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PAVED WITH INTENTIONS

INTERPRETATION, FRAMING AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION IN ROMA EDUCATION POLICIES

A DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION
ABSTRACT

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1. The Research Topic

Roma policies have been in place for several decades now, yet, independent evaluations normally regard them highly unsuccessful, with no obvious results in any field, including education, the field that is generally regarded as central to Roma inclusion. In some cases, we can actually see backslide rather than improvement.

In this research, we are not aiming to argue with this conclusion. The arguments that existing research and analysis has provided are so strong, that we feel refuting them would be impossible, while providing further supporting arguments would be largely unnecessary. We simply accept the conclusion as a starting point.

The question naturally arises then: why do practically all of these policies fail? Answers have already been provided by academic research and professional evaluations. They provide a long list of criticism, highlighting issues such as the failure to address the problem of racism, discrimination and segregation, the lack of a clear budget, the inappropriate targeting, the failure to involve Roma themselves and local stakeholders in the policy process, the lack of data and the non-existent monitoring and evaluation.

At first sight, we could then conclude this topic at this point and say that the question has been answered. Governments need to listen to these evaluations, have to find remedy and the problem will be solved.

However, we think these answers are not completely satisfactory. We believe that even if most of the problematic points that evaluations mention were addressed, the overall outcomes of these Roma strategies would not be improved much. That is because almost all of these points are what we may term technical details and they are not revealing much about the context, most importantly the "intentions" of the policymaker.

For the sake of a simple example, imagine a child is requested to draw a tree. He then produces a drawing of a house. Now, were we to follow the methodology criticised above, we would then evaluate the child's drawing with giving him tips on how the chimney could look better, how another window or a fence around the house would improve the overall picture. But we would remain entirely silent about the fact that the task was different altogether: it is not a tree, but a house.

We therefore argue that the policymakers have been carrying out a task which is basically different from what could normally be expected from a Roma integration strategy or a policy paper.

The Reader, of course, is right to ask the natural question here: what is this task that the policymaker is completing rather than constructing a usual Roma strategy? To answer that question, we will need to turn to some theoretical considerations (see below). Based on these theoretical backgrounds, it is a logical consequence of the social and political setting that the policymaker will actually be dealing with problem redefinitions, image construction and interpretation rather than actually trying to solve the problems of Roma exclusion/inclusion.

The present research is thus an analysis of how some of the selected theoretical models can be applied to Roma policies on the one hand, and how social construction is working in practice in Roma policies. Along the way, we will reveal a number of highly important points that we believe have escaped the attention of most analyst to date. Some of these points will be in connection with practical matters including items in the action plans, but most of them will be centred around social constructions, as the title of this work suggests.

Altogether, we hope that we will provide an answer to the most pressing problem: why Roma policies are not working. Although we do provide recommendations, we are fully aware that it would be too naïve to suppose that it works like a magic bullet. Still, we are hopeful that by simply revealing some of these phenomena will at least contribute to the long process of changing the situation.

2. The Research Questions

The main question is, of course, why Roma policies fail. A general question like this, however, is impossible to operate with in any serious research. To break down the question into operational components, we can easily turn to already existing research and analysis, precisely the ones that we have mentioned above. The ones whose answers, as we have said, we are not fully satisfied with. Indeed, one of our arguments why they may not be completely satisfactory is that we can easily, and

pergaps more naturally, regard them as questions, rather than answers.

We have selected three highly important points of criticism and will use them as questions. They are the following: (Q1) why do policies disregard discrimination and racism? (Q2) Why do policies miss targets (with budgeting, data and other problems)? (Q3) Why do policies consistently and constantly repeat the same mistakes? And of course, we have (Q0), why do Roma policies fail?

This is one possible set of questions. These are the questions that a client could ask was he to commission a research like this. We could call them non-technical questions. As we all know, the researcher is very often required to formulate other, technical types of questions before he could start the investigation in order to be able to answer the client's questions.

The organisation of the second, technical, set of questions is based on theoretical considerations, namely on an approach that is used by the vast majority of policy analysis and research. There are three elements that will probably be part of every type of policy structure, namely: (1) what is the problem, (2) who suffers and who can do something and (3) what should be done?

The first one of these is called **problem definition** in policy analysis. Each of the three points mentioned above are highly important and the success of the policy will depend on them, but problem definition is perhaps the most elementary of all, and as such, it has a special status. If the problem definition is wrong, it may well happen that all the other elements are flawless and still, the overall goal is missed. The question, very simply put, will be this: how do national Roma policies define the problem? What do they see as the most important reason for the unacceptable situation of the Roma? Do they identify underlying causes and if so what are they? Do they define some of the issues as elementary or cross-cutting and if so, which ones? Are there issues that are not included in national policies as part of the problem, contrary to expectations? What are they and why are they excluded?

The second area of investigation will be what policy analysis terminology calls **target definition** or the definition of target groups. Above, we have used the informal expressions "who suffers and who can do something", which actually includes two elements, and not without reason. We believe that it is important to look at both of these two ele-

ments in target definitions, and only examining the population groups that are "affected" by the problem (a usual way of analysing policy) is not enough, especially in the case of minorities.

In Roma education policies, the situation is similar to other target groups which are expected to change. Clearly, simply providing benefits (like pensions or student benefits in other policy areas) will not be expected to lead to results. What needs to change (or be changed) is a whole range of issues. Which of the stakeholders need to change will depend on the framing of the problem. Do we expect Roma children or Roma parents to change, or do we expect the school, the teachers, the management or even the whole system to change? In both cases, what exactly will bring about change? A simple listing of the problems may already shed light on the approach, e.g. is segregation included in the listing at all, and is it seen as a major problem? Do polices see Roma children as unable to achieve results or do they see them as ones who have no access to quality education? Does the policymaker view Roma parents as ones who are unable to provide for their children's educational needs (for reasons beyond their control), or do they appear in policies as ones who are not caring enough, who lack motivation and who do not understand the importance of education? How do policies view the role of the school and the educational system? Are they mentioned at all? If so, what responsibility (or simply what role) are they assigned by the policy?

The last question is identical with the third point that we mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter. "What should be done" is one of the fundamental questions to ask in policy making and policy analysis alike. That is why we will extend the scope of this research to include **actions plans** of policies and seek further evidence for or against what we have found in the previous parts of our analysis.

3. Hypotheses

The most important hypotheses are the following:

(H1) national governments are not satisfied with the problem framing, interpretations and Roma image that is already existing in international documents and academic discourse. If so, it will be able to be de-

tected using both theoretical and empirical tools.

(H2) Based on our theoretical bases it then follows that consequently, governments want to change the framing, the interpretations and the image in order to make them more adequate to their own purposes. This will include excluding discrimination and racism from the underlying causes, while blaming the Roma and their culture for the problems may also be part of the image that is to be constructed.

(H3) Governments feel they are unable to openly challenge the problem definitions and images in the official policy documents (because this is a target group with considerable power), so they will try to do this in a more implicit way.

(H4) From a political point of view, and with today's political approaches and ideologies prevalent in CEE countries and elsewhere in Europe, it does not seem a priority for governments to solve the problem of Roma exclusion.

This last point may be examined in a later research in much more details, but it already goes beyond a policy analysis framework. One sign of this, however, may be discovered. If most of the strategy deals with image construction and problem redefinition, it is already a sign that other elements do not enjoy a priority and thus, they do not constitute an important goal at all.

4. Theoretical Background

Policy analysis saw a major paradigm shift in the early 1990s with the appearance of the so-called argumentative turn. This approach placed a major emphasis on context, linguistic analysis, and the important role discourses and argumentations play in the policy process. Most importantly for us, it utilised what social constructionism had long before claimed, that problems are never discovered, but constructed. The idea that at the initial steps of the policy cycle, before even agenda setting can occur, there is a fierce competition for defining the problem to be placed on the agenda was not new. What *was* new was that interpretative activities in general play a central role *throughout* the policy process and they are not limited to the initial agenda setting phase. After the argumentative turn, a new wave of theoretical models and approaches

were formulated. Of these, we have selected two which will particularly be helpful in providing an answer to the question: how to analyse Roma policies so that we could discover the underlying cause of the problems.

One of them is Carol Bacchi's WPR approach, which essentially says that problem definitions occur in action plans, too. Through recommending particular actions, the policymaker defines what he thinks the problem actually is. If, Bacchi says, the policy for gender equality recommends trainings for women, then the problem is defined as women's lack of trainings or qualifications. If, we may add, the policy for Roma integration recommends advice to parents about the importance of education, then the problem is defined as Roma parents' lack of understanding.

The other, considerably more detailed and complex theoretical model is named "the social construction of target populations" developed by Ann Schneider and Helen Ingram. This approach's starting point is the fact that public policy decisions are made by the political elite, whose main aim is undoubtedly re-election, for which purpose they should avoid major confrontations with public opinions and should devise policies that can expect popular acceptance. If so, it is possible to calculate how public policies will treat certain target populations on the basis of two distinct parameters: the power that the target group has (be it economic, political or other) and the popular image that the group has. The values of both parameters can, and indeed quite often do, change in time. The current situation will largely influence the policy treatment of the given target group: the more powerful they are and the better image they have, the more openly they are likely to be provided benefits. Image is especially important. If the target group has a very negative public image, it is highly risky for politicians to construct a policy which openly contradicts this image and gives the group benefits, when they are expected by the vast majority of the voters to actually be punished rather than be given benefits.

According to Schneider-Ingram (1993), the distribution of burdens and benefits can thus be analysed in a matrix using the two parameters of power and image. The result is four types of target groups: advantaged, dependent, contender and deviant groups (see table 1).

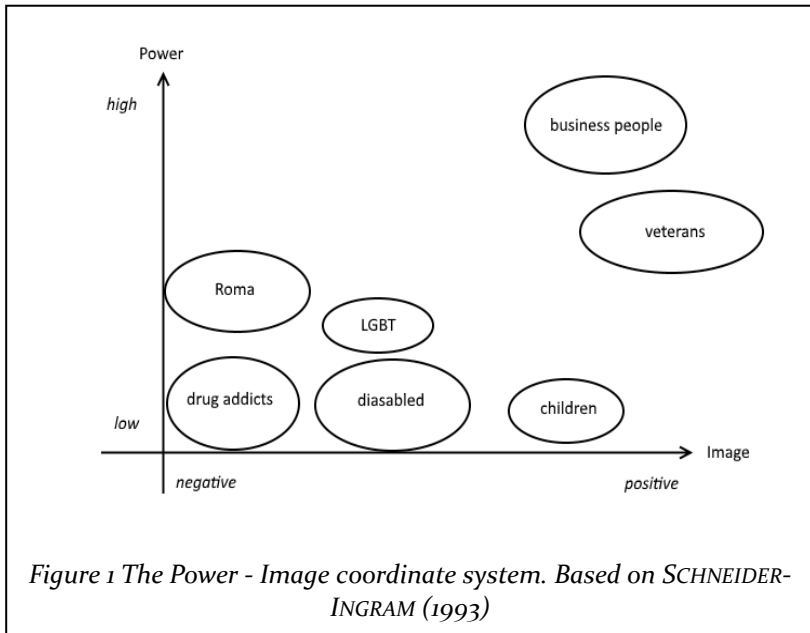|		Image	
		Positive	Negative
Power	Strong	**Advantaged** business people scientists veterans	**Contenders** the rich minorities big unions
	Weak	**Dependants** children mothers disabled	**Deviants** criminals drug addicts gangs

Table 1: Types of target populations – Based on SCHNEIDER–INGRAM (1993)

The four types can be characterised by specific ways of treatment in policies and in the messages that policy makers and more generally elected officials communicate in connection with them. In this matrix, advantaged groups are both powerful and positively constructed, which means that if they get benefits, it meets with public approval on the one hand, and results in political gains on the other. Policies are expected to form very positive messages in connection with them, and only target them with positive measures. Dependants lack power, but they are viewed positively. Policies that target them positively are welcome by the general public, but it may only result in indirect gains as far as political power or re-election are concerned. The case of deviants is as obvious as that of advantaged groups: since they neither have power, nor are they viewed positively, it is advantageous to place burdens on them with giving no benefits at all.

For us, the most interesting case is that of contenders, the place of minorities in the matrix. On the one hand, groups in this category are supposed to be powerful, which should drive policy makers to devise beneficial policies for them. but they are also viewed negatively by the general public, which means that any benefit that they are openly offered may lead to public opposition. SCHNEIDER–INGRAM (1993) note that benefits to these groups may be covert, policies may be *vague and indirect* to avoid much publicity.

It is important to see that the four groups are merely theoretical constructions, and in reality, particular groups will rather be placed in a co-

ordinate system defined by the axis of power and the axis of image. To show this, we have modified the system as seen in Figure 1.

Power

high

business people

veterans

Roma

LGBT

drug addicts   diasabled   children

low

negative   positive   Image

Figure 1 The Power - Image coordinate system. Based on SCHNEIDER-INGRAM (1993)

This shows how different groups may be placed in the coordinate system depending on their power and their constructed image. Instead of being forced to choose one of the four categories above, this system allows for a more accurate way of representing the various groups. Another reason why the coordinate system could have more explanatory power than the table is that over time, all the groups in a society that public policies may target may change both in power and in the image that is constructed of them. This means that they will "move around" in the coordinate system, even though they may still be considered to belong to the same typological group as before.

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The policy process usually starts with agenda setting, which in turn presupposes an already existing problem definition. Consequently, before any policy work may start, there usually is an intensive "definition competition" among various actors, including the government and other political actors. Roma policies, however, constitute a special case among public policies. After the political changes in the early 1990s most governments, especially the ones with the largest Roma populations in CEE countries, were all but forced to construct Roma inclusion strategies and to start to solve the problems of their respective Roma populations. The request was made by various international organisations, and they became ever more increasingly assertive with the EU enlargement date approaching and accession negotiations already underway. For us, the crucial element is that the task of defining the problem had already been carried out by various NGOs, academic institutions, researchers and a list of highly important international organisations. Interestingly enough, these various sources defined *the core of problem* in a very similar way, and EU institutions gladly adopted this definition. But the definition of the problem was something that the vast majority of local populations in these countries would strongly oppose and reject: the Roma are discriminated against, they suffer high levels or racism and exclusion in all areas of life, and this is what causes the rest of the problems in housing, health, education and employment.

Why local populations would not be happy with this problem definition should be very clear: there is a generous amount of research which proves that the Roma are not simply *among* the most despised, but they are indeed *the* most despised minority all over Europe, but especially in Central-Eastern Europe. To construct a policy which essentially says that it is the majority and its institutions who are responsible for the discrimination and racism and that the Roma are the victims of this treatment, would clearly pose a threat to the political leaders, and would also go against the theoretical considerations mentioned above by Schneider and Ingram. A target group which has such an extremely negatively constructed image should actually be given burdens and punishments. At the same time, the Roma as a target group also has considerable power. This power comes from international organisations, European Union bodies, major and influential NGOs and, certainly not least, academic research. Additionally, we have no reason to suppose that governments themselves would disagree with the general

public about the negative and racist Roma image. On the contrary, we have seen the prime ministers of *all* five CEE countries under investigation openly and publicly using racist and discriminatory rhetoric against Roma repeatedly.

All this leads to a situation where policymakers in these countries need to walk a fine line between promoting the racist image and complying with EU and other international expectations and guidelines, human rights based considerations and academic research results. One possible "solution" for the policymaker aiming for political gains and re-election is redefining the problem itself, and construct an image of the Roma where they are responsible for their own problems rather than victims. An image in which they are portrayed as the problem rather than having a problem. This, however, cannot be carried out openly if the risk of a clash with influential international organisations and human rights protection bodies is to be avoided. As we know from theoretical models, policies, on the other hand, are capable of shaping the image and framing the problem, consequently, the policymaker is able to use these policies for precisely such purposes, too.

This is what we have tested in this research.

5. Methodology and research material

In line with what policy analysts after the Argumentative Turn claim, we regard policies acts of communication, where language, argumentations and discourses will play a central, decisive role. Furthermore, policies always appear in written documents. This makes it obvious, and indeed compulsory, to choose content analysis with a focus on linguistic investigation as the methodological tool for our research.

We have used the official Roma policy documents that individual EU country governments submitted to the EU Commission in 2011, but we concentrated our attention on five countries with the largest Roma populations in the world: The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, but occasionally looked at policy papers of other countries too. Besides, we have also analysed international policy documents. The policies are easily available on the website of the EU Commission. We have used the English versions in all cases.

For the technical implementation, we have used MaxQDA, one of the best-known computer-assisted data analysis software.

6. The Structure of the Dissertation

After the introductory parts (including the highly important chapter on the theoretical background), we start with a chapter detailing the criticism that professional and academic analysis has revealed in connection with Roma policies. These serve as a starting point for the analysis.

The remaining chapters are built up according to the research questions that we have set out above. There are three main chapters analysing social constructions in the policies. The first one (Chapter 5) deals with defining the target group. This includes questions of general targeting, while also look at the Roma image that policies build up in details, but questions like ethnic versus socio-economic targeting is also discussed in details.

The second main part is found in Chapter 6, which is about defining the problem. This chapter deals with the extremely important question of how the policymaker defines the problem. Whether they see discrimination and racism as part of the problem at all, and how the policies distribute the roles in the problem domain. We will deal with the question of blaming the victim, or why Roma culture and language get so much attention in Roma policies.

The last main part in Chapter 6 will take a closer look at action plans and what they can reveal about social construction, problem definitions and image building. This part will discuss more practical issues, but with the aim of discovering social constructions.

The remaining chapters will discuss the conclusions and the recommendations.

7. Research Results

The most important points that our research has revealed are the following.

7.1 Blaming the victim

WILLIAM RYAN (1976) looked at policies targeting black people in the United States in the 1960s and found that rather than trying to deal with problems of exclusion and targeting the educational system, policies were blaming the black people themselves for practically every possible problem they faced. These policies were offering help to black students, they were trying to make them understand the importance of education, they were trying to change their mentality and their attitudes. They were claiming that it was something in black people's culture, the ghetto culture, what caused them to lag behind. They were accused of not caring enough, of not wanting enough, of not trying enough. The action plans included the provision of various kinds of complementary assistance rather than acknowledging that the school, the institutions and society in general is stopping them from achieving results. They never mentioned the responsibility of the school or other majority institutions.

Shocking as it may be, William Ryan could have written everything literally about Roma policies today, forty years later and thousands of kilometres away. This is *exactly* what happens in Roma "integration" in Europe now: all we need to do is replace the word 'black' with 'Roma' and 'US' with the names of any of the CEE countries.

This topic is discussed in Chapter 6.6.

7.2 Targeting the excluded

To make it easier to analyse policy targeting in a more systematic fashion, we have devised a model of the educational system which could serve as a kind of typology for policy actions.

In this system, the formal educational environment includes three tiers: participants, tools and framework. Participants include receiving

parties (students, pupils, trainees etc.), teachers, parents, and local communities. Participants are the ones who are expected to actively take part in the day-to-day activities of the school. This group may include other participants in some locations, including school mediators or social workers. The second tier is labelled tools, or it could be called the infrastructural setting. This includes material and non-material components, mainly teaching materials, curricula, methodological resources on the one hand, and the actual physical environment on the other hand, from classroom equipment and other school facilities to transport provisions. The third tier is the framework for educational activities, or the institutional setting. This includes local, regional and higher levels of legislation, as well as the country's general legal environment that has an influence on education, but also school regulations, school management solutions and other organisational aspects.
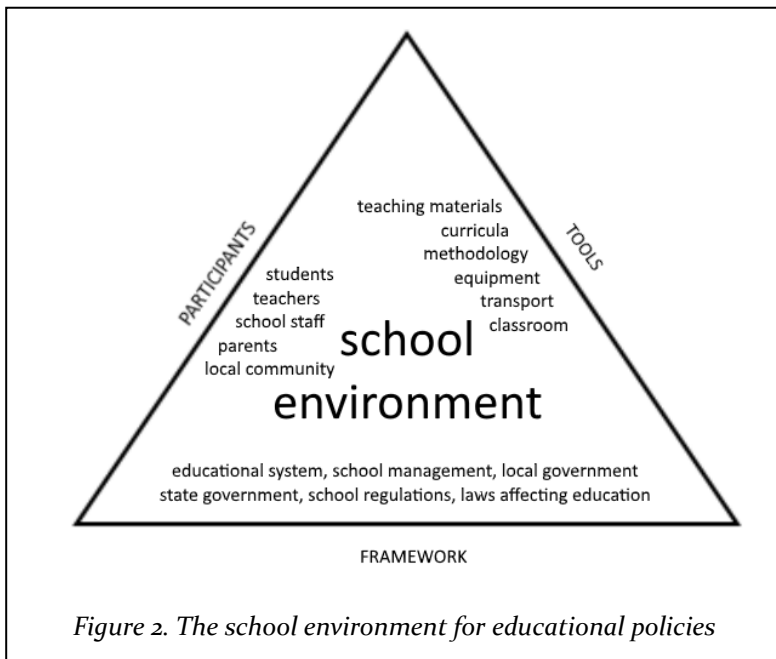
*Figure 2. The school environment for educational policies*

If we look at the action plans of Roma policies, we find that the vast majority of them target participants (see Figure 3). This alone suggests what we saw in blaming the victim, i.e. that policies are not dealing with the system itself, since that would only be possible through target-ing the framework side of the triangle in the first place, and possibly, a large amount of attention would need to be aid to the tools side as well.

Figure 3 Actions targeting participants, tools or framework (HU, SK, CZ, BG, RO)
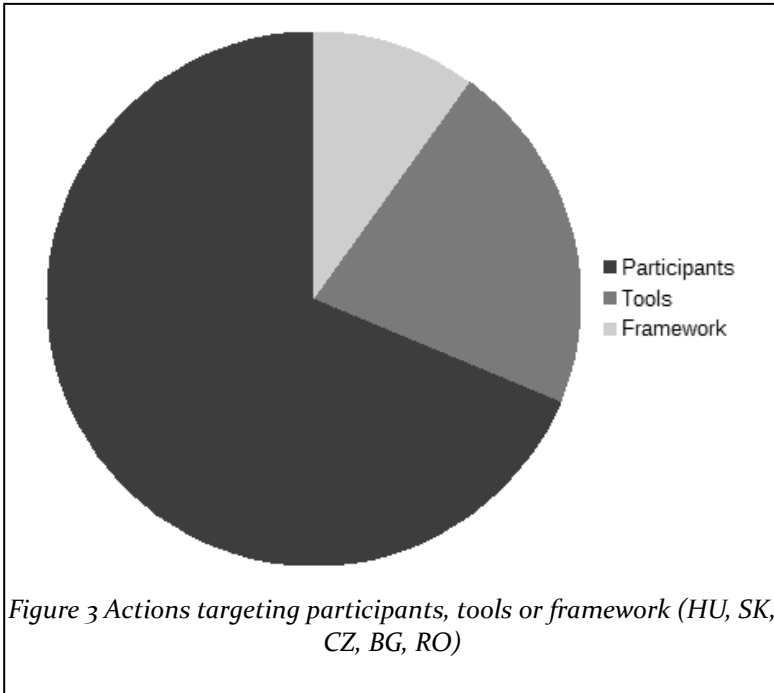
The situation gets even more problematic if we examine the parti-cipants side in more details. Figure 4 shows the result of this analysis. What we see is that more than half of the actions directly target Roma students themselves, implying, of course, that it is them who need to change rather than other participants. The figure shows a considerably large section: Parents and communities. Again, if we focus on this seg-ment only, we are surprised to see that almost all of this attention tar-gets Roma parents and Roma communities, which again implies that the problem is to be found with those participants. Majority students,

majority parents, majority communities and teachers get very little if any attention. (In the chart, we see a sizeable section of the pie labelled teachers, but it should not be misunderstood. Almost all of these actions aim to provide on-the-job trainings for teachers dealing with Roma students, an easy solution in action plans, and without knowing the contents of these trainings, we cannot reliably evaluate them.)

Figure 4 Actions within those targeted at Participants in five countries (HU, SK, CZ, BG, RO)
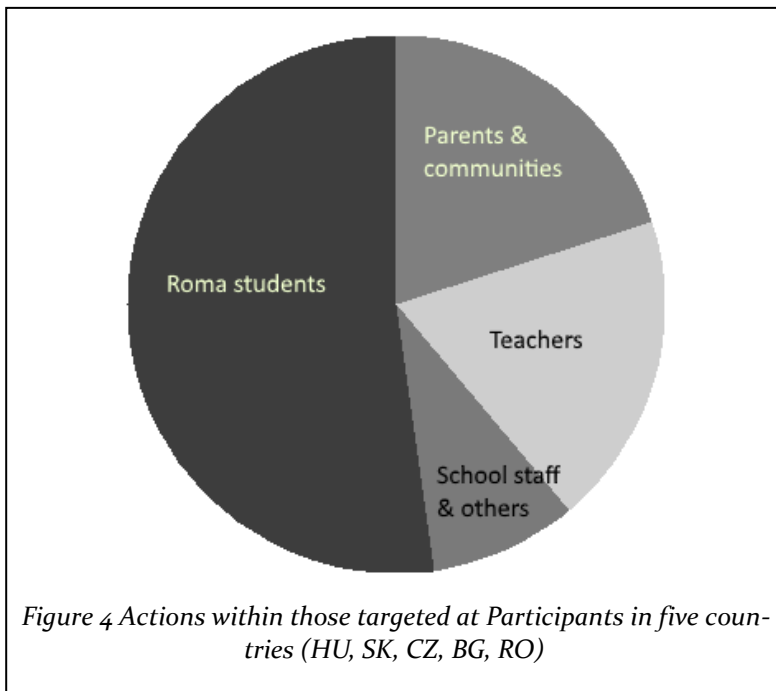
The topic is mainly covered by chapters 5.2 and 5.3.

7.3 The root of all evil

The very basis of the problems that Roma face has been defined as discrimination and racism by academic research and international policies alike. It is surprising then that we see all national policies reluctant to acknowledge this. Most of them define the problem in the descriptive parts of the policies as poverty, with some of them, such as the Hungarian strategy absurdly claiming that poverty leads to discrimination and segregation and only allowing that discrimination may ap-

pear as a problem. Poverty is portrayed as the basis of all other problems by some strategies, and as the most important problem to overcome by all strategies. None of them identify discrimination as the cause. But even if poverty plays such an important role for them, the action plans do not contain effective plans for changing this situation – although this is already beyond our research focus (education), but the failure is clear if we consider that the economic situation of Roma people have actually worsened rather than improved during the last couple of decades, with unemployment and poverty still in the rise today.

But even the strategies which do acknowledge the existence of discrimination and what it causes (segregation being perhaps the most pressing of all), *none (!)* of the action plans have any programmes unambiguously targeting discrimination in the educational policies. Some strategies have a separate section dealing with discrimination, but, be it hard to believe or not, they use it for blaming the Roma and constructing a highly negative image of them. Roma communities, policies say, are typically home to crime and criminal behaviour, and some strategies actually aim to curb criminal behaviour and to promote the rule of law in these localities – all as part of Roma inclusion strategies.

These questions are discussed in Chapter 6.3.

7. 4 *Outside or inside?*

Most of the programmes in action plans that target Roma students (and this is the most usual way of targeting, as we have seen above), include actions such as extra-curricular activities, after-school programmes, extra remedial classes or similar programmes such as clubs and free time activities organised for Roma students. The common denominator is that none of these programmes are part of the normal course of education. They are outside, with the danger that with this, Roma students themselves are seen as outsiders. The social construction effect, whether intended or not, is obviously present in these programmes. The difference is emphasized all along. Even when certain programmes – the minority of actions – happen inside the school such as Romani language classes or Roma culture classes, they are normally organised for Roma only students, which again makes it 'outside' rather than inside.

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The distancing effect also plays a role when Roma teaching assistants are recommended, especially when they are called mediators. Mediating is naturally only possible between two separate parties, possibly with incompatible differences between them. Roma mediators, however, are regarded as 'good practice' even by pro-Roma NGOs, a phenomenon which is hard to understand if we look at it from a social constructionist point of view. We find it not surprising that Roma policies, whose main aim is image building and negative construction, are more than happy to use the topic mediators.

These issues are dealt with in sever subchapters of Chapter 5 and in 7.4.

7.5 Culture and language

Roma culture, sometimes very openly, is regarded as one of the causes of the problems that the Roma face. Even though most strategies aim to protect Roma culture through various minor actions (such as school competitions or devising plans for including Roma culture in the teaching materials), the main reason to place so much emphasis on Roma culture, we believe, is that policies are using it for framing and image building purposes. Roma culture is most often contrasted to the majority culture, and even to European culture, thus it helps the policymaker to distance themselves and the society at large from the Roma and their problems. This is where portraying the Roma as an international, transnational or a "true European" minority is extremely harmful – and beneficial for the policymaker. With this, they are able to put the "burden of" integrating the Roma on European institutions rather than taking responsibility themselves. The situation is further worsened by some international policies, which expressed such shocking claims as "the Roma have no place to call home" (CoE 1993), an idea that is sported by some ultra-right wing racist voices, claiming that the Roma "have no home country", an idea that is literally repeated in some of the national policies, too, entirely ignoring the fact that all the Roma people do have their own countries, of which they are legal citizens with (theoretically) all the rights of a full citizen, and to which they are most often emotionally attached, which they regard their own. (As a side note: wouldn't it be similar to claiming that LGBT people have no place/country to call home because there is no LGBT country?)

Language is another topic that gets an incomprehensibly large amount

of attention in Roma policies. As far as we know, there is no research that would argue that Roma exclusion, segregation, racism and discrimination is even partly caused by issues related to Roma languages. Language socialisation – in whatever language the mother tongue of the child happens to be – is on the other hand important, but is almost never mentioned in policies. While providing Romani language classes to Roma children at select schools is certainly something most people would welcome, it is highly questionable if they could play a major role in solving the overall educational problems of the Roma. However, they have the capacity to emphasize the difference of the Roma from the majority, and we think this is a good reason for the policymaker to place such an exaggerated emphasis on it.

The topic is discussed in chapters 6.4, 7.3 and 7.4 in more details.

7.6 The Roma image

All of the national policies construct an image of the Roma which is not very different from the discriminatory and very often plainly racist image that the vast majority of people in CEE countries have, an image that can be familiar to us from a vast array of surveys and academic research (see for example CAHN 2007, FEISCHMIDT ET AL 2014, MESSING 2008). The image of the Roma that appears in *Roma integration* (!) policies includes the following: the Roma are unwilling to work, to study or to integrate into society. They are irresponsible parents who do not care enough about their own children or their education. It is them who send their children to special schools with the prospect of financial gains (some policies recommend legal proceeding against these Roma parents). If and when they face discrimination, it is because they are poor and not because of their ethnicity. If and when they suffer atrocities, it is also their own fault. The Hungarian strategy framed the serial killings of innocent Roma people in a way that could be understood as Roma people being the perpetrators rather than the victims, and downplayed its importance altogether. Roma "mentality" is a very often used expression in policies, which they of course aim to change. This mentality is harmful and acts as a barrier to school achievement, undertaking employment (the Roma need to be encouraged to take employment, according to most policies) or simply integrating into the majority society. The Roma are presented by policy documents as

groups where criminal behaviour, drug abuse, sexism and other violent crimes are typical, some of them call attention to how dangerous and harmful these Roma communities are for the child.

These questions are mainly discussed in chapters 5.4 and 6.4.

8. Summary and conclusions

In this research, we aimed to examine image construction, problem framing, problem definitions, interpretations and other manipulations that policy researchers usually examine within the frame of social construction. In the title, we used the word intentions, although clearly in a non-technical sense. A review prepared by the Open Society Foundations says as a criticism that "good intentions need to be bolstered by concrete targets and timelines, allocated budgets ..." (OSF 2012:1). Whether these intentions are good, certainly didn't seem very obvious for us, but there are definitely intentions of some kind. After all, calling" it good intentions" when a very often racist and discriminatory image is built of the Roma would seem far-fetched, to say the least. Hence the title of this thesis, a fragment from the saying "The road to hell is paved with good intentions".

But for the issues identified in the OSF review, we believe we have found at least a partial explanation for them. From evaluations it seems as though *nothing* is working in Roma integration strategies. We examined the strategies prepared in 2011. It makes the situation even more incomprehensible that these were far from being the first attempts of governments to build a Roma policy, already having easy access to a myriad of professional and academic analyses, and external evaluations have unanimously kept repeating the same criticisms over a very long period of time.

Policymakers have not listened.

Our research results suggest that with the setup and approach that we have revealed, they are not likely to listen any time soon: it would simply be irrational or inconsistent on their part. It is also important to point out that these policies are actually quite successful in what they

are really trying to achieve: reframing the problem. Let us see why.

Although some Roma policies have existed throughout the twentieth century in almost all of the Soviet Bloc countries, it was not before the fall of Communism that international policy attention started to considerably intensify, while the expansion of the European Union practically made the topic of Roma inclusion one of the most prominent issues in accession negotiations. There were at least two waves which drew increased attention to Roma issues: one immediately after the fall of the communist regimes in East European countries, and one in the period preceding the accession of most of these countries to the EU. From this perspective, it bears no considerable importance that in both cases, West European countries and international institutions were mainly trying to protect themselves from an influx of Roma migrants rather than showing their sincere concerns for human rights and democratic values, the main outcome was that eventually, such concerns did show up in the policies they prepared.

National governments were somehow late (and reluctant) in responding to these trends at the beginning of the 1990s. The initiative was thus taken by policy actors different from national governments: large international NGOs, international organisations and EU institutions, while at the same time, the topic also gained increasing amounts of academic attention, too. When the pressure on national governments (mostly CEE countries wishing to join the EU) was already obvious and real to deal with these questions, the tasks of problem definition, framing and interpretation had already been carried out. Although there were differences among the already existing interpretations, there were a number of points that enjoyed consensus. First and foremost, everyone seemed to agree that the most severe underlying issue is discrimination. International policies and analyses clearly put the blame on the majority societies in question, and they presented the Roma as the victims of the situation. This approach was also supported by the increasing volume of scientific research results, too, which pointed out that segregation and racial (or ethnic) discrimination was so widespread and systematic that addressing the problem was not possible without a systemic approach which would target discrimination and segregation in practically all areas of life from education to health care, while also promoting the advancement of the Roma in particular fields, most importantly education.

National governments were thus faced with the task of creating policies and action plans, and implementing them with already existing, and widely accepted guidelines. Agenda setting seemed to have been completed, with Roma issues already taking place in the decision agenda.

This was not a desirable situation for national governments. Looking at this state of affairs from the social construction policy theory viewpoint, what governments were facing (and still are facing) was the very strong pressure to prepare *decision agenda* policies for a target group which has considerable power, but has an extremely negative image. The power of the group is none other than the pressure coming from EU institutions and other, highly influential organisations, while the extremely negative image is something that a large number of surveys prove: that the Roma have *the* most negatively constructed image of all in all of the countries with a large Roma population.

In a situation like this, governments are supposed to be acting in a way that may satisfy both requirements: distribute benefits to the target population, since they have power; but do this in a covert way, since the vast majority of the population of the country will not be happy to see benefits going to non-deserving groups. This is, of course, only what the theory suggests. However, this would not work in the case of Roma policies. Most importantly, we are not simply talking about benefits to be distributed: there are many more things on a much wider scale, which cannot remain covert if properly implemented. The most significant of these is fighting discrimination and racism. It is only possible to address this issue in a way whereby the majority population (including educational and other institutions, officials and various representatives of state and other establishments) are not only directly targeted but clearly accused of a major wrongdoing, and on top of that, in connection with the most despised group of people, the Roma. This of course carries the risk of losing political support and voting power. None of the governments in CEE countries seem to be willing to take this risk. As a result, fighting discrimination and racism is regarded as a definite no-go area. Acknowledging the existence of *some kind of* discrimination *to some extent* is still something that many policies risk doing, but we can already see that some governments such as Hungary, are refusing to regard discrimination as a major cause or even a significant matter altogether.

The result is that governments find themselves in a vastly undesirable

situation, where they are expected to act in a way that they clearly regard highly risky from the perspective of political gains and re-election. Indeed, it is obvious for them from present-day examples too, that political gains could be earned with the opposite approach: blaming the Roma and regarding them as basically causing trouble and claiming that it is themselves who must change their attitudes, morale, refrain from crime and learn to live a civilised way of life. This is of course also a taboo for policymakers to claim publicly.

There is one important circumstance that is different from the group of contenders in the social construction theory. The target population in our case does have power, but it comes from outside, mainly in the form of primarily international political and policy support. Although there are Roma groups, they do not normally possess a considerable influence, and the Roma voting power is at least questionable. This essentially means that retributive action in the form of voting is not to be expected if the group doesn't get the policy attention that it wishes for. If there is any kind of backfire, it can be expected from international organisations and EU institutions, and mainly in the form of naming and shaming and minor "clashes" with and the disapproval of international courts.

As an addition to the social construction theory for policy, we argue that the tool that governments are likely to use in such a situation is reframing and redefining the problem in a way that may lessen the contradiction between their political gains and the pressure to make policy for a controversial target group with no "direct power". One of the main goals is to avoid confrontations with massive and powerful groups of voters. It is also expected that they will strive to change the image that is contradicting the public image, and reconstruct it if possible, or modify it if complete reconstruction is not an option, in order to bring it closer to the public image. With this approach, it is evidently impossible to build a policy with the original goals in mind. It is therefore in the interest of the policymaker to use vague indicators, elusive concepts and ambiguous forms of evaluation and monitoring. The basic tenet regarding contenders of the social construction theory also remains valid: if benefits are distributed, they should be covert and downplayed. To this end, it is most advantageous if the policy is using a generalist rather than a targeted approach. As far as action plans are concerned, there are safe and unsafe actions depending on how much

public attention they are likely to get and what they suggest in connection with problem framing and interpretations.

Let us examine how these points are supported by the findings of our research.

We argued that fighting discrimination and racism will be over the limits for policies. This is clearly what we have found: none of the policies have a systematic way of dealing with the issue. Some strategies even claim that discrimination and racism are not the cause but the effect of poverty.

We have seen that poverty is commonly regarded as the most important underlying reasons described in problem descriptions, and "fighting" it is supposed or planned to be the most important goal in action plans of Roma strategies. This is a complete redefinition of the problem compared to international policies and academic research, where it is discrimination rather than poverty (poverty being a consequence). We should see that it is a logical result of the framing effort: if discrimination is left out of the equation, the next problem, that is indeed an existing problem described in all external problem descriptions too, is indeed poverty. To put it simply: to completely redefine the problem, all you have to do is delete the first item, i.e. discrimination and racism, and leave most other elements untouched. This is what happened in the Roma policies we have examined. In the rest of the problem description, most of them precisely repeat what we know from scientifically based research, and this may be the reason why some evaluations actually praise some of the Roma policies for the "accurate" problem description found in them – mistakenly so, we think.

Emphasising poverty has another major consequence. Making the Roma problem a problem of poverty helps downgrading the Roma issue. If the Roma problem is redefined as a problem of poverty and socio-economic circumstances, what policymakers may end up with is a poverty agenda rather than a Roma agenda. It is a highly significant difference if we talk about a number of "vulnerable groups" in danger of poverty and marginalisation as opposed to talking about an ethnic group, whose many problems include poverty and marginalisation, most of which are mainly caused by discrimination and racism.

Besides redefining the problem, image construction is another element that we have seen in all of the Roma policies examined. With only a few

exceptions such as the Croatian policy, strategy documents are careful enough not to openly confirm the extremely negative and unjust image of the Roma. They do, however, confirm at least parts of this image in the way they phrase a problem and in measures recommended. As we have seen, blaming the Roma themselves for their problems is common practice. Distancing the problem of Roma issues from the policymaker (i.e. from the governments) is another method very often employed. Like the overemphasising of poverty, this also helps to get rid of the undesired agenda or at least place it at a different level or in a different perspective. One of the methods used is placing the Roma issue in a European perspective and emphasizing that the responsibility is just as European as it is national. Some of the policies send this message very openly, while some others only contain indications, for example through highlighting the "Europeanness" of the Roma and presenting them as one group whose members are much closer to each other than to their fellow citizens in their own countries. Describing the Roma as a foreign group is common both among leading politicians and in policies, underlining differences between their culture and the majority culture can only lead to separation rather than inclusion. The result of this distancing is manifold. On the one hand, it helps to draw an image of the Roma which is nearer to the public image, since it claims that the Roma are not actually "our" people, they do not really belong to this community. It also helps to downgrade the Roma agenda, since this way, the responsibility is shared at least between Europe and the particular state. Responsibility is a key issue. Policymakers may well be aware that the policies they are preparing are not able to properly address the problems, the main goal being problem framing rather than solving problems. But if responsibility is not solely on their shoulders, the situation will become much more favourable: the failure to solve problems is as much a failure of the European community (or even more so) as it is that of the individual country's.

We also dealt with the items in action plans. Here, we saw irregularities which are sometimes difficult to account for. Why do policies deal with some of the questions such as culture and language at length and why don't they pay attention to other, much more pressing problems like school segregation? As they are part of the policy, action plans may not contradict the main goal of the policymaker, which is problem framing and image construction. Any action that is listed should be looked at from this point of view, and some may be regarded safe, while some

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others unsafe. Culture and language are two areas which are not only safe to include, but they may also help some of the partial goals such as distancing the problem from the policymaker and emphasizing differences.

All in all, the Roma integration policies of CEE countries are not essentially different from, among others, the Dutch strategy paper, which openly refuses to work in the field of Roma inclusion and says that it is the task of the Roma to integrate themselves into Dutch society and is blaming them for any failures to do so. The difference is that CEE countries are not in the position to openly act this way. They need to resort to more sophisticated ways, and reframing the problem and reconstructing the image of the target population is one of these options open to these policymakers.

9. Recommendations

One especially important feature of our research is that it looks at policies in a broader context. Although we have examined individual policy measures too, the aim was very different from what we have described above in connection with what most analyses and evaluations do. This is indeed one important message that we would like to present: trying to "correct mistakes in the house drawing when the task was drawing a tree" does not lead to real change and is basically irrelevant. We think that giving advice on "correcting the house drawing" would legitimise the fundamentally erroneous completion of, or indeed the refusal to complete, the task. Besides, we know from experience that governments are not willing to listen to this house-correction advice anyway.

If there is any hope that they might change directions, we should talk about the directions themselves. This means that we would rather confront them with the findings of this research. The findings that show that rather than constructing a Roma policy, they are constructing an extremely negative and often racist Roma image. Rather than analysing (or openly discussing or debating) the problem presented to them by social scientists and practitioners, they are cunningly and implicitly re-

framing this problem and they are reinterpreting issues in a way that fits the image they are constructing: the discriminative image which is present in their respective societies. Rather than trying to deal with the questions of Roma exclusion/inclusion, they are blaming the Roma for practically all the problems they face. They use action plans for these very same purposes rather than for actually addressing the problems.

We would point out to them that before any further step, it is essential to *openly* discuss what they think about the problem, how they would frame it, what interpretations they have about different components of the problem, what image they think is associated with Roma and what they think the image should actually be. We would offer very concrete questions for discussions before any meaningful policy work can start. What role do they think racism and discrimination plays in the exclusion of the Roma? How responsible are the Roma themselves for their own problems? Do they think Roma culture is hindering success? Do they think the Roma are unwilling to integrate?

We would like to remind all concerned parties besides policymakers (advocacy groups, policy researchers, social scientists, think tanks and watchdogs) that this step was never part of the agenda.

No meaningful work in Roma inclusion can be expected to happen without an honest and open discussion of these questions. If governments go on working on social construction and problem framing in policies rather than working towards achieving the goals of Roma inclusion, it makes no sense to point out technical deficiencies like the lack of indicators or inadequate budgeting.

10. Directions for further research

We were dealing with social constructions in Roma policies, and along the way, we have examined a long list of questions some of which could in themselves serve as the basis of separate research. We would like to draw attention to only a few of these questions, not necessarily related to social construction.

Language and culture are, as we put it in the dissertation, the sacred

cows of Roma integration discourse, but unfortunately, there is very little research available about what role they actually play in Roma exclusion or inclusion. Even the word culture is left undefined in policy documents, and there is great confusion concerning what should constitute it. In policies, how could they actually help the integration of the Roma? Besides the practical considerations (very often driven by personal or ad hoc approaches), we think it would be highly desirable to look at the problem from a theoretical point of view, too.

The question of "good practice" is another highly problematic point. We believe that collecting so-called good practice for policy building carries a very high risk, and that most often, the reasons for deeming them "good" are not at all obvious. The vast majority of these good practices originate from NGO activities, like tanodas. NGOs, however, are very different from governments and what may be good practice for them might not at all be the way to go for government policies. NGOs are very often carrying out activities that are unable to change virtually anything in the system but which are necessary for immediate help, and basically, this is what an NGO is capable of doing. Governments should not act like they were just another NGO: they are running a country, they are able to make law, they are able to influence or even supervise educational institutions, they have access to a large amount of financial resources and expertise. These are tools that they should be using, and not the ones that they have seen used by a small NGO with limited resources and capabilities. All this, of course, only after they have openly defined the problem and agreed on all other social construction related matters.

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