing math education in the guise of talking about money matters.

The manner in which our proposals may be implemented will differ based on the needs of the student body and goals of the educator. However, what all successful educators share in common is a desire to accept the students as they are, nurture of love of education in whatever form that takes, and foster the students' real skills, even as they may differ dramatically from the expected norm. We argue that it is necessary to develop a style of teaching and learning that meets the students where they are, and this is a model that is open to all educators.

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# Chapter 12

## The Influence of Social Capital on the Educational Attainment of Roma Persons: Evidence from a Qualitative Study in Romania



Elena-Loreni Baciú and Theofil-d-Andrei Lazar

**Abstract** As the largest ethnic minority in Europe, Roma persons are among the groups with the lowest levels of educational attainment. In Romania, the country with the highest number of Roma persons of all the EU Members States, the situation is even worse, each higher level of education revealing an increasing gap between Roma persons and the general population.

Positioned within the framework of Social Capital theory, the current chapter explores the influences of micro- and mezzo-level social networks on educational attainment of Roma persons, trying to explain some of the mechanisms that perpetuate the gap between them and the general population, in terms of educational attainment.

Drawing on a qualitative bottom-up study of Roma persons' experiences of belonging in society, we analysed the interlocking influences of bonding and bridging social capital on the interviewees' educational attainment. The results of the study point out that both forms of social capital have an important impact on the educational attainment of persons in vulnerable groups, although in different ways, and sometimes they can be mutually reinforcing, depending on the prevailing social arrangements, in either keeping the persons engaged in education, or drawing them away from their educational paths. The results also show that in circumstances of intersecting vulnerabilities, a noticeable imbalance between agency and structure is

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produced, which corrodes the foundational principles of equity and affects the equality of opportunities.

**Keywords** Social capital · Educational attainment · Intersection of economic and social vulnerabilities · Roma persons

## Development as an Output of Education

Based on the human capital theory (Adam Smith), the tight connection between education and development, both at individual and societal level, is globally acknowledged nowadays and stands as one of the main pillars of our social organization system.

The returns of education have been amply discussed, with research exploring both financial and social gains of different levels of educational attainment (see Harmon et al. 2003; Brand 2010; Owens 2004 etc.). At micro-level, educational attainment (EA) has been associated with gainful employment, career development and financial status (see Harmon et al. 2003; Lehmann 2004 etc.). At macro-level, higher levels of education contribute to increased political participation (Mayer 2011; Brand 2010), quality of civic knowledge, support for free speech (Dee 2004) and has positive effects on crime reduction and environment protection (Owens 2004).

Access to education represents one of the fundamental human rights, promoted as such by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since 1948 and adopted ever since as a major commitment by international institutions and national governments, through a plethora of Charters and Programs (for e.g., The International Education Charter, Students Rights Charter, International Education Week, European Education Area).

However, despite all these large-scale engagements towards the provision of equal access to education for all, there are still many people who continue to have limited access to this basic right.<sup>1</sup> Investigations into inequalities among different social groups in accessing education show two main categories that face difficulties in advancing their EA: individuals who have low economic resources (see Homel and Ryan 2014; Sirin 2005; Lehmann 2004; Coleman 1988 etc.) and ethnic minorities (see Arouri et al. 2019; Kim and Calzada 2019 etc.). An especially vulnerable position is held by the social groups in which these two different contexts intersect and produce a combined effect of precariousness and marginality, which describes not only the individual or family's situation but also the condition of the communities they reside in and the institutional resources they can access, such as, low quality segregated schools (Council of Europe 2017).

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<sup>1</sup>World Bank database—School enrollment, primary (% gross), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.ENRR>

## Roma, a Group at the Intersection of Multiple Vulnerabilities

Roma, as the largest ethnic minority in Europe, is among the groups with the lowest levels of EA (O'Hanlon 2016). The latest European survey on minorities, representative for Roma living in nine EU Member States in geographic or administrative units with density of Roma population higher than 10% (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016), shows low levels of school attendance and EA among Roma children and clear gaps between them and the general population regarding education, starting with early childhood education, where their participation is only 53%, compared with 87% among the general population. In terms of school enrolment rates by children age, the survey shows an increasing gap between Roma and the general population with each higher level of education: for primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 1 and 2), 86% of Roma children are enrolled in the educational level corresponding to their age, compared to 90% among the general population; for upper secondary education (ISCED 3), 30% of Roma children are enrolled in the educational level corresponding to their age, compared to 79% among the general population; while for post-secondary and tertiary education (ISCED 4+), only 2% of Roma youth are enrolled in the educational level corresponding to their age, compared to 34% among the general population.

In Romania, the country with the highest Roma population of all EU Members States (1.85 million people according to the Council of Europe, in 2019<sup>2</sup>), the situation is even worse, with 38% of Roma children enrolled in kindergarten (compared to 86% of the general population), 77% enrolled in ISCED 1 and 2 educational levels (compared to 85% of the general population), 22% enrolled in ISCED 3 educational levels (compared to 80% of the general population), and 77% of the Roma youth (aged 18–24) registered as early school leavers (compared with only 19% of the general population) (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016).

Roma are an ethnic minority, with cultural differences and specific needs that must be taken into account when designing educational inclusion programs (Lauritzen and Nodeland 2018; Tremlett 2014; Walsh and Krieg 2007). Most of them have a low socio-economic status and live in poor neighbourhoods, especially in peripheral rural areas (Berescu 2019; Baciu et al. 2016; Dohotaru et al. 2016). The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2016) notes that, in 2014, around 70% of the Romanian Roma were at-risk-of-poverty, a percentage significantly higher than in the general population (25%). Being at the intersection of economic and social vulnerabilities, the educational well-being of young generations of Roma is negatively influenced and this entails high risks of social exclusion for them (Ravnbøl 2009). Roma community has a growing and predominantly young population in an ageing Europe, and the immediate ending of their current state of intersecting vulnerabilities should represent a top priority for policymakers and

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<sup>2</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-romania\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-romania_en)

program implementers alike. The integration of Roma persons through education has the potential of bringing positive changes on many macro-levels, with a special emphasis on the labour market (World Bank 2010).

## **A Qualitative Investigation into the Interlocking Influences of Social Capital on the Educational Attainment of Persons from Vulnerable Groups**

There is still an ongoing debate among researchers about which factors contribute more decisively to shaping a person's opportunities and choices when it comes to education. For modelling future policies and programs toward enhancing EA and, thus, improving the returns of education for individuals and societies alike, the results of this debate are extremely important, because they will set out the blueprints for the allocation of resources for such interventions.

The social capital, as a conceptual tool, is strongly embedded into fundamental sociological concepts, and describes a *virtuous circle* that results from people's shared understanding about values, norms and cooperation (Putnam 1993). As such, and due to the implications it has for the levels of trust, happiness, health and wealth within communities, it has the potential to shape policies and strategies of development (Uslaner and Conley 2003). Its core contribution to social sciences is the portraying of social networks as *usable resources* or *capital*, alongside other forms of capital (human, economic, cultural etc.): it helps explain how individuals can gain economic and cultural resources by deliberate socialization within different groups and are thus motivated in creating and developing such networks (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital (SC) has proved to have a great influence on economic development and poverty reduction (Woolcock 2001), but it has also been proven to contribute to reproducing structural patterns of exclusion for economically vulnerable groups (Cleaver 2005; Young 1999). Consequently, given the 'two-sided' nature of SC (Kropf and Newbury-Smith 2016), it is an important task for researchers and policy makers to understand how it works to shape various opportunities for persons from vulnerable groups, and how its two forms (bonding and bridging) interfere with each-other, 'making' or 'breaking' these opportunities.

Positioned within the framework of SC theory (Putnam 2000; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Granovetter 1973), the current chapter explores the influences of micro- and mezzo-level social networks on the EA of Roma persons, trying to explain some of the mechanisms that perpetuate the EA gap between Roma persons and the general population. While we acknowledge the importance of the macro-level policies and programs in supporting inclusive educational climates and increased participation in school for vulnerable groups, we focus our analysis specifically on the mechanisms of the micro- and mezzo-level forces that are at work in shaping the challenges and opportunities of Roma children and youngsters to advance their education.

A fundamental distinction is made between two forms of SC (bonding and bridging) to try to trace and explain the interlocking influences they have on participants' educational attainment: (1) *Bonding SC* is the SC developed within *closed networks of similar individuals*. In general, these include networks composed of family, relatives, and friends (Coleman 1988; Woolcock and Sweetser 2002; Lancee 2010). (2) *Bridging SC* is conceptualized as the interactions of individuals with *networks consisting of persons that are dissimilar to the individual* (Woolcock and Sweetser 2002; Field 2003; Lancee 2010), in this case with *ethnically and economically diverse* entities. The networks formed through *interactions with local authorities, local institutions and organizations* also fall under this category.

We know, from previous research, that *bonding SC* is a more common asset among lower income/lower class individuals than *bridging SC*, and that, at the same time, the former is often seen as rather a prerequisite for the development of the latter (Edin and Lein 1997; Sampson 1999; Warren et al. 2001). We also know that, for vulnerable population groups, bonding SC has limited resources to support higher educational attainment (Raymond-Flesch et al. 2017) and that, when available, bridging ties (formed with educational staff—Ashtiani and Feliciano 2018—and peers with different backgrounds—Radoš et al. 2019), support vulnerable categories of youngsters to achieve higher levels of EA. However, the empirical evidence about *how* exactly the two types of capital (bonding and bridging) intertwine in their influencing EA among persons from vulnerable groups is rather scarce, because previous investigations focused mainly on the differences rather than on the synergies between them.

The remainder of the chapter addresses this gap by adding to the body of knowledge about the mechanisms through which the two types of SC shape Roma persons' educational outcomes. In doing so, we try to unpack the complexities of the influences exerted simultaneously by the bonding and bridging capital over Roma persons' educational paths. We pay close attention to the way the balance between individual choice (attributable to agency) and available resources (attributable to structure) is produced in the case of Roma persons' access to education, and if this balance then creates a climate for compliance with the principles of equity and equality of opportunities for all.

### ***Methodology of the Study***

The results presented in what follows are based on a qualitative, bottom up investigation of 24 life stories of Roma individuals from two regions of Romania (the Western and North-Western Regions), collected through a purposeful sampling process, based on the 'information rich' criterion (Patton 2002). The data collection process was part of a larger scale research (see Lazăr et al. 2015 for more details), which explored, from the standpoint of persons from vulnerable groups, how local practices and experiences in the persons' immediate environment are tied into extended social relations or chains of action that organize the 'social happening'

(Smith 2005; DeVault and McCoy 2006) of belonging in society. The data discussed in the present chapter was collected through individual interviews, based on semi-structured interview guides. The central topic that guided the discussion was the interviewees' experiences on the labour market. We used the labour market as an 'entry point' into a set of institutional relations, from where we further explored the ways the 'institutional' (in the sociological sense) order creates the conditions of individual experience. We asked the interviewees to provide in their stories as many details as possible about their experience with schooling, the entities that significantly influenced their educational paths, and the ways they received these influences. Based on the assumption of 'intergenerational transmission of social capital' (Weiss 2012), those interviewees who had children at the time of the interview were asked the same questions about their children as well.

The process of selecting participants (conducted with the support of two regional non-governmental organizations—NGOs—promoting Roma persons' rights) emphasized variation and, through the purposeful stratification of participants, we intended to ensure different, rather than common profiles of interviewees (Palinkas et al. 2013). As such, we selected 11 men and 13 women, 10 residing in urban areas and 14 in rural areas and 9 employed and 15 unemployed at the time the interviews were conducted. The EA of the interviewees also varies, from the lowest to the highest level of studies: six subjects had no schooling whatsoever, three subjects had started primary school, but didn't finish it, three subjects managed to complete primary school (four grades), two subjects started middle school but didn't finish it, two subjects completed middle school (eight grades), three participants attended high-school without graduating, two participants graduated from high school, and three participants started university, of which only one completed this level. Due to the focus of the investigation, compared to the official statistics on the EA of Roma individuals in Romania, we overrepresented in the sample the number of cases with the lowest level of EA (in order to obtain a comprehensive list of the factors that contribute to school non-attendance and to early school dropout) and those with the highest level of EA (which helped to convey a clear picture of the assets needed by Roma persons to advance on their formal educational path).

### ***Reasons for Not Attending School or for Early School Dropout***

The widespread low EA of Roma persons in Romania (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016) has been explained by various authors (see Voicu 2007) within the context of their families' lack of financial resources. Despite the fact that mandatory education is free in Romania, families still have to deal with various expenses in order to keep their children in school: buying clothes and shoes, special books or notebooks, supplies, transportation pass, etc. In the case of very poor families, who live on social welfare and daily labour, these expenses can often be unsustainable.

However, in the stories of the interviewees with no or low levels of EA, the lack of financial resources never appeared as the sole cause for not attending school or dropping out early; it was always mentioned in connection to other reasons, such as dramatic family situations that required them to undertake complex household duties or jobs in order to support and provide for the family.

The need to give up school in order to undertake household duties was often invoked by the *female interviewees* with no or low EA. Sometimes the household duties involved taking care of siblings, while other times they involved marriage at a young age and moving in with the husband, a change that disrupted the interviewees' educational paths. For example, Denise<sup>3</sup> (32 years old at the time of the interview) says that she never went to school because she had two smaller brothers she had to care for, while her parents went to work. She comes from a very poor family that struggled to make ends meet, and the parents (without any education at all) always held menial jobs. She started taking on household duties even before she was of school age. Over time, her parents had three more children, so by the time she finished raising her five younger brothers, she got married herself and had her own children to care for. So, she notices, it was never the right moment for her to get an education and her parents were never preoccupied by this aspect. On the other hand, Maria (37 years old at the time of the interview) moved in with her husband shortly after she met him. She was 13 years old and he was 20. Before that, she lived for 4 years (since the age of 9) in a placement center with her younger sister, due to her mother's serious health issues (her mom was a single parent) and the financial difficulties the family had to face. Although the couple did not have children until Maria was 17, she gave up school as soon as she moved in with her husband, so she finished only five grades. Focused on her and her daughters' survival, Maria's mother had no objections to Maria's dropping out of school.

Dropping out of school due to early involvement in income-providing activities was evoked exclusively by the *male interviewees*. In such cases, the family's poor economic status or the loss of one income provider (through death, illness or parental separation) constituted the onset for the money earning activities (mostly on the black market) for the youngsters, who had to give up school. Andrew (25 years old at the time of the interview) recalls how he had to start working when he was around 14 years old, due to his father's untimely death. His mother (who had no education at all) was left to care for her four children, which was impossible due to her small income obtained from temporary and precarious employment. As a result, the oldest male child (Andrew) had to get involved in providing an income for the family.

The outcomes of not attending or dropping out of school at a young age were strongly felt as negative by all the interviewees concerned, especially in the area of labour market integration: the unemployed felt that their chances to find a job would have been significantly enhanced if they had completed a higher level of education, while those who had secured a job felt their low EA impeded their professional advancement, despite the fact that they had the job experience and the skills needed

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<sup>3</sup>The names are invented, in order to protect the identity of the interviewees.

for a higher position. Other interviewees expressed regret at not enrolling in school or giving it up too soon, because they faced difficulties in their day-to-day life even in small activities like reading, filling out a form or understanding complex ideas expressed in the news, TV shows or movies.

All the interviewees with low EA who had children expressed, in some way or another, their desire for their children to be better educated than them, although their projections for their children's educational paths varied. For example, Denise, the 32 year old who never went to school because she had to care for her five siblings, has difficulties imagining her two children (one in the first grade and the other in the fifth) going beyond eighth grade, because a middle school is the highest education institution available in the small rural community where they live. In order to access further schooling, the children would have to travel outside the rural community, a scenario that seems implausible to Denise at this stage. Maria, however (the girl who moved with her future husband at 13 and dropped out of school after fifth grade), has great ambitions for her three children: her eldest daughter (aged 20) is enrolled in Law school at the University in the city where they live, and her middle daughter attends the Pedagogical High school in the same city (one of the most prestigious high schools in town). The youngest child, a 9 year old boy who is now in middle school, takes private lessons in order to make sure he will be admitted the same high school in ninth grade. Maria says she doesn't expect him to help around the house as long as he does well in school.

### ***Assets Needed to Advance on the Formal Educational Path***

The interviewees with high EA mentioned the influence of their parents' attitudes and opinions regarding education as definitive in motivating them to stay in school: the parental figures were the ones that provided them the support, encouragement and sometimes even the coercion necessary to keep them engaged in education. In most cases, the supportive parents were located in urban areas or had at least an average financial status.

Daniel (47 years old at the time of the interview) comes from a traditional Roma family with seven children, who lived in a rural community and had a small farm. By the time he was 7 years old, both his parents had died, so he was left in the care of his six older brothers. One of his (Romanian) neighbours, somewhat wealthy, took him in, initially wanting to adopt him. Because some legal complications appeared in the process, the adoption did not go through. However, for the rest of his youth, the neighbour took responsibility for him and acted as a parental figure. He supported him all the way through middle school and high school. He remembers the expenses to keep him in high school were quite high, because he had to move to the city during the school year. Looking back on his childhood and youth, Daniel acknowledges that the care and support received from his neighbour were much higher than his parents could have provided him if they had been alive at that time.

Peter, on the other hand (24 years old at the time of the interview), does not hesitate to mention that, although he wasn't too fond of school, he had no other choice but to finish high school, because his parents did not allow him to drop out. He later started university twice (in two different programs), but dropped out each time before the end of the first year. He describes his family as "non-traditional Roma, for sure". Also, his fiancée is Romanian and he has a lot of friends outside the Roma community.

Another important factor mentioned by the interviewees was the institutionalized support programs provided to Roma persons to continue their education. For example, all three subjects that enrolled in University programs mentioned they accessed the national Roma university scholarships program.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, women interviewees with low education level, from both urban and rural areas, completed primary school or learned to read and write after enrolling in special programs, such as the Second Chance program.<sup>5</sup>

Annie (44 years old at the time of the interview) says that, when she was a child, there was a clear distinction between boys and girls, when it came to Roma parents' expectations about their children's educational attainment: the parents expected their girls to end their educational path once they had learned to read and write. So, she quit school after she completed the eighth grade, which was an unusually high level of studies for a girl in her traditional community and, she confesses, made her parents seem quite "liberal" at the time among the community members. It was only when she turned 40 that she decided to resume her education, so she enrolled in a support program for Roma women and completed eleven grades.

In their stories about their educational paths, the interviewees mention various types of institutional interventions that they experienced and considered useful in promoting education for Roma persons:

- (a) At a local level: clothing and school supplies aid from the local budget; recruitment of the school age children by the school educators and teachers directly from the community, through house calls;
- (b) At a national level: the Second Chance program; the university scholarships for Roma program; the mandatory enrolment of children in kindergarten for at least 1 year, before enrolling them in the first grade; 10 years of mandatory school; the conditioning of the state allowance for children on the children's enrolment and participation in school; the "Bread-roll and milk" program<sup>6</sup>; the school mediators;
- (c) At a European level: intervention programs implemented by local NGOs, with EU funding, enhancing access to basic education, or providing training programs for educators and teachers on managing diversity in the classroom. Most

<sup>4</sup>A government-sponsored program which provides university scholarships for Roma students.

<sup>5</sup>A school program which allows persons (adults) with no or low levels of education to re-enroll in school and graduate the primary and/or lower secondary level (ISCED 1 or 2).

<sup>6</sup>A government-sponsored program through which a light lunch (one bread-roll and an yogurt, usually) is provided in schools, for children from poor families.

often, the interviewees, especially those from rural areas, were acquainted with such support programs thanks to the help and mediation of NGOs, which brought information into communities, and supported and motivated the individuals in the process of completing their education.

Since high EA among Roma persons is such a rare asset, the interviewees who had this asset were also quite proud of it and of themselves. They were aware they had managed to do something that is very uncommon among their peers. Daniel (the orphan who was supported by his neighbour) confesses that, when he returned to his parents' village after graduating from high school, he and his quasi-adoptive parents were extremely proud about it because he was 'the first gypsy with a baccalaureate<sup>7</sup> degree in the whole village'. Annie, the woman who resumed her education at 40, was a source of inspiration for other middle-aged women in her community, who also decided to join her in the program. She mentioned that the oldest neighbour that became her school colleague was 48 years old at the time.

The interviewees with higher EA also mentioned they needed a lot of determination and courage in order to overcome the many obstacles they encountered on their educational paths. One of these obstacles consisted of the discrimination experienced in the educational environment. Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours during the schooling period were pointed out by almost all interviewees, regardless of their gender, where they lived or the period when they went to school. Name calling ('gipsy', 'crow') and social isolation by peers were some of the most frequent forms of discrimination experienced by the interviewees, together with teachers treating them in ways that felt unfair at the time.

### *An Overview of the Interviewees' Social Capital*

Building on Bram Lancee's (2010) approach to assessing SC, we analysed two dimensions—*structural* and *cognitive*—for both *bonding* and *bridging* SC. *Structural bonding SC* is understood as the *strength of family ties* and *cognitive bonding SC* is understood as *attitudes and values* (including particularized trust) that contribute to the exchange of resources in close and dense networks. In contrast, *structural bridging SC* is represented by the *collection of ties* that forms one's extended social network, while *cognitive bridging SC* is seen as the *attitudes and values* (including thin or generalized trust and outward orientation) that contribute to the exchange of resources in wide social networks.

The type of SC that appears most visibly throughout the stories of all interviewees is the *bonding SC*. The analysis of the *structure* of the *bonding SC* showed that the interviewees' closest, densest and strongest ties had been with the members of their family and the co-ethnics in their community. This confirms previous observations

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<sup>7</sup>High school degree.

that the family social network is the most accessible and most used form of SC (Coleman 1988): all participants, regardless of their EA level, placed a lot of emphasis on the pivotal role and function of family (parents and siblings alike) in their daily life and in their decisions-making process about major aspects such as education, marriage and employment. Additionally, the interviewees also evoked enhanced involvement, collaboration and exchange with ethnic community members, especially those living in extreme poverty or residing in segregated communities. The existence of stronger co-ethnic ties (ethnic solidarity) in contexts involving minorities, poverty or marginalization have been previously discussed (Lancee 2010; Sanders 2002) and attributed to the need of the members of such communities to protect and support each other, acknowledging the fact that they would not manage on their own, individually. The interaction between members of these communities is frequent and intense and, in some cases represents an extension of the family network, with neighbours sharing limited resources (for e.g., clean water) or “borrowing<sup>8</sup>” various things from one another (for e.g., electricity, TV cable etc.). Based on these patterns of interaction, a further analysis of the *cognitive dimension* of the *bonding SC* revealed a diffusion of similar attitudes and values among members of the same community. The more segregated the community, the higher the agreement among its members about what is necessary, acceptable, or desirable. Unavoidably, these values were absorbed within the family and further disseminated by parents to their children. The trust between the members of these communities is particularized (they trust only each other) with shared practices supporting a collectivist model and with a clear division between “us” and “them”, along the lines of ethnicity. As such, during the discourse analysis phase, we noticed in the interviewees’ stories that the first-person statements were mainly in plural (“we, the people living here are poor”, “we, the Roma from the gipsy world”, “the people in the Town Hall built *us* houses”), even when the storyteller was not directly involved in the particular experience that was reported.

The interviewees’ reports about what ultimately constitutes their *SC that bridged the ethnic divide* converged to produce an image of marginality and powerlessness, where acceptance and integration in the society relied heavily on the benevolence of the non-Roma majority. In terms of *structure*, the interviewees’ *bridging SC* depended mainly on a number of factors that configured, on the one hand, the person’s status within the society, but, on the other hand and more importantly, the welfare of the community/neighbourhood they lived in. For those living in poor and marginalized communities, the interactions with other ethnic groups was limited, episodic, and purposeful. Mostly, it involved formal encounters with various local public institutions (municipality, school, labour market office, hospital, etc.), prompted by the necessity to either fulfil a specific need (when the encounter was sought by the persons), or solve a legal issue (when the encounter was initiated by

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<sup>8</sup>Although illegal, borrowing is a widespread practice in poor neighborhoods, where an unsecure connection between two or more households allows them to share electricity or cable with each other.

the institution). The stories of the interviewees residing in segregated communities showed that local NGOs are an important source of support in facilitating bridging interactions with public institutions and often act as Roma persons' advocates in such encounters. Furthermore, the analysis of the discourse used by the interviewees residing in segregated communities showed a certain degree of *institutional blindness* among them (characterized by a low level of awareness about formal institutional details, such as the name of institutions they accessed, or the type of services they received), coupled with the *instrumentalization* of such institutions (characterized by the person's representation of a certain institution only in terms of the benefits or services received from it—the Town Hall is represented by the “social benefits”, the Employment Office is equalled with “unemployment benefits” etc.). Interviewees evoked names of professionals that provided them support or assistance, but were unable to name the institutions those professionals worked for. For example, when an interviewee mentioned that she “received the social (i.e., welfare) from Mrs. Claudia”, she expressed in fact that the Town Hall was providing her and her family with social benefits and the social worker (in the person of Mrs. Claudia) was the person from this institution that managed the case. Such a representation, ‘stuck in informality’ (Breimo and Baciu 2016), distorts, for the persons concerned, the understanding of the legal arrangements behind the provision of support, making it seem discretionary and depending on the benevolence of the donor identified by name. For the beneficiary receiving the support, it is not a matter of their legal rights, but a matter of the good will of the provider.

On the other hand, the interviewees living in more resourceful communities were more aware of the institutional resources available to them and also had more frequent contact with persons from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The *cognitive* dimension of the interviewees' *bridging SC* also varied with the social and economic conditions characterising the community/neighbourhood the persons lived in. For those interviewees residing in poor and segregated communities, their narratives showed a low level of trust in persons from outside the community, apart from those they had already interacted with and the interaction had proven successful and beneficial. Interaction with non-Roma persons, which have no prior proven benefit, are not necessarily unwelcomed, but they are neither sought for, nor invested with trust. The interviewees residing in mixed non-poor communities have a different pattern of interaction and socialization with non-Roma, being involved in various cross-ethnic networks (in school, at work, in their spare time), whose members they invest with trust and whose opinion they value.

## **Conclusions: The Influence of Social Capital on Educational Attainment of Persons from Vulnerable Groups**

When placing under scrutiny together the *EA level* and the *SC* of the interviewees, the first thing we notice is that *the low levels of EA were prevalent among the interviewees who had access to narrow social networks*. An examination of the

mechanisms that link these two dimensions (low EA and limited bridging SC) reveals some aspects that are present and readily observable and others that are significant through their absence.

Poverty, precarity and marginality are among the aspects from the first category, and are vividly evoked by the interviewees in their stories, thus becoming the main descriptors that paint the picture of the interviewees' childhoods: poor family, deprived community, reduced socialization opportunities outside the community, daily struggles to make ends meet. Under the circumstances, the consequence is a somewhat natural prioritisation of efforts based on the benefits they provide, and, for parents, children's schooling is put on the back burner, surpassed by activities that provide more immediate and concrete returns (household duties, income provision activities). Since the model of low or even no school attendance is generalized among the members of the community, no one in the neighbourhood is alarmed or even disturbed when a child is not enrolled in school or drops out. These are the (visible) influences of (what essentially constituted) the interviewees' bonding SC on their school participation.

The bridging SC, however, is notable through its very absence from this picture: when they dropped out, the interviewees and their families held no significant connections to the 'outside' world, and had no alternative models from what was already familiar to them within the community (low school levels or no school at all). Moreover, no institutional bridge (over the ethnic gap) was available either, meaning that no relevant institutions from the community (like the school or the local municipality) made inquiries about the child's whereabouts, in the context of his/her school non-attendance or dropout.

Thus, because of the precarious situation of their families and communities, these persons were deprived of what should have been the resources generally associated with their bonding SC: supervision, monitoring, motivation and financial support from the family (Roksa and Kinsley 2018; Weiss 2012; Garg et al. 2002; Fan and Chen 2001; Muller 2018), in order to begin or advance their education. Moreover, the institutional actors from the community, associated with what could have been their bridging SC, did not step in to compensate or replace these losses at the proper time. From the interviewees' stories, it is clear that the relevant institutions (municipality, school) *did nothing* about their school non-attendance or dropout.

So, for these interviewees' educational path, the influence of their social capital, in both its forms, had *centrifugal effects*, derailing them from it, but for different reasons: the bonding SC had nothing *usable* to provide in order to keep the (then) child on track, while what should have been the bridging SC was partially or entirely absent (at least for the child) at the time. Thus, for the interviewees in this situation, we can barely say they were 'actors' in their settings, since, due to their young ages, they had no real choice to make about their education, but their paths were rather laid out in front of them by the social arrangements they and their families were caught in.

Conversely, when looking at the stories of the interviewees who 'made it', we notice that *the highest levels of EA were prevalent among those interviewees who could rely on their bonding SC and who, in one way or another, accessed social*

*networks that bridged the ethnic divide*. On the one hand, their bonding SC acted like a resource, through modelling their educational aspirations, supporting them in making the ‘smart choices’ and motivating them to stay in school; all these family inputs have been already proved as essential for children’s EA (Homel and Ryan 2014; Garg et al. 2002; Fan and Chen 2001).

On the other hand, the bridging SC also acted as a useful resource, mediating the persons’ access to financial support (for e.g., scholarships), information (NGOs), educational programs, and exposure to positive models. These examples confirm the already formulated necessity of ‘institutional backing’ (Lamas et al. 2018) within the community structure in order to enhance EA of young Roma students. It becomes clear that, when institutional actors decide to *do something* about it, there can be noticeable improvements in the EA of persons from vulnerable groups.

In their cases, both forms of SC had a *centripetal effect* towards their EA, keeping them in school through modelling their expectations and providing them with, or at least mediating their access to the necessary resources for advancing their education.

However, as the narratives showed, their exposure to inter-ethnic socialization was not necessarily premeditated in some way, but rather decided externally and either presented by the interviewees as a ‘given’ (in the case of those residing in heterogeneous non-poor neighbourhoods), or perceived as a ‘lucky opportunity’ offered by fate (like in the case of Daniel, the orphan ‘adopted’ by the Romanian neighbour). Again, the ‘agency’ of the interviewees was superseded by the structures that surrounded them. Such structures are not necessarily produced locally, via current social and institutional arrangements, but are rather the reflections of old and widely entrenched negative stereotypes and representations about Roma ethnicity, circulated in Romania (Lazăr et al. 2015), but also in the larger European space (McGarry 2012).

Turning to the interviewees’ narratives about their own children’s educational projections we notice an improvement compared to their own situations, although more for those in non-poor and non-segregated communities. These micro-level improvements, combined with the recent mezzo-level institutional progress (involvement of the NGO sector, availability of institutionalized support programs, de-segregation of schools, prohibition of discrimination), hold the potential to generate positive changes in the long run.

Seeking to understand how the SC works to shape various opportunities for persons from vulnerable groups, the current chapter has discussed the mechanisms through which the bonding and bridging SC influences the EA of Roma persons. The 24 stories of educational success and failure of our Roma interviewees allowed us to glance at the important but different roles each form of SC has. We have, thus, noticed that, when they are available, the two forms of SC can have a mutually reinforcing effect, *drawing* the persons towards their educational path and keeping them there. We have also observed that, for those persons that found themselves at the intersection of economic and social vulnerabilities (which is the case for most Roma persons), the SC, in both its forms, has an opposite, although still mutually reinforcing effect, *distancing* the persons from their educational paths.

Furthermore, we have noticed throughout our interviewees' narratives a clear *imbalance between structure and agency* when it came to their choices or opportunities regarding their own educational paths: the replication of the 'success stories' is hardly possible at the individual level, because they very much depended on fortunate contexts. As it can be observed from the gaps accumulated between the EA levels of Roma persons and those of the general population, such an imbalance corrodes in time the foundational principles of equity and undermines the equality of opportunities.

If a decrease of the EA gap of the persons in vulnerable situations is desired, then local and central institutional actors alike need to step in and do *something* about it—in terms of providing support programs that can enrich both forms of SC, in order to help individuals to take control over their own educational paths.

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# Chapter 13

## Roma Population in the Spanish Education System: Identifying Explanatory Frameworks and Research Gaps



Francisco Javier Ullán de la Rosa and Hugo García Andreu

**Abstract** This chapter makes a literature review based on the Grant and Booth qualitative systematic methodology of the studies about the educational situation of the Roma in Spain, with an wider, extended scope that allows to compare the findings with those conducted on other countries' Roma populations. Studies on the Roma educational situation in Spain are hindered by the lack of official, periodical statistics, having to rely on sample-based surveys and ethnographic studies. In spite of the inaccuracy of the studies all of them show, as a general picture, a staggering educational gap between the Roma and the rest of society which is common to all Western countries. Most of the studies on Roma education have concentrated in this negative aspect. Numerous theoretical frameworks have been developed to explain this staggering education gap. All them acknowledge the phenomenon as a multidimensional one but for heuristic purposes they can be ordered along an endogenous/exogenous factors continuum depending on how much they stress the weight of factors stemming from characteristics of the Roma ethnic group itself or, on the contrary, of the majority non-Roma society. The literature review has also identified an emergent critical current that sees this studies focused on educational underachievement as a sharing a common essentialist bias that helps to reinforce the stigmatization of Roma and have turned to focus, instead, on the study of academic success among the Roma. Although this emerging field is very promising, our review has identify several significant research gaps in this regard: a lack of longitudinal studies, a lack of studies on the Roma upper and middle classes and a lack of studies on Roma students in post-compulsory education, particularly the university level. This article encourages researchers to fill this gaps with the conviction that the knowledge obtained can help combat the negative stereotypes and the self-fulfilling prophecy effect that approaches focused on Roma underachievement may have.

**Keywords** Roma · Gitanos · Gypsies · Educational attainment · Higher education · Spain

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## **Introduction: The Statistical “Invisibility” of Roma People in Spain and the Scarcity and Discontinuous Nature of Quantitative Nationwide Studies**

One of the problems that hinder an accurate knowledge of the educational characteristics of Roma in Spain is the lack of census data on any sociological dimension concerning this group. The misuse of ethnic censuses along the twentieth century as a political weapon to commit ethnic discrimination or cleansing led to the abhorring of this statistical tool in many countries and the passing of laws banning the collection of ethnic, racial or religious data at the individual’s personal level. However, the elaboration of anonymous statistical ethnic censuses has never been banned by any international legislation. On the contrary, the current standards set by the United Nations, the Council of Europe or the European Union (Directive 95/46/CE) recommend the recollection of data about the ethnic composition of the population through national censuses and other periodical statistical instruments, because the “visibilization” of ethnicity is seen as an effective mean of preventing discrimination (Simon 2007; Arp 2009; Estévez Hernández 2015). As has been highlighted by many researchers, accurate knowledge about the Roma population is a key prerequisite to designing well-targeted policies and monitoring their outcomes (McGarry and Tremlett 2013). Many countries with Roma populations have, indeed, ethnic censuses and statistics. This is the case of most states in the American continent and some in Europe (Kertzer and Arel 2002) but not many among them include the Roma as an specific ethnic group for the gathering of data, and the information about them is merged (and, thus, lost for analytical purposes) within a residual category of “other ethnic groups or races”, as, for example, in the USA Census (US Census Bureau 2010). We dare say that the Roma are one of the most “invisible” ethnic groups in the Western world. Currently, only a few countries having Roma minorities collect specific census data about them: Romania (Institutul Național de Statistică 2011), Hungary (Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2011), Bulgaria (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria 2011), the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office 2011) and Colombia (Sistema Estadístico Nacional de Colombia 2018). To that list, we will have to add the UK in its 2020 census (Office for National Statistics 2019) and maybe Brazil (Ministério Público Federal do Brasil 2018). It is not the case of Spain, though, where all administrations have resisted to collect census and other statistical data on the Roma. And that, in spite of recommendations from the European Commission and pressures from the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to do so (Arp 2009). All Spanish governments have defended this position affirming that asking people about their ethnic origin would be a violation of the constitutional mandate that upholds the equality of all citizens (Arp 2009; Estévez Hernández 2015). However, nothing in the Spanish legislation forbids the collecting of census ethnic data. The two organic laws on data protection (1999 and its 2018 amendment, aimed at aligning the Spanish legislation with the European Union Data Protection Directive) allow and regulate the collection of statistic ethnic data provided it serves the public interest and some safeguards

(anonymity and consent of respondents) are respected (BOE 1999, 2018). In fact, ethnic data about the populations of migrant origin have been gathered by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) since its 1991 Census (INE 1991) and regional governments where a language other than the common Spanish one is spoken, have been producing what can be considered as some sort of “ethnic” censuses—language being a proxy for ethnic identity—of Catalan (IBESTAT 1991; IDESCAT 2011, SIES 2015), Basque (EUSTAT 2016) and Galician (IGE 2018) speakers in their territories since that very same year. As a result, the Roma turn out to be the only ethnic group lacking official statistics in Spain. Because they don’t have an ancestral territory where they mostly concentrate, unlike the rest of Spanish ethnic minorities, but are dispersed across the whole country, don’t speak their original language anymore and lack an affluent and educated bourgeoisie to lobby for their interests, their influence in the Spanish post-franquist identity politics has been weaker than any other national ethnic group. They have never been considered eligible to be granted any kind of political autonomy and although they undertook a significant organizational process this was in many cases guided by external actors (the oldest and some of the major Roma organizations, like *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* or *Secretariado Gitano de Barcelona* were founded and are still administered by the Catholic Church) and rather fragmentary in nature, resulting in a plethora of local and regional associations that operate under the legal status of NGOs. To that we must add the deep cultural and social chasm that exists between the Spanish majority group (Gitanos) and the more recently arrived Portuguese (Ciganos) and Eastern European Roma. Had they had a strong and unified lobbying body, the Spanish Roma could have exerted a stronger political pressure possibly advocating for a reform of the state official statistical tools, as a way of coming out of the state of “invisibility”. But for many years they never even expressly asked for it.

The situation has somehow changed since 2005 when the Spanish government fostered the creation of the State Council of the Roma People, that brings together most of the existing associations and acts as an advisory body on social programmes and policies aimed at the Roma population (Royal Decree 891/2005). In 2017 this Council backed the first initiative to make an ethnic census for the Roma, a proposal that came from the Andalusian regional government and was meant to be applied exclusively to Eastern European Roma living in Andalusia, a sub-group mainly consisting of nomadic or highly-mobile families for whom data, or even estimates, are almost nonexistent (Junta de Andalucía 2017). For the first time, the statistical “invisibility” of the Roma was acknowledged as being a hindrance for the provision of social services and affirmative actions by a Spanish public administration. In spite of this, the proposal was criticized by some sectors of the Spanish and Gitano society alike, a reminder of how persistent the negative image of ethnic censuses still is in Spain. Critics compared the Andalusian proposal with the one launched the same year by Italy’s Ministry of Home Affairs, Matteo Salvini, and the State Council had to publicly defend its decision by pointing out the completely opposite purposes of both initiatives (FSG 2018b). In 2019, the Andalusian Autonomous Region changed administration and the proposed census has not been carried out yet as of the date of this writing.

The Roma population in Spain is, therefore, still statistically “hidden” inside other ethnic or national categories. Following a widely accepted consensus, we will use the term *Gitano* to refer to the native Spanish Roma, the term *Cigano* to talk about those recently arrived from Portugal while reserving the most generic terms Rom, or Romani for those of Eastern European origin. Statistically, the Gitano are “hidden” inside the native Spanish population group and so are, respectively, the Portuguese Ciganos and the Eastern European Rom (with many individuals from the latter group completely unrecorded by any official statistic due to their nomadic way of living (Gamella 2007; Piemontese 2017)).

As a consequence of this, quantitative nationwide data about Roma in Spain are based on sample surveys whose margin of error cannot be estimated accurately for several reasons: (1) the total number of the studied population is an estimate itself. (2) all surveys, and even censuses, dealing with ethnic identity are confronted with very important methodological unresolved biases (Stavenhagen 1992; Messing 2014): Figures can change significantly depending on the identification criterion applied: self-identification (individuals are only classified as Roma if they themselves declare to be Roma), external categorization (the interviewer decides if the person is Roma) or some combination of these two. The surveys conducted in Spain have not been consistent in the application of a single standardized criterion.<sup>1</sup> With regard to the self-identification criterion, Roma, as other ethnic minorities historically subjected to stigmatization and acculturating pressures can be reluctant to acknowledge their identity or can have double or multiple identities which are not often reflected in the questionnaires.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, using an external criterion may lead to the alteration of the results due to the subjectivity and racial/ethnic prejudices of the interviewer.

## Methodology

This work shows the results of a qualitative systematic review (Grant and Booth 2009). This technique is a narrative method for integrating and comparing findings from qualitative studies. It looks for ‘themes’ or ‘constructs’ that lie in or across individual studies. It may employ selective or purposive sampling, using quality assessment (Grant and Booth 2009). The method was selected because most

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<sup>1</sup>As an illustration of this the 2007 and 2013 FOESSA surveys were implemented using external categorization (FOESSA 2008, 2014) whereas the 2018 FOESSA survey applied the self-identification criterion (FOESSA 2019).

<sup>2</sup>As an illustration of the significantly potential impact of this bias, when the 2011 Hungarian census changed the question on ethnic identity to allow co-equal dual identifications, the number of Roma, as measured by the census, increased by 53% (Messing 2014) and, in Spain, when the FOESSA survey changed its methodology from hetero-categorization to self-identification the total population estimate of Roma population in Spain went down from 970,000 to 560,000 (Hérmendez et al. 2019).

published studies on Roma education are qualitative and also because of the complex nature of the phenomenon. Firstly, a search was performed in the scientific databases Web of Science and Google Scholar. Subsequently, different themes were identified and classified. Within each theme, shared aspects and differences among the publications were identified. Thirdly, the main study limitations as well as proposals of future lines of research were identified and analysed.

## **A Review of Quantitative Studies on Roma Education in Spain**

The fact that there are no census or systematic statistical data about the Roma doesn't mean, however, that quantitative nationwide studies are completely non-existent. It doesn't mean, either, that the Spanish state has completely neglected the quantitative study on the Roma. What it really means is that those studies are sample-based, methodologically dissimilar, scarce and non-periodical. All the nationwide studies have been, in fact, conducted by only three organizations: the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, the Spanish official organism responsible for the conducting of sociological surveys, the Secretariado Gitano Foundation (FSG), the biggest Roma NGO in Spain, linked to the Catholic Church, and the FOESSA Foundation, a think tank of Cáritas Spain, the biggest Catholic Church charity. All the surveys conducted by the FSG since 1991 have been undertaken in collaboration with the Spanish government. The CIS and FSG data are, thus, the closest thing we have to some sort of official statistics on the Roma.

The first quantitative nationwide study was the one conducted in the 1970s by the Asociación Secretariado General Gitano, a previous name of the FSG (FSG 1990). This study took the first snapshot of the Gitano society (by then migration of Portuguese Ciganos and Eastern European Rom to Spain hadn't yet started) in relation to demographics, family structure, housing, education, employment and economic activity, health, religion practices, cultural values and discrimination. It also gave us the first estimate of the Gitano population, 208,344 people. The next one was something close to a comprehensive census of Roma dwellings and provided a second population estimate: 296,225 (FSG 1991). It was the pioneer of a series of dwelling censuses conducted by the FSG, in a non-periodical fashion (FSG 2007, 2018a). The total population estimates, always based on external categorization, provided by those censuses were 459,088 and 516,908, respectively. The 2007 study gave, for the first time, disaggregated data of the Roma subgroups, based on self-identification (93.7% Gitanos, 1.8% Ciganos, 3% Eastern European Rom). This dwelling censuses have become the main sample-building tool for subsequent surveys, introducing in them two significant underrepresentation biases (that of the nomadic and highly mobile Rom groups, and that of the most integrated Gitano families, which are not included in the census).

The FSG has been quite prolific in the conducting of other nationwide quantitative surveys on several topics. It is worth mentioning the last comprehensive study on social exclusion, with a section devoted to education (FSG 2019). This is in sharp contrast with the scarcity of studies undertaken directly by public organisms, only three: the 2007 survey undertaken by the CIS on its own, which investigated a variety of topics (CIS 2007) and the two National Surveys on the health conditions of Roma population (La Parra 2009; MSSSI 2018). The FOESSA Foundation has been conducting surveys on the social conditions of the Spanish most impoverished population segments at almost regular intervals since the 1960s but only in the last three (FOESSA 2008, 2014, 2019) they asked about the ethnic identity of the respondents, allowing to disaggregate the data on the Roma from those of the overall population. The FOESSA surveys themselves, however, because of their encompassing scope, don't contain very detailed information about the Roma: this must be found in works published separately (Laparra Navarro 2008; Damonti and Arza Porras 2014; Hernández Pedreño et al. 2019). The FOESSA surveys provide us with yet other population estimates and illustrate how difficult is to come up with an accurate figure: the 2007 survey (FOESSA 2008), using an external categorization criterion, estimated a population of 970,000; in the 2018 survey (FOESSA 2019), which changed to a self-identification criterion, the estimate was 560,6769. This last figure is closer to the one given by the 2015 FSG dwelling census (FSG 2018a) (but this study warned about the number having forcibly to be bigger, since only took into account the sedentary Roma, most of them Gitanos, living in highly ethnicized neighbourhoods). The estimate given by National Survey on the health conditions was 665,987 (La Parra 2009). As we can see, the actual population figure remains unknown. This must always be taken into consideration when discussing the data on Roma education.

As far as the specific quantitative studies on Roma education are concerned, the studies are equally sample-based, discontinuous and can be reduced to a handful of works. The Spanish state annually publishes statistic reports on the education system since 1963, first through the INE (1964, 1985) and then through the Ministry in charge of the education system, which has gone under different names (MEC 1986, 1995; MECD 2000; MEF 2019). None of these reports has ever included data on the Roma student population. In contrast, the reports do include the total amount of students by national origin (although no other specific information beyond that figure). To this statistical "invisibility" we must again add the absence of an official policy committed to the conduction of periodical nationwide studies on the educational situation of the Roma population. And this, in spite of the existence of specific policy instruments aimed at reducing the historical marginalization of Roma in Spanish society (MSSSI 2012). The pioneer work by the Asociación Secretariado General Gitano contains some general data on literacy, dropout rates and maximum level of education attained (FSG 1990). From there we have to wait till 2006, with a study on the schooling of Roma girls in secondary education (FSG 2006). The CIS survey (2007) included only two questions about education (CIS 2007). The most relevant and comprehensive studies up to date were the ones conducted by the FSG on primary (FSG 2010) and on secondary education (FSG 2013). To these we must

add the comparative survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights on Roma from all European countries (FRA 2014). Since then no other specific quantitative study on Roma education has been conducted in Spain. Relevant nationwide quantitative data on education, though, can be extracted from the FOESSA (Laparra Navarro 2008; Damonti and Arza Porras 2014; Hernández et al. 2019) and FSG surveys on social exclusion (FSG 2019).

There is a plethora of studies about the educational situation of Roma in Spain, and their number has gone up at an increasing rate as decades went by (Haz-Gomez et al. 2019). However, all those other works are of an ethnographic, fundamentally qualitative, nature (74.3%, according to Haz-Gomez et al. (2019) with an additional 10.3% combining ethnography with limited quantitative data collection) and all of them use some of the mentioned studies as their source of nationwide quantitative information.

## **Roma Education Studies: The Hegemony of a Perspective Focused on the Roma Educational “Anomaly”**

In spite of 40 years of social and education policies aimed at achieving the full convergence of Roma with the rest of society, this goal is still very far from being attained. Whether coming from quantitative or qualitative studies the evidence is overwhelming: high levels of absenteeism, low performance and high drop-out rates that increase sharply in the transition to the second cycle of secondary education, being significantly higher in the case of Roma girls. Here are some illustrating figures from the most recent nationwide quantitative studies. We want to call your attention to the differences in estimates between sources, which clearly demonstrates the already discussed inaccuracy of the available data:

- The illiteracy rate of Roma overall population was 7% in 2013 and 5.5% in 2018 (Hernández et al. 2019), 8.6% in 2011 and 9.85% in 2018 (FSG 2019).
- 43.3% of Roma population has completed the compulsory secondary education (Damonti and Arza Porras 2014). This figure is 34.9% in the last FOESSA survey (Hernández et al. 2019)
- 50.3% of Roma students skip school between 5 and 10 days per month (FSG 2013)
- The dropout rate by age 16 is 63.4% in Roma males and 69.3% in females (FSG 2013), 72% and 83% (FRA 2014), or 65.1% and 60.6% (Hernández et al. 2019). In comparison, this figures were 21.2% for males and 14% for females in the total Spanish population (INE 2018)
- Only 12.3% of Roma aged 16–24 are enrolled in non-compulsory secondary or higher education. The rate for general Spanish population in the same age cohort is 62.3% (Hernández et al. 2019).

- An estimate of between 2 and 3% of Roma youths arrive to university (FSG 2013; Hernández et al. 2019) versus a 32.1% of the total Spanish population (MECD 2019).

Regardless of their inaccuracy, the figures reflect the undeniable existence of a huge educational gap between the Roma and the overall Spanish population. Some studies lead to hypothesize that this gap might also exist when compared with minorities of migrant origin. The Ministry of Education doesn't publish any data about the educational achievement of migrant students and unlike the case of the Roma, there is no nationwide survey and the number of ethnographic studies is low.<sup>3</sup> Thus, as far as the education field is concerned, the migrant population suffers from its own kind of "invisibility". Nonetheless two regional quantitative studies have been published recently, shedding some light on the matter. The first one shows drop-out rates of secondary migrant students in Catalonia to be similar to the rate for native Spanish (Moroccans, 15.9%, Latin Americans, 15.5%, Chinese, 13.6%) with the only exceptions of Sub-Saharan Africans (40.9%) and Pakistanis (35%) (Bayona and Domingo 2018). The second gives a general drop-out rate for the migrant student population of Murcia, 43%, which is also lower than the one for the Roma (Frutos and Barba 2018).

This phenomenon is what we refer to as the "Roma educational anomaly", something that has been consistently reported in all European and American countries having Roma minorities (Meunier 2007; UNESCO 2007). Radojević (1984) wrote of it as a "peculiarity" and Jurova (1994) labelled it a "handicap". This educational gap has been perceived by many scholars and policymakers as one of the fundamental dimensions of the Roma social exclusion, where education and social marginality are caught up in a systemic loop, being at the same time cause and consequence of each other. A situation that constitutes a major social problem and has, consequently, led to an enormous proliferation of research on the subject, the studies being carried out by different social actors concerned with the plight of the Roma collective: researchers from all sorts of fields, public policy-making institutions, NGOs and Roma organizations.

The first relevant academic works on Roma education came from the United States (Vogel 1979; Vogel and Elsasser 1981; Kaldi 1983) and Britain (Reiss 1975; Worrall 1979) as a part of the boom on ethnicity studies of the 1970s. They will take off in the rest of the Western world from the 1980s onwards. According to Liegeois (1994), schooling is the only field regarding the Roma minority to have been subjected to systematic analysis in almost every European country (Radojević 1984; Jurova 1994; Liegeois 1999; Gomes 1999; Myers and Bhopal 2009; Trentin et al. 2006; Forray 2002; Ringold 2001; Kyuchukov 2000). Spain, being one of the countries with the largest Roma population, pioneered the foray into this sociological territory (González 1970; Garrido 1980; Iniesta 1981; Palacios and García 1986). In the twenty-first century we see also studies proliferating in the Americas

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<sup>3</sup>Only two (Portes and Hao 2005; Calero and Escardíbul 2016) are worthy of mentioning.

(Bereményi 2007a, b; PRORROM 2007; Bel 2011; Niquetti 2013; Gewald et al. 2013; Walsh et al. 2008; Hancock 2013; Silverman 2012 ) although with a lower number of publications than in Europe, where Roma populations are larger. And yet, the phenomenon has not been covered or studied in all its possible dimensions. This is so because most research, whether in Spain or other countries (EUMC 2006), has predominantly focused on the “anomaly” rather than the more encompassing and multidimensional phenomenon of Roma education itself. Why this has been so can only be hypothesized. Perhaps it has to do with the predominance the applied dimension of the research about Roma has attained in the last decades, at least in Europe, fueled by the abundant funding coming from social inclusion programmes. Whatever the reason, it seems that Social Sciences have tended to regard Roma education with the eye of a clinician, as a social malady to be cured rather than as a mere sociological subject to be simply analyzed. This could explain why the literature is overwhelmingly focused on the negative factors of the Roma education phenomenon (Abajo and Carrasco 2004), because they are the most conspicuous and the most alarming ones for a majority of researchers that don’t only search for explanations but for urgent solutions, for a way to “normalize” the “anomaly” (even if this “normalization”, is understood in the light of the postmodern paradigm and entails “inclusion without identity loss”). The Roma education field has been hijacked by the agenda of social inclusion policies. As the sociological and educational “anomaly” persists till this date, the number of studies keeps growing in both continents at an ever quicker pace (Helakorpi et al. 2020; Lapat and Miljević-Ridički 2019; Da Costa Santamarina 2019; Da Silva Reses et al. 2019; Santiago et al. 2019; Petrogiannis et al. 2019; Myers 2018; Boyle et al. 2018; Hamilton 2018; Álvarez-Roldán et al. 2018). In the Spanish case, the recent bibliometric study conducted by Haz-Gomez et al. (2019) shows that education is the third most researched dimension in Roma studies.

The explanatory frameworks developed to account for this “Roma educational anomaly” have been numerous but all of them have at least one thing in common: they all agree the phenomenon is of a systemic nature and stems from some complex set of interrelated factors. A review of the literature has allowed us to make a list of the different factors identified by the researchers and sort them out in four broad categories resulting from the intersection of two dichotomous categorical axes: (a) An endogenous/exogenous axis: that is, factors associated with the social and cultural traits of the Roma themselves versus factors that have to do with the characteristics of the majority society. (b) A structural/cultural axis: factors that have to do with social institutions, institutionalized roles and functions in the political economy versus factors stemming from the systems of values (those of the Roma and those of the non-Roma populations). Combining both axes, factors can be classified into a four-fold categorical scheme (endogenous-structural, endogenous-cultural, exogenous-structural, exogenous-cultural factors).

Although most of the works take into account, to some extent, all four dimensions, explanatory frameworks can be ordered along a continuum from those who give more weight to the endogenous factors to those stressing the exogenous ones. On the first end of the continuum it is more likely to find works written by non-Roma

academics and, more particularly, the earliest studies (Garrido 1980; Iniesta 1981; San Román 1984; Fernández Enguita 1999). On the second end we can locate those works conducted by NGOs (some of them Roma) and more recent academic studies (Flecha and Soler 2013; Padilla et al. 2017), some of them conducted by an increasing number of Roma researchers (Heredia Maya 1980; Santiago and Maya 2012; Macías-Aranda and Redondo 2012). A very general chronological trend can be observed for the studies to move away from strongly endogenous culturalist explanations towards approaches that give more weight to exogenous factors such as social exclusion, discrimination and deficient education policies. The change is at least partially the consequence of NGO's and Roma associations becoming important agents in the Roma studies field as well as the climate of political correctness brought to the Roma studies by the national and European social policy agendas. It can also be partially seen as a consequence of the accelerated process of acculturation and integration experienced by the Roma, a process that has steadily eroded some of the endogenous factors that, in the eyes of many scholars writing just some decades ago, seemed to be paramount for the explanation of the “educational anomaly”. This passage has also taken place in the midst of an incensed international debate initiated by some Roma academics like Hancock (2010) and led in Spain by some of the Gitano *intelligentsia* linked to Roma associations and by the Centro de Estudios Gitanos integrated in the CREA (Community of Research on Excellence for All), a leading research group from the University of Barcelona that counts among its members several Roma scholars (Macías-Aranda and Redondo 2012). This current has a strong exogenous stance and has accused studies leaning towards the endogenous factors of being fraught with an ethnocentric and essentialist bias. In Spain, the critics have been particularly harsh towards the work of Fernández Enguita (1999) which has been overtly labelled as “anti-Gitano” (Macías-Aranda and Redondo 2012: 79).

In the following pages we describe the main factors in the four sets of categories:

***1. Endogenous-structural factors (that originate in the specific forms of social organization of the Roma population and their functional/class articulation with the more encompassing social system/political economy)*** A kinship organization in highly ethnically endogamic extended families which function as a self-segregating mechanism in all social dimensions, including that of education (Vallés 2017; Leeson 2013; Olivera 2012; Hasnia-Sonia 2011; García 2006; Jakoubek and Budilová 2006; Arias 2002; Weyrauch 2001; Anta 1997; San Román 1984); the persistence of patrilocality and a patriarchal role/status system (which would explain the education gender imbalance) in which women's life goals are placed in early marriage, early maternity, and their role as homemakers, and high school is negatively perceived by parents as a dangerous environment that can damage their daughters' social capital (which is built around virginity and the acceptance of a dependent, domestic social role) (Álvarez-Roldán et al. 2018; Colectivo Ioé 2015; Asensio 2011; Levinson and Sparkes 2006; Ayuste and Paya 2004; FSG 2013; Aubert and Valls 2003; Vogel & Elsasser 1981); the marginal mode of articulation with the labor market, with a significant predominance of very low- skilled and/or

informal jobs which involve the collective/cooperative work of the whole family (including older children, adolescents and younger adults) based on reciprocity mechanisms (FSG 2006, 2019; Álvarez-Roldán et al. 2018; Gamella 2011; Garreta and Llevot 2007); the nomadic or highly mobile way of life of part of the Roma population (that of Eastern European origin, in the Spanish case) which seriously hinders their schooling or the implementation of assistencial programmes (Gamella 2007; Piemontese 2017).

All this factors point out at presenting the Roma as a group that constitutes a society within the society, one with clear-cut boundaries but, more importantly, characterized by the survival of pre-modern structural traits (kinship-based-vs. individual-based relations, informal vs. formal economic bonds, intellectual and technological backwardness, gender inequality). From this point of view, some have argued that comparing the Roma to other ethnic minorities in European societies is misleading and that their unique socio-cultural characteristics made them much more similar, instead, to the indigenous peoples in postcolonial states (Banach 2001; Botonogu 2007; Cesarino and França 2017; Andrade Martínez 2018). Some of those postcolonial states, like Colombia and Brazil, have, as a matter of fact granted to their Roma populations a legal status quite similar to that of their Native American ones (Colombian Government 2010; Salloum and de Vasconcellos Figueira 2019). Although not very often explicitly acknowledged in the Roma studies field, the Roma have, as a matter of fact, been considered by many as just another “indigenous people” and the classic theory of modernization, the one that makes formal school education and modernity two synonym concepts and sees traditional pre-modern sociocultural characteristics as obstacles to educational attainment (Harbison and Myers 1964; Anderson and Bowman 1965; Aran et al. 1972; Rival 2000; Paprock 2006), has almost inadvertently sneaked into the explanatory frames. In the light of this theory the premodern Roma sociocultural structures are seen at odds with the formal education systems of modern states in very similar ways as has been described for indigenous peoples around the world (Thompson 1978; Eversole 2005; McEwan 2004; Marie et al. 2008; Gordon and White 2014; Bosco 2017) even leading to some comparative studies between indigenous and Roma students educational attainment (Levinson and Hooley 2014). This cluster of factors can also be related to the so called Theory of Cultural Discontinuity, which has been applied to explain the underachievement of Native American students (Ogbu 1982; Garrett 1995; Tyler et al. 2008).

## ***2. Endogenous-cultural factors (related to an idiosyncratic Roma habitus stemming from their secular history as an “outsider” group in Western societies)***

Among them, the following ones has been mentioned as explanatory factors of the Roma educational “anomaly”: The very low cultural capital of Roma families (Levinson 2007; Fernández Enguita 1996); a sort of historical *ethos* that rejects the execution of highly abstract cognitive tasks of the kind demanded by the last years of compulsory and post-compulsory education curriculum (San Román 1984; Fernández Enguita 1999); an undervaluation of school and a sort of skeptical attitude towards its declared function as mechanism of upwards social mobility (Gkofa

2017a, b; Powell 2016; Fernández Enguita 1999; San Román 1984) that leads to high rates of absenteeism and the disengagement of families from the educational process (Martínez and Alfageme 2004); the anomie caused by the disadjustment between a new set of personal expectations and goals in life instilled in the Roma youth by acculturation processes and the structural possibilities (and perceived probabilities) of achieving them from their marginal position within the social structure (Bereményi and Carrasco 2015; Soriano et al. 2011); the cognitive dissonance between the individualistic cultural goals of mainstream society acquired at school and those of the collectivist traditional Roma families; the absence of role models of school success (Gypsy teachers, intellectuals and professionals) within the Roma community itself (Fernández Enguita 1999; Vargas and Gómez Alonso 2003; Álvarez-Roldán et al. 2018).

Studies that focus on this approach tend to see the Roma educational situation in a similar way as that of other disenfranchised ethnic minorities and/or particularly vulnerable segments of the working class in Western societies. The reference model here is the African American subproletariat in the U.S. and two theoretical frameworks which were developed to explain their school underachievement. The first one is the Theory of Cultural Deprivation (Bernstein 1961; Taba 1964; Hunt 1966; Chopra 1969). According to it, most Roma families have severe cultural deficits that limit their capacity to support their children's school careers: illiteracy and functional illiteracy, insufficient language proficiency (although Spanish Gitano have lost the original Romani language, they speak a sort of substandard Spanish and they are completely disadvantaged in those regions where a second regional language is taught at school) and insufficient command on the varied array of skills required of them by the education system (knowledge of the bureaucratic organization and rules of the school system itself, social and cultural skills to interact with the rest of the school community, pedagogical resources, etc.). The second one is the Theory of Oppositional Culture (Ogbu and Simons 1998; Ogbu 2008; Downey 2008), an application to African Americans (and other highly marginalized "involuntary" ethnic minorities, which Ogbu and Simons oppose to the "voluntary" minorities of migrant origin with higher expectations of success) of the Theory of the Culture of Resistance developed by Willis in his ethnography on an English working-class school (Willis 1977). In the light of this theory, the rejection and skepticism towards education shown by many Roma (another "involuntary" minority) is seen as an alternative set of cultural values stemming from their perception of mainstream society as a hostile world in which their chances of success are very limited. The values, goals, role models and expectations transmitted by the school cause anxiety and low self esteem because they are perceived as unattainable. The underrating or utter rejection of academic goals step in as a coping mechanism to avoid anomie and psychological harm. The school is seen, then, as a prison where society forces the Roma to stay and absenteeism and underachievement are *oppositional* mechanisms of *resistance* that become a subset of cultural practices in themselves, even a *habitus* in Bourdieu's sense (Bourdieu et al. 1977). In conclusion, what at the end of the day is discussed here is how the values, attitudes, expectations and practices of Roma *vis-à-vis* education are part of a more

encompassing underclass culture, in the sense identified by the Culture of Poverty Theory (Lewis 1963; Leacock 1971). A culture of poverty that becomes a self fulfilling prophecy keeping most Roma trapped in the state of destitution and privation consistently described by all the studies (CIS 2007; FOESSA 2014, 2019), in spite of the increasing battery of public policies addressed to them.<sup>4</sup>

Not all the diffidence of Roma towards school comes from values related to poverty, though. According to some explanations, the Roma strong sense of cultural identity also plays a part (Fernández Enguita 1999): the school would be seen by some Roma as an acculturating institution, triggering a fear of social and cultural assimilation very much alike to the fear of “whitening” described in Afro American students (Pruitt 2004; Picower 2009).

**3. Exogenous-structural factors (derived from the institutional architecture of the national welfare and education system)** The weakness and ineffectiveness of affirmative action policies at all levels of administration (FSG 2010, 2019; Salinas Català 2005); the limited lobbying and political effectiveness Roma organizations have displayed so far *vis-à-vis* the education governance bodies (Ministries, regional governments, etc.) (Jiménez González 2012); the highly spatial segregation of Roma population and their subsequent concentration in so-called “ghetto schools” as a consequence of enrolment schemes based on school zoning (Santiago and Maya 2012; Parra et al. 2017); the deficient facilities and equipment in those “ghetto schools” attended by the majority of the Roma population (FSG 2013; Brüggemann 2015); the inexistence of educational programmes or strategies aimed at the nomadic or highly mobile Roma population (Piemontese 2017); teachers’ lack of training in intercultural pedagogical tools (Luciak and Liegl 2009; Olivencia 2012; Herrero et al. 2017); the system’s failure in preventing the chronic absenteeism of Roma students (Bereményi 2007a, b; Toro et al. 2017); the government strategy to tackle the Roma educational problem by putting most of them in a simplified remedial curriculum (Aulas de Educación Compensatoria, Remedial Education Classes) instead of increasing the quality of education (Díaz-Aguado Jalón 1999; Iguacel 2009; Santiago and Maya 2012); the cultural alienation provoked by an assimilationist school model devoid of Roma cultural references and the inexistence of specific affirmative action programmes for the training and hiring of Roma teachers (Smith 1997; Casa-Nova 2010; Calvo Buezas 1989, 2012; Vargas and Gómez Alonso 2003; Moreno 2006; Liegeois 2004; Parra et al. 2017).

**4. Exogenous-cultural factors (derived from the ethnically-based system of prestige, the set of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices and the dynamics of interethnic relations in the mainstream society)** All recent surveys on racism, xenophobia and ethnic prejudices have shown Roma are one of the most negatively

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<sup>4</sup>The last study on social exclusion conducted by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG 2019) states that the poverty levels of Roma population in Spain have worsened with time, blaming the low levels of education for it. As the Spanish economy increasingly becomes a knowledge-based the economic niches available for poorly educated Roma dwindle, and they become more vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion.

stigmatized and discriminated against ethnic minorities in Spain (Cea D’Ancona and Valles Martínez 2018; Colectivo Ioe 2003; Calvo Buezas 1995, 1990b, 2012). Laparra Navarro (2008) calls them “the most segregated ethnic group in Spanish society”. The effects of this die-hard racism would be projected onto the education system and practices in similar ways as the described for other discriminated groups, such as Black students in the Anglo Saxon countries (Kohli et al. 2017; Smith 2005; Graham and Robinson 2004; Gillborn and Kirton 2000; Troyna 1984): the prejudices and stereotypes about Roma that still persist among teachers (Vargas and Gómez Alonso 2003; Peček et al. 2014; Trentin et al. 2006; Liegeois 1998, 2004), students (Calvo Buezas 1990a), the curriculum itself (Jiménez González 2018; Calvo Buezas 1989) and society in general (McGarry 2014; Calvo Buezas 2012; Saul and Tebbutt 2005) and their consequences (Golem, self-fulfilling prophecy or social-mirroring effects, among others) (Calvo Buezas 2012; Calvo Buezas 1990a, b); the even more serious effects of the most explicit racism (Fekete 2014; Hancock 2010; Flecha and Oliver 2004; San Román 1986).

## Emerging Approaches and Research Gaps in Roma Education Studies

Starting in the 1970s most of the literature on Roma and education has focused on the negative aspects of the phenomenon. Some authors (Abajo and Carrasco 2004; Jiménez González 2012; Macías-Aranda and Redondo 2012) explain this as the consequence of a biased approach to the matter underpinned by an implicitly common theoretical-epistemological position of a culturalist nature. Despite the already discussed variety of frameworks, critical authors, some of them Roma themselves, contend that many of the studies implicitly see educational underachievement and Roma ethnicity as one and the same thing. As some author has put it: “Compulsory education till the age of 16 doesn’t match the cultural patterns of the Roma population” (Martínez and Alfageme 2004: 307). Jiménez González (2012), a Gitano sociologist, points out that one of the problems that contributes to the social exclusion of Roma in Spain is their invisibility at different levels and that to the other “invisibilities” (territorial, statistical) we should add one in the educational field: that of the Roma with average or outstanding academic performance. Focusing the lens on the deficiencies of Roma education, the argument follows, contributes to generate a partially misleading explanation of the phenomenon and to distort the perceived image of the Roma community itself, making it more difficult to single out and analyze the role and weight of any existing positive dimensions (Macías-Aranda and Redondo 2012). The most recent research by Álvarez-Roldán et al. (2018) could be brought up as an illustration of this. The ethnographic study is conducted in a school where the already mentioned “anomaly” is, in fact, the only reality: a school where the dropout rate of Gitano students is 100%. *Instead of pointing out at the exceptionality of this extreme situation (exceptional even for the Roma) they use this exceptional environment as a laboratory to explore and explain the causes of the whole ethnic group educational underachievement.*

In order to mitigate this bias, a different approach is emerging in Spain (Aubert and Valls 2003; Abajo and Carrasco 2004; Flecha et al. 2009; Gamella 2011; Jiménez González 2012; Castilla Vázquez 2012; Flecha and Soler 2013; Arranz and González 2014; Girbés-Peco et al. 2015; Amador 2016; Longás et al. 2016; Macías-Aranda et al. 2019) and other European countries (Derrington and Kendall 2007; Dezső 2013; Brüggemann 2014; Gkofa 2017a; Goga 2019), one that focuses on the study of Roma students with successful education trajectories, aiming at identifying the assets and strengths that may exist within the ethnic collective, rather than their shortcomings and weaknesses, and trying to find patterns of success in individuals or families. The point of departure of this approach is a two-fold one. On the one hand a rejection of the cultural essentialism perspective, on the other hand, a double and bidirectional hypothesis about the role of the cultural factor in the students' educational attainment: first of all, the assumption that its weight as a factor leading to failure is not as important as presumed by the previous literature but, more importantly, that it does not always have to be a hurdle in the school performance of ethnic minorities. This approach is trying to apply to the Roma the findings of a whole set of studies on education and ethnic minorities conducted in the United States (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Portes and Zhou 1993; Ford and Harris 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rhamie 2007; Byfield 2008). This line of research found that ethnic factors may operate in a positive way, not as obstacles, but as drivers or boosters of educational attainment. Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) and Ogbu's studies (1995) showed how different groups of Afro Americans and Hispanics with similar cultural traits presented different grades of educational achievement depending on the particular characteristics of the social context in which they were inserted. This put the blame on the education system itself, not the ethnic culture. This hypothesis has been tested by several studies on the Roma: At a European level, the FRA survey showed great differences in the achievement of Roma populations across the continent (FRA 2014).<sup>5</sup> Levinson compared the educational situation of students from two Roma communities in Southwest England. In the first community, the school attainment was similar to that of non-Roma pupils. Dezső (2013) reported the positive results achieved by a high quality educational project aimed at the Roma population, the Gandhi School, in Hungary. In Spain the studies have been led by the CREA within the 5 years macro research "Includ-ed" project funded by the European Commission (Flecha et al. 2009). Several works have shown how the quality of Roma education can be successfully improved with the adequate pedagogical programmes, without apparent cultural loss. They have also detected the emergence of cultural narratives and discourses among the leaders of the Roma associative movement advocating education as a tool for community social development and a path to achieve greater and better opportunities for the future (Macías-Aranda et al. 2019; Girbés-Peco et al. 2015; Flecha and Soler 2013). Coming back to

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<sup>5</sup>The illiteracy rate in the 16–24 age group was 35% in Greece, 22% in Romania, or 10% in Portugal versus 1% in the Czech Republic and Spain. The dropout rate figures showed equally significant differences (92% in Greece, 55 in Hungary, 52 in the Czech Republic).

the United States, Portes' and collaborators (1993, 2001) observed that, across all the studied minority groups, those students who maintained a stronger ethnic identity and had only selectively acculturated performed better than those who had lost their identity (dissonant acculturation) and how this was especially the case in highly discriminated groups. Derrington and Kendall (2007) and Gkofa (2017b) have tested Portes' theory of selective acculturation on successful Roma students, arriving at the same conclusion. In Spain this line of research is still completely underdeveloped and constitutes the first of the research gaps identified by our literature review.

The other research gaps identified by this review are also related to this emergent field of studies:

- There are very few longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of Roma educational achievement along time (Salinas Catalá 2009; Gómez García 2009), whether at a national or local level, from a quantitative or a qualitative ethnographic approach. Virtually all studies offer a still picture of the phenomenon, comparing the Roma situation with that of other ethnic groups at a given moment in time. Studying it, instead, from a chronological point of view, comparing the present Roma educational situation with that of the Roma of previous decades would help to see the “anomaly” in other perspective, as a situation that is capable of improvement.
- There is a total absence of studies on the academic achievement of Roma students from the upper and middle classes, which could amount to a 10% of the total Roma population (FSG 2019). The FSG already warned (FSG 2018a, b) that research on the more affluent Roma is methodologically complicated, since they are spatially dispersed and constitute small minorities in areas (and schools) of a majority non-Roma population. For that reason, all studies and surveys, including those on education, have been conducted in places with a high concentration of Roma population, where the poor and marginal Roma live. The study of the Roma upper and middle class population could shed light on the role of selective acculturation in educational achievement.
- There are very few studies about Roma students in post-compulsory education. The review has not found a single one on vocational schools and only three on Roma students in higher education<sup>6</sup> (Gamella 2011; Carmona et al. 2017; Vargas del Amo 2018). The FSG has estimated their number in between 2 and 3% of the total Roma population (FSG 2013, 2019) but there is no way to calculate the margin of error of that estimate. The studies are also quite scant at the European level (Kende 2007; Pantea 2015; Garaz and Torotcoi 2017; Gkofa 2018) and non-existent in the Americas.
- There is not a single study on Roma professionals: quantitative figures, ethnographic studies, nothing.

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<sup>6</sup>The FSG published a study about Roma in higher education which was not an academic work but, rather, part of an awareness-raising campaign to encourage Roma students to go to university by showing Gitano role models of success (the text collected the biographical accounts of 50 Gitano university students) (FSG 2018a, b).

## **Conclusions: Closing the Research Gaps on Roma Education as a Way of Improving Roma Social Inclusion**

The literature review has shown there is a historical lack of statistics and periodical nationwide quantitative studies on Roma education in Spain that may lead to an inaccurate assessment of the educational situation. This problem is worsened by the fact that most of the studies are excessively focused on the negative aspects of the phenomenon. This has the effect of introducing a bias that magnifies the so called Roma educational “anomaly”, making it appear not only bigger than it probably is but also as an almost insoluble problem, as it tends to see it in essentialist terms, as tantamount to being Roma rather than as a phenomenon which can be separated from the ethnic ascription and subjected to change (and improvement) throughout time. We agree with the most recent critical currents that this bias may be acting, even though in an unacknowledged, unintended way, as a tool that reinforces the negative stereotypes and the cultural stigmatization that the majority society projects on the Roma and, in that sense, many of the studies might end up becoming, paradoxically, a contributing factor, an obstacle, to the educational attainment of Roma students, one more piece of the self-fulfilled prophecy mechanism that also works in other dimensions.

To counteract the deleterious effects of the data “invisibility” and the essentialist bias, the emergent approaches that focus on the positive dimensions of Roma education must be encouraged and the identified research gaps must be filled because the information obtained could be useful for the design of more effective inclusion policies. A chronological approach, for instance, would show the huge educational improvement undergone by the Gitano population in the last 40 years. The illiteracy rate in 1978 was 58% among the 10–24 age group (FSG 1990), but only 1% in 2014 (FRA 2014). If 27% of Gitanos have completed primary and only 1% compulsory secondary education in 1978 (FSG 1990) they were 98.6% and 40%, respectively in 2012 (MSSI 2012; FSG 2013). This positive trend is likely to continue in the future and we will need periodical studies to track it and divulge it to the Spanish population. A future conduction of studies on the top 10% of upper and middle class Gitano families will probably also provide a much more positive picture of the binomial Roma-education. And finally, more research is needed on the Roma enrolled in vocational schools and universities, as well as on Roma professionals. Although still an inaccurately measured phenomenon, there is no doubt that Roma students in Spanish universities are no longer anecdotal as they used to be (or as they still are in other countries) and show a growing trend in numbers since at least the beginning of the 2010s. It is essential to render the presence of Roma in the university more visible through further research on the subject. An ongoing study conducted by ourselves with forty Roma undergraduates from the five Valencian public universities is currently attempting to do just so: we are testing the selective acculturation theory, since all of them show strong Gitano identity, and we are looking for common characteristics in order to determine whether they are just exceptional individuals who have succeeded in spite of some ethnic and cultural

barriers or the product of structural drivers of some sort, stemming from the ethnic group itself or from more encompassing social dynamics.

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# Chapter 14

## “I Felt I Arrived Home”: The Minority Trajectory of Mobility for First-in-Family Hungarian Roma Graduates



Judit Durst and Ábel Bereményi

**Abstract** This chapter explores the upward social mobility trajectories, and the corollary prices of them for those 45, first-in-family college educated Roma in Hungary who come from socially disadvantaged and marginalised family and community background. We argue that among the academically high-achieving participants of our study the most common upward mobility trajectory, contrary to the common belief of assimilation, is their distinctive minority mobility path which leads to their selective acculturation into the majority society. This distinctive incorporation into the mainstream is close to what the related academic scholarship calls the ‘minority culture of mobility’. The three main elements of this distinct mobility trajectory among the Roma are (1) The construction of a Roma middle class identity that takes belonging to the Roma community as a source of pride, in contrast of the widespread racial stereotypes in Hungary (and all over Europe) that are closely tied to the perception of Roma as a member of the underclass, (2) The creation of grass-roots ethnic (Roma) organizations and (3) The practice of giving back to their people of origin that relegate many Roma professionals to a particular segment of the labour market, in jobs to help communities in need. However, we argue that in the case of the Hungarian Roma, these elements of the minority culture of mobility did not serve the purpose of their economic mobility as the original concepts (Neckerman et al. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22(6):945–965, 1999) posits, but to mitigate the price of changing social class and to make sense of the hardship of their social ascension.

**Keywords** Educational mobility · Social mobility trajectories · Hungarian Roma middle class identity · Selective acculturation · Ethnic capital · Minority culture of mobility

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## Introduction

This is it! This is why I wanted to be born a Gypsy!<sup>1</sup> To belong to a nation that does not belong anywhere but feels at home everywhere in the world. . . It's awesome. The curiosity of a child, the creative thinking, the fraternity, the love for children, the respect for the elderly. . . That's how we are. And you know why? From never being accepted. Had we never been destitute, or never been persecuted, or if there had never been these preconceptions that we lie, steal, cheat and stink, we would never have gotten to where we are. As it is, everything we do, we do to be loved and accepted. (Franciska Farkas, a well-known Hungarian Roma actress in her play 'Letter to Brad Pitt', based on her own life).

My work is not comfortable for many people. Because I do not want to promote us as exotic beings and very different from you. No. I'm saying, "Hey, we are like you in many ways. But we didn't have your chances." I, as a Roma artist, would like to be in the repertoires of the mainstream theatres. I do not want to be with the specials. I do not want to have my work only in Roma Days and Diversity Days. (Alina Serban, award-winning actress, a first-in-family graduate from the British Royal Academy of Drama, born in Romania).

These are excerpts from some of the written material of the exhibition of the project 'Roma Heroes—II. International Roma Storytelling Festival'—a work designed and implemented by the Independent Theatre (IT) group in Hungary whose aim was not only to give Roma artists, actors and directors the power of self-representation, by constructing and telling their own stories, but also to introduce to the wide public role models, everyday heroes, successful Roma as they can be the inspirational forces to advance the socially and economically disadvantaged Roma communities all over Europe. The founder and leader of IT, himself one of the interviewees in our study, shares with us his philosophy behind the idea of the Roma Heroes project this way: 'I myself, being the first Roma actor and director in my poor rural community of origin, was influenced by the fact that the leader of my Drama College in Budapest was a Roma man. He made me believe that if he could do this, I can do it too. I do not need to be an obedient actor, I can also get into a leadership position, even if I am a Roma. I can be a fighter, fighting against racial subordination that permeates the society where I live. A fighter or a hero knows that although there are adversarial circumstances, he can still make changes in his life, in the interest of his wider community of origin. . . We know well the structural problems and the adversaries, not only our everyday lives but many researches remind us of them. But we try to make changes. And these successful Roma role models inspire us and we can follow their examples'.

The Roma Hero project, parallel with many anthropological studies on poor Roma communities, aim at changing the "narrative of victimhood" (Bíró et al.

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout the text we use both the 'Gypsy' ('cigány') and the 'Roma' categories denoting our respondents' ethnicity, accordingly to their own wordings, as they used it during our interviews with them. Although we acknowledge that women of Roma origin in the academic sphere call themselves 'Romnia' and as 'Romani Women' using words from the Romani language (Brooks 2012); and we are also fully aware that 'Gypsy' can be a degrading or 'dirty word' and has negative connotation for many Roma people (Oprea 2012), especially for the educated ones, we thought it crucial to speak about our study group of Roma by using their own terms from their narratives.

2013) to emphasise the role of agency even in adverse circumstances of structural racial subordination. Our chapter is embedded in this “everyday heroes” narrative. Strikingly, the “hero” or the “fighter” metaphor came up in many of our interviewees’ narration about their personal biography and thereof the road to their academic success. (See for similar result Papp (2017) on first generation Hungarian minority students in Carpathian Ruthenia).

This chapter aims to tell the story of social ascension of the first-in-family Hungarian Roma graduates, focusing on their various upward mobility paths, along with their concomitant ‘prices’ (Friedman 2014), ‘emotional cost’ (Reay 2005, Reay et al. 2009), ‘psychological strain’ (Neckerman et al. 1999), or in an umbrella term: the ‘hidden costs’ (Cole and Omari 2003) of their social climbing. The focus is on outlining the characteristics of one particular mobility trajectory, the one that is most common in our study and what we call ‘Roma minority mobility trajectory’. Many of them have constructed a double rooted, Hungarian Roma middle class identity by making up a distinctive incorporation into the mainstream society that is close to what the academic scholarship calls the ‘minority culture of mobility’ (Neckerman et al. 1999; Vallejo 2012; Shahrokni 2015). We interrogate this concept, by exploring the ‘Hungarian Roma variation’ of it. We show that unlike the original thesis suggested for minority groups in similar structural positions, that is, being underrepresented in higher education, and facing severe prejudice and discrimination as a group for reasons of race alone (for the Roma students in Hungary see especially Szalai 2013, Kertesi and Kézdi 2008, and Hajdú et al. 2014), Roma college-educated people in Hungary use the minority cultural repertoires and strategies not to achieve educational and socio-economic mobility but to mitigate the price of it by making sense of their hardship throughout the process of their social ascension (Naudet 2018).

In the following we outline and systematically analyse the personal experiences of upward social mobility attained by the academic high achievement of college graduated Roma who come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, in Hungary. Almost one-fifth of the non-Roma Hungarians possess a university degree, meanwhile only 3.3 per cent of Roma have graduated from a higher education institution (Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) 2011). The scholarly jargon calls these Roma ‘resilient students’ (Máté 2015; Ceglédi 2012; Patakfalvy-Czirják et al. 2019) emphasising their achievement despite stalled mobility and decreased fluidity in post-socialist Hungary (Szelényi and Tóth 2019; Róbert 2001, 2019; Zolnay 2016), and against all social stressors, that is, structural hindrances, be it institutional racism, poverty of their family of origin, or in some cases the counter-ideology or “oppositional culture” (Fordham and Ogbu 1986) of their community of origin that de-values formal educational attainment.

The article will be structured in the following way. First, we delineate the theoretical framework this article is embedded in. Second, we describe the setting of our study, its design and methodology. Then, by closely analysing the narratives of our Roma graduate interviewees, we briefly show their various upward mobility trajectories, and those conditions that they commonly reflected upon as aided their high educational attainment. We place particular emphasis here on the role of

mobilisation of ethnic capital during the process of social ascension as it appeared a crucial mobility aiding factor in many of our interviews. Finally, we focus our attention on the most common mobility path among them that we call the ‘Roma minority mobility trajectory’ that resembles what is named the ‘minority culture of mobility’ in the academic literature. Here we identify the three main elements of this trajectory, and explore how all of these practices help our upwardly mobile study participants mitigate the price of their changing class; and also, how it leads them to a selective way of acculturation, or in other words ‘accommodation without assimilation’ (Gibson 1988) into the mainstream society.

### **Theoretical Framework Ethnicity and Educational Mobility, Its ‘Hidden Cost’ and the ‘Minority Culture of Mobility’**

Interrogating how race and class, and especially how their intersecting effects influence educational opportunity for socially disadvantaged minority students has long been an interest of educational researchers. Firstly, most studies from a cultural-ecological perspective concentrated on the case of African American students who ‘made it against the odds’: despite the disproportionately poorer overall educational achievement of their co-ethnics when compared to the ‘Whites’ (non-African American) college-going rate (Horvat and Antonio 1999; Ogbu 1991). Sociologists notably suggested that not only race but also class and especially its intersection with ethno-racial inequalities has a decisive part in shaping social mobility experiences of minority students. Further contributions introduced within group differentiation, and an intersectional perspective.

In Britain, the educational achievement and aspirations of children from ethnic minority groups has also long been a concern for both academics and policy makers (Modood 2004). However, recent studies have shed light on the variations in the educational attainment of different ethnic minority groups, and the role of mobilising ‘ethnic capital’ in ameliorating social class disadvantage (Shah et al. 2010).

These studies had drawn on Zhou (2005)’s conceptualisation of ethnic capital, that for her is defined as social capital (social ties) that ethnic group members possess by their belonging to an ethnic community. According to Zhou, Chinese families in the U.S., even with low socio-economic status (where parents had low educational credentials), managed to aid their children (second generation immigrants) on the road to educational mobility, despite their little ‘human capital’ which hindered them to directly help their children with their homework. One of the reasons behind these children’s educational success was the support of ethnic community. This community, through its organisations, and by their members of higher socio-economic status instilled (mobility) values and expectations in children of poorer families and offered them support and the enforcement of shared norms and behaviour.

In this chapter, beyond this ‘ethnic capital’ thesis that suggests to consider cases when ethnicity can be seen as social capital, we also build on Yosso’s (2005) critical race theory approach which, complemented by the social capital conceptualisation (Stanton-Salazar 2004; Bereményi and Carrasco 2017; Lukács and Dávid 2018), has recently been utilised in researches in Hungary explaining successful Roma higher education path (Óhidy 2016). Yosso, by exploring the educational success of People of Colour (as she calls the visible minority groups, often stigmatised by race), suggests shifting the research lens away from a deficit view of their communities “as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages”, and instead focuses on... “the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalised groups that often go unrecognised” (Yosso 2005, p. 69). This ‘deficit view’ has long characterised the works of sociologists exploring the socio-economic circumstances of the Roma population in Hungary (see e.g. Kemény 2005, Ladányi and Szelényi 2006); in contrast to cultural anthropologists who shed light on the cultural wealth of their studied communities (Stewart 1997; Bereményi and Carrasco 2017; Kovai 2017).

Although academics, along with many school professionals and activists celebrate the positive consequences of educational mobility and school success, a growing scholarship on high-achieving minority youth draw attention to ‘the price of the ticket’ (Friedman 2016): the complex and multifaceted effects and the ‘emotional costs’ (Reay 2005) or psychological strain of social ascension. Those who study the experiences of upwardly mobile individuals coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, stepping into the elite, whose trajectory is characterised by a huge range of social ascension, agree that independent from the particular national context, there is generally a tension between these people’s background of origin and their attained class (Naudet 2018). According to Naudet, this tension originates from the situation typical for many upwardly mobile people from poor families, when the norms and values of one’s background of origin do not coincide with the norms and values of the attained social group. This, in extreme cases, can lead to alienation, mental suffering (Sorokin 1959) or the feeling of ‘in-betweenness’ (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Friedman 2016) which upwardly mobile people struggle with as not being able to belong to any of the two (background of origin and the attained middle class) groups they identify with. Bourdieu even speaks of a ‘habitus clivé’ in his autobiography (Bourdieu 2008, cited by Friedman 2016), indicating a ‘dislocated habitus’ or a ‘divided loyalty’ (Lehmann 2007) between one’s background of origin and attained class. In the same line of thinking, Cole and Omari (2003) speak about the ‘hidden costs of upward mobility.’

Other scholars (e.g. Carter 2006), however, emphasise the capacity of people in situations of upward mobility in handling the difference between their preliminary (in family and in the community of origin) and secondary (in college and in the attained middle class) socialisation. They call the upwardly mobile ‘cultural navigators’ or ‘cultural straddlers’ who understand the values of both dominant and non-dominant cultures and embrace skills for participating in both cultural environments. These in-betweeners, or in Hungarian, ‘lebegők’ (Tóth 2005, 2008; Mendi 1999; Bokrétás et al. 2007; Forray 2004), are ‘flexible negotiators of cultures’

(Devine 2009) who actively exercise their agency towards school teachers, peers and family members.

Neckerman et al. (1999), by aiming to take into consideration the effect of ethnicity on the price of upward mobility, suggest the evolvment of a distinctive “minority culture of mobility” in the context of discrimination and group disadvantage. They argue that stigmatised minorities such as African Americans in the United States in the situation of upward mobility face distinctive problems that accompany their minority middle class status. One class of their problems arises from their frequent contact with the white majority, which is accompanied by the feeling of discrimination, of not being recognised as bona fide members of the middle class. This is what Cose (1993) called the “permanent vulnerability of one’s status” in the case of the Black middle class in America. The reason behind this vulnerability is that black middle-class people frequently encounter white strangers in public spaces (on bus, in shops, etc.) where white tends to assume that all black strangers are lower class and respond accordingly: with fear, insult or threat.

Neckerman et al. note, that another race-related injury of those changing class is them “being the only minority in a white dominated setting. . .and the exaggerated visibility of [them being] the token” which can also mean a “psychological burden of loneliness” (ibid 1999, p. 950).

The second type of distinctive problems for underrepresented minority college educated professionals stems from their frequent interclass contacts within the minority group of their background of origin by keeping up relations with their poor extended families. To overcome these problems, the minority middle class can turn to their ethnic social ties as a resource and deploy a ‘minority culture of mobility’ by mobilising the socio-cultural repertoire of their ethnic community (Shahrokni 2015; Naudet 2018) and by setting up their ethnic organisations (Vallejo 2012). This enables them to culturally navigate in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile social field and to straddle both worlds, in their background of origin and in their destination class. Further on, we will argue that upwardly mobile first-in-family graduate Roma interviewees, similar to other stigmatised minority groups, deploy some of the social practices and cultural repertoires of this so-called ‘minority culture of mobility’. In this chapter, we will apply the concept of “minority mobility trajectory”, in order to avoid the overloaded ambivalent connotation of “culture” in the case of Roma.

In what follows, after delineating our research setting and methodology, we outline the different upward mobility trajectories of our Roma interviewees, and argue that the most common path among our research participants is what we call ‘minority mobility trajectory’. A salient element of this path is the mobilisation of ethnic capital, as a natural response to cope with the ordeal and price of social ascension for those who come from a stigmatised minority, as the ‘minority culture of mobility’ thesis predicts. We will interrogate how this trajectory manifests in the life of our Roma graduate respondents, what the main elements of it are, and how, contrary to the established belief, it leads the majority of them not to assimilation, but to a distinctive incorporation into the mainstream society.

## Roma Educational Mobility and Its Outcome: Assimilation or Selective Acculturation?

Despite the expanding higher education sector in Europe, and in contrast with the high academic achievement of some immigrant minority groups, students who belong to Roma groups, are still characterised by low participation in higher education. The scarce data on Roma's access to colleges and universities indicate a significant discrepancy when compared to non-Roma. In the mainstream population around 30% of the population has a college degree (OECD 2014, p. 44). In contrast, the 2011 UNDP Roma Survey which is the very few data set providing multi-country statistical data on education attainment of Roma in Eastern and South-eastern Europe showed that only 1% of those identified as Roma in these countries have postsecondary education (FRA & UNDP 2012). This low participation has not considerably changed despite the commitment of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) and the European Framework for national Roma strategies until 2020 to improve educational opportunities for Roma, partly by affirmative programs and by establishing pro-Roma ethnic organisations, and the Roma Education Fund (Brüggemann 2014). As a recent study by Garaz and Torotcoi (2017) reveals, it is not only that Roma in this region are underrepresented in colleges and universities, but also that they do so in the STEM fields of study (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). At the same time, Roma are overrepresented in humanities and art. Garaz and Torotcoi argue that this segmentation of the choice of study has the potential to negatively impact their competitiveness in the job market after graduation.

In the field of Romani studies, as to the outcome of educational mobility of Roma first-in-family graduate, on the one hand, there is a line of sociological research that adopts the ‘canonical’ straight-line assimilation theory developed by Gordon (for a summary, see Prieto-Flores 2009). Explaining the success of some immigrant groups in the United States, Gordon (1964) suggested that those groups who successfully adopt the dominant culture, subscribe to its norms and begin to look less different, that is, those who assimilate into mainstream society, will be able to achieve upward socio-economic mobility by losing the significance of their ethnicity.

Following this line of thinking, some scholars assert that Roma identity is highly vulnerable to upward mobility. Bárány (1998, 2002), on the basis of the census data on Roma in Slovakia, describes how Roma people lose their identity and try to assimilate into the mainstream society when they enter higher education and get white-collar jobs. According to Bárány, the only Roma people who maintain their identity would be those who form what he calls the Romani Intelligentsia. He suggests that that the main reason for them to keep their identity is their individual political aspirations and interests. By the same logic, Robert Koulis (2005) argues that self-ascription through a Romani identity in Hungary decreases relative to an

increase in educational and economic opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Torkos (2005) has also found in her doctoral research that Roma graduates in Hungary typically assimilate.

On the other hand, many Roma and non-Roma researchers have pointed out that even successful people maintain their Roma identity (Kóczé 2010; Bíró et al. 2013; Tóth 2008). Studies on successful school trajectories among Roma university students in different European countries (Brüggemann 2014; Bereményi and Carrasco 2015, 2017; Kende 2005, 2007; Mendi 1999; Óhidy 2016; Máté 2015; Székelyi et al. 2005) are, however, mainly occupied with questions around identity conflict for high achieving Roma and not with the outcomes of their educational mobility in regards to how they incorporated into the mainstream society through their labour market position (for a few exception see Székelyi et al. 2005; Durst et al. 2016).

Prieto-Flores (2009) suggests that there is not enough reliable and significant data to confirm the existence of only one type of assimilation or acculturation process or the lack of it for Roma people who are in the situation of upward mobility. Drawing on the result of a UNDP survey carried out in five Central and Eastern European countries among their Roma populations, he shows how statistical data contradict the long-held assumption (Bárány 1998, 2002; Koulis 2005) that those with more education are more likely to assimilate into mainstream society. According to this data, there seems to be no connection between education and ethnicity. That is, being university educated does not affect whether people identify themselves as Roma or not. Therefore, he proposes that the Roma people can follow an assimilationist trajectory, or alternatively can maintain Roma identity important. Therefore, he argues drawing on Portes and Zhou's (1993) idea about the segmented assimilation of second-generation immigrants in the United States, a 'segmented theoretical framework of acculturation, assimilation and [upward] mobility would be needed,' in the case of Roma people (Prieto-Flores 2009, p. 1394).

The ambition of this chapter is to fill this need through outlining the most common upward educational mobility trajectories among our Roma college-educated respondents through systematically analysing their narratives of social ascension. We argue in line with the growing scholarship exploring the personal experiences of upwardly mobile, stigmatised, ethno-racial minorities, that many Roma first-in-family university graduate developed a minority-specific experience of social rising (Neckerman et al. 1999; Vallejo 2012; Prieto-Flores 2009; Shahrokni 2015; Nyíró and Durst 2018).

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<sup>2</sup>He based this conclusion on the result of his survey during which he followed Ladányi and Szélnyi's (2006) methodological suggestion by using an oversample of 150 'people called Roma' (in Hungarian: *cigánynak nevezett emberek*", Szuhay 2001), being selected with the help of a group of experts. This way of sampling is a big limitation of the validity of his results.

## The Research Study and Its Methodology

The data presented here are part of a larger research project that explores different educational mobility trajectories, their outcomes and effect on the life and subjective well-being of 120, academically high-achieving, first-in-family Roma and non-Roma graduates in Hungary. For the purpose of this chapter, we use data only from 45, purposively selected Roma interviews of this project who followed a distinct minority mobility path. We considered our interviewees as Roma on the basis of their self-ascription, that is, according to their self-identification, which is particularly important in the case of those who are children of an ethnically mixed couple.

We conducted semi-structured, narrative in-depth life course interviews (each lasted between 1 and 2.5 h) with all participants of our study. The interviews had been collected over a 2-year period, across Hungary, either in the home or work environment of our respondents. All of them were recorded, transcribed, de-identified to ensure anonymity, and analysed with the aid of Atlas.ti 8.0 software.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. We used different channels to find our interviewees in order to decrease sampling bias, therefore we searched for respondents in the researcher’s own personal networks, in generic Roma and pro-Roma institutions, and through the online media (Facebook advertisement). We also used purposive sampling and a general inductive approach (Thomas 2006), by re-visiting some interviewees from our previous research (Durst et al. 2014). The high number of interviews was necessary to identify and compare various educational mobility trajectories, in terms of the range and the speed of upward mobility (Friedman 2014). As to identifying the range of mobility of our respondents, we compared their attained social and spatial position (their educational and labour market attainment, and residence) with that of their parents. We used this dimension of analysis to differentiate between interviewees whose parents already achieved a certain level of upward mobility (we considered these interviewees to attain short-range mobility compared to their parents), and those whose parents did not (these interviewees had long-range mobility compared to their parents). The speed of the mobility in our case refers to whether our respondents’ educational carrier was interrupted or unilinear (uninterrupted). The variations of interviewees according to the range of their social ascension enabled us to identify various types of mobility trajectories and their different effect on our respondents’ life and well-being (which we call the ‘different price of mobility’).

We also resorted to our networks established during our previous Roma migration research project to reach out for the ‘invisible’, educationally high achieving Roma who could only imagine their social betterment through geographical mobility and by ‘assimilating’ into the mainstream host society. One of the limitations of our research is, however, similar to many studies on successful Roma, that despite all our effort, we still missed those fully assimilated Roma whose aim is not to be noticed as belonging to this stigmatised group in order to be able to melt into the Hungarian society.

Out of the 45 respondents of our study, 20 were men, 25 women. 80% of them came from rural settlements. Three quarter of them studied humanities subject at universities, and accordingly, they work on the special segment of the labour market as teachers, NGO project workers, lawyers, and social researchers dealing with “Roma issues” (see Nyíró and Durst 2018).

We believe that understanding the various trajectories of educational mobility and their outcomes, be it the hidden costs of mobility or the mode of incorporation into the mainstream society, for the high achieving Roma is a very complex topic which requires the use of qualitative methods, namely, narrative interviews and personal biographies. As Naudet (2018) suggests, creating a self-narrative of a success (or the lack of it)—the main material interviews offer to the researchers—can never claim to be objective, because of the risk of the imperfection of memory, the potential attempt of reconstructing the past, the inevitable strategies of the interviewee to present himself in a better light and to make sense of all his ordeal. However, for sociologists, goes on Naudet, social facts are not limited to social practices but include discourses. “While discourse is never objective, it can be objectified. . . As Bernard Lahire (2011) says, using Bourdieu’s famous words, there exists an ‘objectivity of the subjective’, and discourse, however subjective it may be, remains an indicator of objective structures. . . There are objective structures of thought, perception, evaluation, belief. . . as these are expressed in actions or practices” (Naudet 2018, p. 26).

## Discussion

### *Different Mobility Trajectories of Roma Graduates and Conditions Behind Their Success*

On the basis of the narratives of our respondents we identified at least three different modes of incorporation into the Hungarian middle class among first-in-family college educated Roma. The first one which was the rarest in our sample is the well-known assimilationist mobility model. We only encountered one interviewee in our sample who openly spoke of assimilation strategy<sup>3</sup> of this type:

I came here to England to work in a school as a teacher. They know me at the school as a Hungarian woman. . . I live my own individual life, feeling grateful though to everybody who helped me to get my degree. Sometimes I feel that my old friends feel indignant at me

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<sup>3</sup>We are aware of the limitations of our study that (1) it is not representative of the Roma college educated in Hungary, and (2) even if it was a research on the first-generation graduates in Hungary, we did not manage to reach those first-in-family college educated Roma who wanted to fully melt into the mainstream. We only know of this group from the narratives of our Roma interviewees. One of them, Lola spoke about this type from her own university experience: “I met a Gypsy girl at the uni. I knew from the first sight that she was Gypsy. But she said to me that although her parents were Gypsy, she prefers to disown to be a Gypsy. In this case she will not be discriminated, she will be no differentiated. She did not even want to open up towards me. . .

for not working for Roma issues. . . It is not right, is it, to live your life having left behind the Roma? But I'm good with my life now as it is.

The second type of upward mobility model was of those Roma professionals who incorporated into the private sector of the Hungarian labour market as cosmopolitan experts and citizens. Lajos's self-description epitomises this group's characteristics:

I am a man, a father, a private company's manager and by the way, Roma. . . But in 2019, when the threat of global warming is the most important challenge of our globalised world, who cares, out of the 7 billion people that I am accidentally a Roma?

The third and most typical mobility model in our sample is that of the 'distinct Roma minority mobility' trajectory, the focus of this chapter. But before we turn our attention to its main elements and characteristics, we briefly outline the most important, common conditions of educational mobility that our respondents reflected upon, independent on which trajectory they followed.

Almost all our interviewees considered their “persistence”, “fighter personality” and “inner desire to study” as the main factors behind their educational success (see also Forray 2004, 2014; Varga 2017), therefore supporting the myth of meritocracy (Naudet 2018). Nevertheless, after careful analysis of their narratives, the role of the opportunity structure available to them at a particular historical context, also, that of the protective agents, along with the part played by their family and micro community (see also Kóczé 2010) in the complex and often contingent story of social mobility, was salient. Success factors have been widely investigated among academically high-achieving Roma. Non-segregated neighbourhood, parents' social and labour market integration, integrated school environment, ethnically mixed groups with non-Roma peers, children-focused pedagogy, protective / caring tutors and school-teachers, inclusive, respectful school culture that ensures supportive and smooth relationship between parents and school staff, economic aid or scholarships, mentoring/career guidance professionals, sheltering pro-Roma support groups as well as resilience developed by Roma students are among the most relevant conditions that positively effect—even if not determine—the emergence of successful educational trajectories. Most of these aspects are also present in the international literature on social mobility through educational success. Nevertheless, our focus in this chapter is not on these success facilitating factors, but rather on those features that make “Roma minority trajectory of mobility” distinctive from that of their non-Roma peers.

### ***“I Am Still a Gypsy but in a Different Way”: The Roma Minority Trajectory of Mobility***

While our upwardly mobile Roma respondents' academic success can be seen as a testimony of them managed to adjust (to an extent) to their new white middle class social milieus' codes, partly with the navigational help of the above-mentioned pro-Roma ethnic organisations, our data show that the majority of them still

maintained a set of embodied dispositions ingrained through their primary socialisation in their community of origin. Academic literature calls this way of incorporation (selective) ‘acculturation’ (Gans 2007) in the case of immigrant ethnic minority groups who merge many elements of the cultural repertoire of their attained middle class with some of the values of their background of origin. This merging process became possible to be explored by our research method, the discourse analysis of our interviewees’ narratives of personal biographies.

As Naudet (2018) explains, drawing on Ricoeur (1992), discourse is the space where the ‘narrative identity’ is displayed and allows the person in a situation of upward social mobility to make sense of all the difficulties they have experienced. Narrative identity involves “a necessary transformation of the self, a rearrangement of one’s original dispositions, a social hybridization, and an acculturation to new system of action and perception. Mobility in fact raises with particular keenness, the question of identity, the issues of the changing, variable nature of identity, and its permanency over time. The question that individual in a situation of social mobility is faced with is: how do I stay the same while being different?” (Naudet 2018, p. 13).

With our research method, by analysing personal biographies and narrative identities, we became aware of the prevalence of an evolving minority mobility trajectory among our Roma middle class respondents. We identified three main elements of this distinct trajectory which resembles in many aspects to what Neckerman et al. (1999) called the minority culture of mobility in the case of Black middle-class people.

Minority Middle Class Identity First, there is the construction of a Roma minority middle class identity. Here, following Archer’s argument, we use the concept of middle-classness as a relational formation (Wacquant 1991). “That is, middle-class identities can be understood as produced in... reaction to working-class identities, essentially epitomize and embody all that is not working class” (Savage 2000; cited by Archer 2011, p. 135). As Archer (2011, p. 148) suggests, the minority ethnic middle-classes who occupy a distinctive structural position at the intersection of class privilege and racial subordination, produce their identity in line with their uneasy relation to the ‘authentic’, white middle-classness, where many feel excluded from and not recognised by, due to racist readings of their minority ethnic belonging.

One part of this minority middle class identity is the feeling of “having a foot in two different worlds” (Friedman 2016). Although a few of our interviewees have recounted being “torn by contradiction and internal division” as Bourdieu (2008) suggested on the basis of his own personal experience of ‘divided habitus’ as a price of his huge range of upward mobility, the big majority of our Roma participants reported developing a ‘bridging’ personality or a ‘straddling between two worlds’ (Carter 2006) habitus instead. Janó’s self-ascription epitomises this biculturalism (see also Tóth 2008; Boros 2019):

I am a bicultural, dual rooted man. This does not cause me any tension anymore. Instead, I take it as a pleasant journey between two cultures [his background of origin and attained class]. All of [my college-educated] Roma acquaintances [in similar position] recounted identity crises at one point in their life, mainly when they were at university being the only

Roma student there. But thanks to the influence of the first Roma intellectuals from the 1980s, the Roma community has awakened to its self-worth. There has been an Enlightening in the Roma [professional] circle, a change in what it means to be Roma. There is a common belief now that it's not only the non-Roma's [Hungarian] culture that has value but the Roma, too. (Janó, 43 year-old man, a social science researcher)

This bicultural, straddling incorporation strategy to the mainstream society can also be called, using Gibson's (1988) notion as "accommodation without assimilation". Like Gibson's Sikh immigrants in the United States, Roma first-in-family college graduates validate their accommodation of demands of white-dominant arenas such as educational institutions as a necessity to social mobility, however as such that need not jeopardize one's private, ethnic identity. Lola summarised this practice the following way:

We [Roma graduates] will never fully melt into the Hungarian society. 'Cos we do not have a shared history [with non-Roma Hungarian], we have our own tradition, our own customs. . . We only learnt to live together with the Hungarian. Our parents here in the village adopted many of the Hungarian's norms and values to make easier to live together with them and to advance in life. . . They left their different language, their way of dressing. They started to speak Hungarian at the local grocery shops and at school. . . But at home, behind the four walls, we are still Gypsies in our way of speech, our customs, and in our values. (Lola, 23, a rural elementary school teacher).

However, for many of them, this easiness of who they are after they have changed so much during their social ascension, was the result of an identity re-construction process, nurtured by their educational mobility, through their like-minded peer group and importantly by the Roma support organisations, initiatives and other mobility aiding pro-Roma grassroots associations. Jola's reply to our question what it means for her to be Roma, is a testimony of this reconstruction process:

In our region, Gypsy is one who queues in front of the post office [waiting for her child benefit and other social grants], who hangs around at the pub, who sweeps on the street in his phosphorescent yellow west [the uniform for public workers], and who is black. So, if I say in my neighbourhood that I am a Gypsy, then people associate me with these images, and they are confused. . . In olden times my Romaness to me was something to be ashamed of. But not anymore! Absolutely not. Nowadays, I have a positive self-esteem, and I was happy when my daughter kept her family name even after her getting married to a non-Roma man to show the world what one can achieve in life if one is Gypsy and wants to study (Jola, 45, social worker and teacher, lives in a small rural town).

Another element of this Roma middle class identity is the self-perception and the feeling of responsibility that comes with it, of our Roma respondents as them being the 'Race Man' or 'Race Woman' (Neckerman et al. 1999). The below two excerpts epitomise this identity characteristics of those who followed this Roma minority mobility trajectory:

The fact that I started to deal with Roma issues, was accidental. I was drifted to the Roma issues as I was needed the most there. But now I believe that it was my predestined path. I know that my responsibility is much bigger than it would be if I were not Roma. As a Roma woman, wherever I serve, I have to stand up in the name of the Roma people. Whether I want it or not, they consider me as a Roma woman, a Roma expert. I would like to be just another human being, but I know that during these times [when the Roma still experience social

disadvantage and discrimination], I cannot afford to do that. This is a big burden on my shoulder. (Anita, 40, social scientist and a voluntary youth worker).

I have an inner drive, a compulsion, to spread the knowledge that I acquired. I know that I can help even just with my example, just for being there [in the public sphere as an educated Roma]. . . I believe that everyone who comes from a minority group, has this compulsive proving themselves. (Gábor, 42, linguist).

## Creating Ethnic Organisations

The second characteristics of this distinctive Roma minority mobility trajectory is that many of our respondents joined or formed ethnic minority organisations as we have explored elsewhere (Nyíró and Durst 2018, see also Kállai 2014). These all started as grassroots initiatives by some members of the “Big generation” (active before and during the democratic transition) and also by some younger Roma intellectuals, a few of them internationally renowned academics by now. One of the previous directors of Romaversitas (Romver as its members call it), an “invisible” dormitory for talented Roma students having completed their first year of university course, recalls the beginning this way:

During the mid-1990s, when the doors had slowly started to open to universities, for not only the elite, top students, there was an opportunity to talented Roma youth whom finished secondary school to carry on with further education. Here in Budapest there were a few dozens of them, who got entry into various universities, coming from rural settlements. They have been hanging around in the capital, de-rooted, knowing nobody. They did not have any community that could hold them, they did not know any Roma youth in a similar situation, and they had serious financial difficulties. . . Then came the Soros Foundation and gave these students stipends. But what is even more important, these young Roma university students started to create their alternative places in the city, they started to build a community from scratches. That was the time when some Roma and non-Roma intellectuals came up with the idea that an ‘invisible dormitory’ should be created for these Roma university students. So, this was a grassroots initiative. . . From the academic school year of 2004-2005, when they had abolished entry exams to universities in Hungary, and A-level exams became the condition for entry to higher education, there was a big opening [for educational mobility]. Since then Roma and non-Roma Youth from socially disadvantaged families have started to get into universities in bigger number. . . The peak was in 2009 when we had 200 Roma applicants for 14 places in Romaversitas.

Similarly to Romver, the establishment of the other important mobility aiding ethnic institutions, the ‘Christian Roma Collegium Network’ in 2011, as a result of the collaboration between four churches and the support of the Hungarian government (Lukács and Dávid 2018), was also partly a result of grassroots initiatives, at least according to some of its first members: “The whole Roma Collegium Movement started at around 2004. At that time, it was an informal community of Roma youth. We got to know each other through a university entry preparation course to be held in Budapest. We all came from rural settlements, and we got the support of a private donor paying our accommodation and travel cost, and a foundation covering our entry preparation course fee. . . We made friendships during the 8-month weekend course, and we started to come together regularly to discuss public issues. [. . .] Our motivation was how we can manage to further study and at the same time, how we can help the advancement of our people. . . [. . .] the first year of university was very bad, very difficult. We needed a community of people in similar situation that can hold us. It was always refreshing when I met this informal group of Roma students once a month. . . It was

many years before the Christian Roma Collegium Network was institutionalised" (Lali, 34, a former leader of one of these special Roma collegiums that function as dormitories besides providing financial and educational support for its students).

These narratives sharply demonstrate that young first-in-family university students are not only passive recipients of social capital but can be active social agents, and generator of new resources, relationship and norms and can actively contribute to re-construct and re-define their ethnicity (Shah et al. 2010).

These abovementioned ethnic organisations did not only help our interviewees overcome their constant financial difficulties (by giving them stipend) and the structural barriers that underrepresented minority students face in a higher education environment (by empowering them with navigational capital in the circumstances of racial discrimination). They also provided them a place to meet with like-minded Roma peers, creating close friendships and dense ethnic networks and by this, a feeling of belonging and an emotional shelter (Lukács and Dávid 2018; Nyíró and Durst 2018). By this, they contributed to mitigate the price of their upward mobility, through reducing the psychological and emotional cost of changing class.

My time in Romver was one of my best periods in life. It was wonderful. What did I get from that community? I got love, encouragement, the sense of self-worth and self-pride, solidarity and self-belief. That is everything that makes somebody a human, enable one to feel good in this world. Thanks to that period, I think I will never feel bad about myself anymore. (Béla., 41, journalist).

### Giving Back to the Community

Finally, the third element of this distinctive Roma minority mobility trajectory is that most of our respondents have concentrated on the segments of the labour market where they can help marginalised people, or people in need, or their own community in marginal positions.<sup>4</sup> That is, where they can give something back to the community (Nyíró and Durst 2018). Piroška's story illustrates this element clearly:

As my knowledge has developed, as I started to understand the situation of the Roma, I became more devoted to serve my community, to return something. At the beginning I found it difficult to be a token Gypsy. I was the Gypsy woman who looked nice on the camera, who had to be showcased. I would have protested against it if I could've done, to say that I want to be shown not because I am Gypsy but because I am clever... But after a while I came to understand that this was important. And I took up this Gypsy token [díszcigány] role. I realised that I was in the position that people listened to me more, that I could change lives. . . Some of my students have realised that if it is not degrading for me to identify myself as a Gypsy than this is not that horrible for them either. . . I say to them I am still a Gypsy but in a different way. (Piroška, 56, a university teacher).

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<sup>4</sup>However, this tendency seems to be changing with the younger generation of current Roma university students. As a previous leader of one of the Christian Roma Colleges asserted in our interview, they have nowadays a couple of students of economics, law and information technology courses as "Roma Youth also want to have occupations with market value that would pay the bill".

For the majority of our interviewees, resorting to these three elements (social practices and cultural repertoires) of the distinctive Roma minority mobility trajectory, contributed to the mitigation of the price of their social ascension. There seems to be a subgroup of them, however, where the range and the speed of their upward mobility was so ‘brutal’ as one of them put it, or so high; and the social distance between their background community of origin and their attained (non-Roma Hungarian) middle class was so big that they still have not yet managed to reconcile their belonging to two different worlds. However, even for them, giving back to their community of origin was a life-long aspiration as early as from secondary school. Their pain comes from the fact that despite their desire to help advance the Roma as a group, they feel neglected and not recognised by their own ethnic community. They are still convinced though that their task is to take up a “bridging role” between the two worlds (their Roma background of origin and their non-Roma middle class attained group), to help their people. One of them, a pastor and an academic researcher, coming from a traditional, rural Vlach Gypsy community where he, “against the odds”, managed to lift from poverty through studying and partaking in Higher Education as a vehicle for upward social mobility, put it this way:

I still feel, despite all the non-recognition, that my role is a bridging role. . . I could rather manage to make changes in the way of thinking of the non-Roma (Hungarians) than in the Roma’s—because to change the Roma’s mindset, is a very tough job. At least I did not manage in my own community. . . When I go back to my village, I see everybody is busy, working in the construction industry, making their own businesses and earning good money with their 8 years of schooling. . . They do not understand me, we are not at the same intellectual level. Nobody is interested back at home in my opinion. . . It is sad. When I was a child, I wanted to be the Martin Luther King of the Roma. . . Now I feel I could do the most [out of my knowledge] if I got a university teaching job. My affinity is to work with young intellectuals, that’s when I would feel home. . . I believe that the Roma intellectuals should be given more space and more recognition in higher education. . . I think most of us, Roma intellectuals, who had ascended from poverty, we think that we will do something for our community, to return something back. We feel we have to be the lantern [to show the way]. The non-Roma, when would they do anything for their community? They go for self-realisation, they will become lawyers, economists. But for us, the community is important. Because our community is looked down, stigmatised. And we feel we will show them that if we can do it they can do it, too. . . . But even if I feel I made a brutal jump [on the social ladder], I do not see they like me more, they praise me. . . They [his community in his home village] did not even make a party for my celebration when I got my PhD degree. . . (Pali, 38, a researcher in an academic institute, from a rural Vlach Gypsy community).

## Conclusion

Our research study on first-in-family college graduate Roma from socially disadvantaged families outlined different social mobility trajectories, common conditions behind educational success, and the different ‘prices’ (emotional costs) of changing social class. We argued that the vast majority of our respondents, as in the academic literature on under-represented minority middle classes in the higher education

sector suggests (Neckerman et al. 1999), resorted to a distinctive Roma minority mobility path. They did it in response to their distinctive problems, that is, being minority and middle class, “located at the intersection between class privilege and racial subordination” (Archer 2011, p. 134).

We identified three main characteristics of this minority mobility trajectory. The first one is the construction of a bicultural Roma middle-class identity, in which not only the Hungarian but also the Roma culture has value. This identity is characterised by double rootedness, to overcome the uneasiness from estrangement from the community of origin by their accusation of Roma academically high achieving individuals of ‘becoming Hungarian’ through further studying at university level. The second element of this distinct mobility path is the creation of and participation in ethnic associations and pro-Roma support programs that serve as a buffer against some of their status anxiety or cultural dislocation and which could ease the pain of the ‘divided habitus’ (Bourdieu 2008; Friedman 2016) that many of our participants recounted as having to struggle with at least at one point in their upwardly mobile life course. Related to this mobility model, the third element is the social practice of giving back to the community of origin, and the segmentation on the labour market in jobs relegated to help people in need.

We also showed how the mobilisation of ethnic capital (Shah et al. 2010; Zhou 2005) or of ‘community cultural wealth’ (Yosso 2005) not only facilitated educational mobility of our Roma graduates but also, it contributed to mitigate the reported psychological costs of their social ascension. This is a question that has not yet been, to our knowledge, raised in mobility studies in Hungary. We believe that by outlining the social factors and conditions that led to the alleviation of the (psychological) price of social ascension for the Roma sample of our study, this research project can contribute to raise awareness of what the characteristics of the ‘costless’, or of minimal cost, resilient minority mobility trajectory are, and how the careful mobilisation of ethnic capital and ethnic community cultural wealth can support the formation of a strong Roma middle class in Hungary, even under confining social constraints and hindrances.

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# Correction to: Educational Situation of Portuguese Ciganos: Social Changes versus Social Continuities



Maria Manuela Mendes and Olga Magano

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