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Faculty of Humanities  
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Sociology of Education Programme  
Specialisation in Romany/Gypsy Studies

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**„A SECONDARY GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR *YOU*...?!”**

**Secondary Romany/Gypsy Nationality Education in Hungary  
1989-2009: achievements and challenges**

DOCTORAL (PHD) THESIS

**SUMMARY**

SUPERVISOR

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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„You can judge a democracy by the way it treats its minorities.”

Mahatma Gandhi  
(Landauer 2004:7)

The biggest national minority without a home country in Europe today is the Roma/Gypsies.<sup>1</sup> Although their cultural, historical background and status is rather heterogeneous in this region (Crow 1995), their everyday challenges are treated with a homogenous emphasis within the European Union, the Council of Europe and beyond.

For most of the people being socialised in the cultures of Europe and North America the institutional network of schools represents the scenario where the norms and values of a society are transformed for the individual. In the case of minorities the educational index of the individual becomes a significant marker as the majority of the society prejudices minorities along it, formulates stereotypes, and gives status in the labour market along the level of one's education.

Within the educational challenges concerning the Roma secondary education is a neuralgic issue,<sup>2</sup> because the social handicap of this minority is the most significant at secondary level (Ferge 2005). Although the number of schools where A levels can be achieved has raised to a great extent since the Transition Years (Lannert–Mártonfi 2003), for most of the

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<sup>1</sup> In the present summary the terms Romani/Gypsy (adj.) and Roma/Gypsies (noun pl.) are used interchangeably without negative connotation (see Ries 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Priority of elementary education is non-negotiable – still my research does not focus on this stage of schooling.

Gypsies in Hungary this level of education remains unattainable and so it symbolises a breaking line that separates our society to those with chances for success and the remaining ones who most likely continue transmitting social handicap (Kertesi 2005).

In 1992 self-contained intellectuals and Romani/Gypsy organisations started a foundation named after Gandhi (representing non-violent fight) aiming at helping the situation of Roma through the instruments of education. Their goal was to set up a secondary grammar school for the Gypsies as a first institution of its kind.

The Hungarian Parliament passed the Law on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities including the Roma nationality in July, 1993 creating a milestone in the history of the Roma in our country as this act legitimised the Gypsies as an official minority to introduce their nationality education.

Although this concept has been targeted with critiques of segregation since its idea was born we must note that segmentation is based on voluntary separation not violent division.

## II. THESIS TOPIC

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My research does have a twofold nature. On one hand it examines questions of education concerning the Roma after the Transition Years in Hungary in general with a special focus on institutions of secondary education. On the other hand the research is concrete because it focuses on challenges of the very first nationality secondary grammar school founded

for the Gypsies, the Gandhi School. An additional nature of my thesis is that of educational history as it reconstructs the foundation and the first 15 years of a unique, pioneer, model institution of Romani nationality secondary education both in Hungary and beyond.

Examining the declared mission statement of the founders of the Gandhi School (i. e. that a significant number of Romani intellectuals are trained within the not very distant future) I search the study achievements of daytime students of the school and the markers of educational innovation helping social integration at the second chance education department. As for the nationality markers of the school I outline the possible scenarios of implicit and explicit realisations of Gypsy studies.

### **III. APPLIED METHODS**

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My thesis is an exploratory, descriptive, comprehensive, analytic dissertation; therefore I combine characteristics of research methods of these types. Discovering and studying an uncovered field is as much as my intention as creating a source for developmental research focusing on perfection of an educational service, or improving the efficiency of relevant educational policies.

Triangulation and crystallisation are the validity assurances of my qualitative research in the field of sociology of education (Sántha 2009:112). These concepts can be interpreted as metaphors of multidimensional approach: primary and secondary methods both have been used during my research.

While analysing the institution's representation in relevant articles of local and national papers from the founding years to present days I carry out source research. My content analysis reflects on the press while exploring the history of the Gandhi School and relevant websites when describing Romani nationality educational institutions at the secondary level as well.

During my research I applied questionnaires, semi-structured interviews of individuals, dynamic pair and group interviews and participant observation. Relevant legislation, databases, school documents and websites were also subjects of my analysis.

Concerning literature I focused on volumes available in Hungarian and English. Due to the current nature of my topic an insufficient volume of literature is available on the subject of Romani/Gypsy nationality education, most of the bibliography focuses on issues of the Roma related to education in general. Relevant volumes (Forray 2009; Kozma 2009; Dupcsik 2009; Takács 2009; Sántha 2009) were published even in the last year (2009) of my research so I had to apply an ever reflective approach during my work.

### **IV. THESIS STRUCTURE**

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Eight chapters, making up four parts is the basic structure of my thesis. The first unit is the two chapters of introduction and methodology. In the second unit I outline basic reference information, explain concepts, and introduce the main characteristics of the Hungarian society and its

educational policy followed by an introduction of model institutions. The focus of the dissertation is the third part where I summarise the history of the Gandhi School and its achievements. Last but not least I structure my findings and outline possible further research areas.

## **V. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

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According to my research findings the opportunity of Romani nationality education was born due to policy changes in education of the Transition Years. Educational innovation, i.e. practical implementation of this educational concept in a widespread, structural way however has not been realised between 1989 and 2009 in Hungary.

### **V.1. UNSOLVED AND UNDECIDED – REMAINING CHALLENGES**

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Challenges I have summarised in my thesis stand firm because their borderlines are inconstant and may harm several values and interests. Therefore any intention aiming at finding solutions to these challenges cannot be interpreted merely or exclusively within the framework of educational policy.

#### **V.1.1. THEORITICAL APPROACHES**

While clarifying the concepts of Gypsy nationality education the first obstacle researchers come across with is defining the terms Gypsy and

Romani – the basic circles of representatives of the target group (Ladányi-Szelényi 2001, Kemény-Janki 2003, Kertesi 2005). Not only the undefined nature but the heterogeneity of the Roma/Gypsies (Landauer 2004, Dupcsik 2009, Orsós 2006) raises difficulties. Similarly, it is challenging to decide if the culture of the Roma should be studied from a socio-economic or an ethnic perspective (Szuhay 1999).

From the viewpoint of education policies the same question arises: should decision makers aim at and consider the socio-economic or ethnic nature of the target group(s)? Although theoretically there is conscious distinction between the two types of articulations it seems that practice cannot follow the distinct approaches clearly (Pulay–Benkő 2008, Forray 2009).

Anthropologists declare that any kind of social or ethnic category may alter to a great extent and neither of these is more homogeneous than other categories of human beings (Eriksen 2008). Even if proved, this anthropological phenomenon does not ease political decision makers' and practicing educators work.

Another consideration that has to be clarified is that educational policy should work within a system of other policies related to the challenges Romany/Gypsy people. Social, regional, economic, financial and employment policies (Polónyi-Timár, 2005) should each be considered as a structure, as none of the elements can be reformed when the rest are neglected. Although establishing a system of Romani educational institutions has been the declared intention of several governments in the last 20 years, these policies remained unfulfilled.

### **V.1.2. ENDEAVOURS ON THE SPOT**

As illustrated below, most of the time the existence of Romany nationality schools or student hostels are not the consequences of generous donations of the state budget. The following list introduces the names of the institutions, their location, the date of foundation and the name of the founders/maintainers:

1. Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre and Primary School, Kazincbarcika (1988- ), Roman Catholic Church of Hungary.
2. Kalyi Jag Roma Minority Vocational Secondary School, Budapest/Kalocsa, Miskolc (1994- ), artist and musician Gusztáv Varga.
3. Kedves (Nice, sweet, amicable, dear, gentle – in Hungarian) House Student Hostel, Nyírtelek (1995- ), For the Children SOS '95 Foundation (founded by a teacher, Lázár, Péter)
4. Dr András T. Hegedűs School, Szolnok (1996- ), Foundation for Integration in Education.
5. Collegium Martineum, Mánfa (1996-2008), run by a foundation attached to the Catholic Church in Germany and also received funding from Soros Foundation.
6. Józsefváros Day School (Tanoda) (1997- ), Józsefváros Day School (Tanoda) Foundation.
7. Little Tiger Vocational School, Alsószentmárton (2004- ), “Gate of the Dharma” (Doctrine) Buddhist Church.
8. Dr. Ámbédkar Secondary Grammar School, Sajókaza (2007- ), „Dzsaj Bhím” Buddhist Community.

With all the examples and initiatives introduced above relating to Romany minority educational institutions one might wonder where the

challenge is when such a colourful scenario can be introduced in a country of ten million people. The essential challenge is in the character of the maintainers of these model institutions: they are churches and foundations although by legislation the provision of equal opportunities in education is a basic, declared function of the state. Most of the models are constantly struggling with financial issues which consume time and energy that could be spent on professional (educational) development.

The institutions introduced reach only a slight proportion of those whose equal opportunities are more than dubious, and being isolated educational centres their effectiveness can most probably be traced on a local rather than a more widespread, nationwide level – none of them deals with more than 250 students at a time.

## **V.2. A SCHOOL WITH SYMBOLIC VALUE**

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The central topic of my dissertation is the formation and achievements of the Gandhi School. My research was carried out amongst the daytime students and on the second chance department of the school between 2006 and 2009.

### **V.2.1. THE HISTORY OF THE GANDHI SCHOOL REPRESENTED IN THE PRESS**

While searching for the history of the school in the press I have examined more than two hundred articles. Among these articles there are

publications of numerous genres: interviews, reports, coverage, panels and messages. There are several forms of press releases that have been focusing on the school and the events that can be connected to this institution since the intention of starting the school became public (April, 1992) up till July, 2009. Amongst this written media we can find Hungarian:

- weeklies, such as *Heti Világgazdaság* (Weekly World Economics), *168 óra* (168 Hours), *Magyar Narancs* (Hungarian Orange), *Hetek* (Weeks);
- educational journals, like *Köznevelés* (Public Education), *Fejlesztő Pedagógia* (Conducting Education);
- University and youth papers: *Faktum* (Facts), *KIDS*, *Pécsi Campus* (Campus of Pécs);
- nationality papers: *Barátság* (Friendship), *Amaro Drom* (Our Road), *Világunk* (Our World);
- national monthlies, such as *Kritika* (Critics) and *Beszélő* (Talker);
- and a county paper of Baranya: *Diskurzus* (Discourse).

Though the sources are rich in my thesis I concentrate on the most read Hungarian papers described as primary sources. Articles examined can be listed according to particular focuses such as the following themes and topics:

- formation of the Gandhi Foundation (1992);
- finding a place for the world's first Roma minority nationality school (1992-1993);
- "school start" (1994);

- the Gandhi Foundation becoming a Public Foundation (1995);
- financial issues;
- philosophies behind the institution;
- portraits of the teachers of the school;
- necrology of an emblematic director, Mr Bogdán (1999);
- initiation ceremony of the gymnasium of the school (1999);
- first maturity exams (2000);
- opening ceremony of the real school building (2002);
- 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school - library extension (2003);
- everyday life of the school;
- the school as a (mostly symbolic) venue;
- complaints of citizens living in the neighbourhood of the school;
- debate about the school's new directorship in the 15<sup>th</sup> school year (2009).

Since the foundation of the school negative attitudes of the majority of the society can be traced while reading the articles. Citizens of two county centres, Kaposvár and Pécs articulated their disinclination towards the institution several times in forms of petitions in local dailies and at the municipalities.

Although the original idea of the founders of the school was to build a network of Romani nationality schools, only one institution started by Gandhi Foundation. Building the complete infrastructure of this grammar

school (school building, gymnasium, library, student hostel) required more than a decade. Today objective circumstances of the school are satisfactory.

According to visitors various pedagogical methods are applied in the classrooms of the school and the overall climate of the institution is mostly represented in a positive way between January, 1994 and June, 2009. Several prestigious statesmen honored the school personally and within this period the leadership of the institution received positive feedback from national and international political and human rights audience.

On the other hand numerous conceptions of the founders/school management remains unrevealed. The teaching-learning work started six months later than it had been planned originally. Instead of realising the vision of 350-400 daytime students at a time the average sum of students per year changes between 200-250 students – the same number of adults study at the second chance department. Although numerous volumes related to Gypsy Studies have been published by the maintainer of the school, a nationwide pedagogical centre for Romani Studies has not been born. Until June, 2009 no pre-university courses started at the school that would reinforce students' study skills after taking their A levels.

Due to the weak civil sphere in Hungary the maintainer of the school, the Gandhi Foundation transformed into a Public Foundation during the autumn of 1995. This setting provides the necessary financial background of the institution as most of the finances is provided from the annual national budget. The support per students is 2.5 times more in the Gandhi School than that of an average secondary school student. From June 2009 decision making of the Board of Trustees became unable.

## **V.2.2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF DAYTIME STUDENTS**

A significant number of Romani intellectuals have not been trained in the secondary school during its first 15 years. 281 daytime students of ten graduations between 2000 and 2009 received their A levels in the Gandhi School. Occupations traditionally seen as white collar jobs such as medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, economists have not been successfully targeted by graduates. Most of those who applied to tertiary education continued their studies as teachers or social workers.

During the first six years of functioning its students took part in education that lasted for six and a half years. The system changed to an optionally six or four year long training afterwards, and from September 2004 students normally take part in four graded education. Those who are the most talented but come from the biggest social handicap can take an extra year of competence improvement before starting with the general four grades of secondary education. Two graduates of the first five year long programme were accepted to preparatory courses of the Harvard University in 2009.

Compared to other secondary school students in the city Gandhi students' achievement is relatively poor. After 15 years of its functioning at the end of the first term in the schoolyear 2008/2009 grades given to students in the Gandhi School in the case of most subjects is weaker than grades of students attending other schools. Disciplinary problems can be traced along teachers' feedback and the number of unattended lessons.

Paradoxically the maintainer of the school did not indicate among its expectations the Romani nationality nature of the school according to the report on the partners' satisfaction survey taken in 2006. Its nationality characteristics are articulated in the curricula of the school: Romani (Lovari dialect) and Boyash Gypsy language classes and Gypsy Studies are taught. Students are motivated to study these subjects; their positive attitude towards these fields can be observed while investigating their grades.

The school often hosts the final of the nationwide competition in Gypsy Studies. "Gandhi Days" are organised annually where colourful programmes are offered to participants. The presence of FUND Arts School offers extracurricular activities in preserving Gypsy culture – students can take traditional music and dance lessons.

There were two teachers of Gypsy/Romani origin in the staff in 1994, when the school started. This number increased to 11 by the 15<sup>th</sup> year of its functioning. Six of those teachers were once Gandhi School graduates in 2009.

### **V.2.3. SECOND CHANCE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

Altogether 167 students both Roma and non Roma attained their A levels at this department of the school between 2004 and 2009. Both integration and innovation have significant indicators at the studied institution. From the interviews and the questionnaires I have processed I found evidence to my supposition, i.e. that there is connection between the innovative educational methods that are being used during the teaching-

learning process and the integration being realised at the Second Chance Department of Gandhi Secondary Grammar School.

Concerning integration I found the indicators below the most significant:

- Equal representation of Roma and non-Roma students;
- Establishing close personal relationships between different nationalities - each of the followings done together (!):
  - free time activities,
  - self-organized study circles after school,
  - planning/realising getting into higher education,
  - helping each other with taking up positions at the labour market;
- Altering prejudice among students;
- Modifying prejudice of students' micro-economies (family members, friends, etc);
- Changing negative attitudes towards different nationalities;
- Involving members of students' micro-economies to the teaching-learning process of the department - in this way spreading the realisation of integration.

Besides integrative indicators the most innovative factors of the school can be summarised, too. The most important ones are:

- innovation of subjects and methods, such as
  - introducing new moduls, blocks of subjects (e.g. social science versa history),
  - a locally developed subject: Romany studies,

- trainings on methodology of learning each term,
- study help developed by teachers (e. g. guides to use books),
- requirements *during* the terms (versa end of term evaluation only),
- methods of student requirements (projects, net-surfing),
- using ICT in education,
- pair and group work of students;
- extra curricular activities built in (Roma festival, visiting museums, analyzing movies);
- personal qualities of teachers (empathy, openness, energy, patience);
- presence of highly qualified Roma teachers;
- cooperation in innovative nationwide projects.

## VI. FURTHER RESEARCH OPTIONS

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My thesis may become a fundamental source for future researchers. Those who consider founding Gypsy nationality schools alike can learn the lessons of the first experiment of its kind. The dissertation also aims at summarising the achievements of a historically important period, that of the Transition Years. Because of these characteristics the history of Romani nationality education and the case of the Gandhi School represent a symbolic message of new born democracies of Eastern Europe.

Systematic, ministry or institution driven follow up of Gandhi graduates has not been started until June, 2009. Tracking the career of once

Gandhi students may be an important research topic as we could conclude the possible effects of Romani/Gypsy nationality education even at an inter-generation level. Follow up research is considerable amongst those who graduated on the second chance department of the school as well.

The decade between 2005 and 2015 is devoted to Roma Integration. This is the time to carry out research on relevant issues, as there is lack of reliable, well-constructed studies that would enable decision makers of education policy to focus more closely on one particular model institution. Action for and with the Roma is essential today not only in Hungary – this is why I am publishing my research findings in English as well (Dezső 2007; Dezső 2009).

Twenty years after democratic changes in the political structure of our country a particularly significant marker, minority nationality education does not show either satisfying or optimistic results. Different educational policies and approaches intending to solve the “Romani issue” have failed and Gypsy minority education faces more challenges than twenty years ago. Legislation provides opportunities; policy-making, still it has not proven to go hand in hand with a theoretically given framework and real options.

Democracy has to be born in people’s minds, in our ways of thinking, judging, decision-making, and acting in everyday life situations as much as in realising the ideas of those who proclaim equal chances when introducing acts based upon basic human rights. Martin Luther King had a dream in 1963 and the United States of America has an Afro-American president today, in 2011. Shall we have a Prime Minister coming from the Romany/Gypsy minority in another twenty five years?

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