

**UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS
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LIFE PATHS OF ROMA, GYPSY YOUTH

Research on a Roma youth support extracurricular
("tanoda") programme

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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Topic and aim of the study

In general there are not many information about those Roma students' lives, who despite of the earlier trends choose secondary school in the middle of the 1990's. In the families of these Roma students secondary education was unknown; the parents of them had lower education. There are even less information about those initiatives, programmes and extracurricular activities from the 1990's what supported Roma students.

This research aims to gain information on the field of education science and Romani studies in order to provide more knowledge about Roma students. On the other hand, this research contains life path interviews, what make possible to understand on a better way the actual processes of the society in relation with integration. These interviews might provide a great help to recognize the problems of those Roma people who are already working as intellectuals but their children are still facing with difficulties in inclusion.

Gypsy, Roma students and education in Hungary

Researchers are paying attention on Roma students in education since the beginning of the 20th century when more Roma students enrolled to education. Before 1945, only half of the Roma children went to school (and only for a few years). (Kemény, 1996) Between the two world wars, the Hungarian authorities made great efforts to expand four-class education and, in parallel, to resettle migrant gypsies. However, according to a survey conducted by István Kemény et al. In 1971, 50% of Gypsies between the two world wars, the 35-59 years old at the time of the survey, never went to school. (Kemény, Janky & Lengyel, 2004, p. 77) As a result of social researches in the 1970s, education policy and education researchers turned their attention to the problem of the education of Roma

students. The studies analyzed the relationship between school and social mobility on the one hand and the causes and consequences of educational and social inequalities on the other. The results of sociological research in education (Coleman, 1966; Gázsó, Pataki, Sántha & Várhegyi, 1970; Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu, 1978) have revealed that certain social groups have less chance of changing their social status, their life chances are determined by their origin.

1966 study by Coleman also showed that students' school performance is determined first and foremost by the socio-economic status of their parents, and just secondly influenced by school. Hungarian researchers also achieved similar results. The role of the family is decisive for the chances of social mobility, and the education and occupation of the parents greatly influence their children's vision and opportunities. (Gázsó, 1971; Andorka & Simkus, 1983; Andor & Liskó, 2000; Kertesi & Kézdi, 2005; Havas & Liskó, 2006; Messing & Molnár, 2008) The social status of Roma parents is generally characterized by low educational attainment and unskilled education. As a result of which their labor market chances are worse than those of the majority of society. The employment crisis in the aftermath of the regim change hit the Roma families hardest, as firstly the unskilled and low-skilled workers lost their jobs and became long-term unemployed. (Kemény & Havas, 1996; Forray & Hegedűs, 1998; Kertesi & Kézdi, 1998) Education was the only possible way for their children to break out. Research conducted at the end of the 1990s (Andor & Liskó 2000; Havas & Liskó 2006; Messing & Molnár 2008) proved that at the time of choosing a career some Roma parents had concrete ideas about the future of their children. The higher the educational level of the parent and the more the child was educated, the more likely it was that the parent had a realistic idea of his or her future occupational decision. Promoting and supporting the success of children at school – compensating for disadvantages - became increasingly important in Hungary in

the 1990s, with the aim of providing children with an opportunity to break out of poverty. The most important legitimate ways of doing this were through the education system and extracurricular opportunities. From the 1990s, the pursuit of integration has emerged as a view in the education system, with children from different social backgrounds aiming to reduce disadvantages for disadvantaged students and/or Roma students in addition to students with disabilities.

In the early and mid-1990s, support programs, scholarship (Roma Foundation, Soros Foundation, Public Foundation for National and Ethnic Minorities) and educational institutions (eg. Gandhi Grammar School, Collegium Martineum, Roma Chance, Kalyi Jag, etc.), as well as educational initiatives started to spread. By the end of the decade, education policy discourse had changed.

It is difficult to determine to what extent educational and empowerment programs and educational policy efforts since the 1990s have contributed to compensate the disadvantages of Gypsy students, thereby increasing their social mobility and improving their quality of life. Various studies (Havas & Liskó, 2005; Arató & Varga, 2005; Németh & Papp, Z., 2006; Kézdi & Surányi, 2008; Messing & Molnár, 2008; Havas & Zolnay, 2011; Varga, 2015) have shown that after the change of regime especially in the period after 2000, the issue of the education of Gypsy students became central. Later it changed with the creation of the category of disadvantage, and it became evident that the socio-economic status of the child is significant in the school's success. In the case of Roma students, several targeted support programs were launched during the decade following the change of regime, with the aim of intervening to increase social and educational opportunities, and intervened at the appropriate time (eg. career orientation). It has become evident that for the good functioning of society, there is a need for support programs that increase the chances of the Roma, outside of the educational system (school), aimed at the success of the school.

The research

Aim of the research

The study analyses interviews with Roma, Gypsy adults from the Southern Transdanubia region of Hungary who lived in segregated neighbourhoods or settlements. Despite socio cultural disadvantages, all participants have completed secondary- or higher education studies and attend the same career orientation program between 1994 and 1999. The aim of this study is to contribute to research regarding the mobility and education of Roma population in Hungary and what factors support or hinder their employability and/or marketability.

There are two main goals of the study: firstly it aims to provide a ‘snapshot’ about those Roma youth, who started their secondary education at the same time and today they are 35-45 years old. The following topics are discussed in details: what are these people working nowadays, how they are thinking about different questions, what kind of values do they share, what kind of life goals they have, and on which level are they to reach these life goals. In addition, during the education or social mobility what strategies did they choose: integration or assimilation? The research aims to find and analyse those supportive factors and those obstacles what effected the education, the employment, the labour market situation and social mobility of these young Roma people.

On the other hand, the study introduces the OBK Association and its programme for Roma/Gypsy students and/or students with disadvantaged social background.

Target groups

1. 35 Roma people who born at the beginning of the 1980’s participated in half structured interviews. 20 of them participated in life path (in depth) interviews. These people were member of the same supportive programme during their studies

but later on continued on different career ways. All of them have baccalaureate or university degree.

2. During the research it turned out that the *Amrita Orientációs Baráti Kör* Association had an important role in the life of these people, so the association was analyzed as well.

3. The founders, teachers and social professionals of this association participated in half structured interviews (12 people). The aim was to get know the goals, experiences, values, motivations and pedagogical tools, methods of this association's extracurricular programme.

Hypotheses and research questions

H1: It is assumed that those Roma/Gypsy youth, who participated in the Amrita OBK Association's school supportive programme in the 1990's and entered to higher education, have higher social and economical status nowadays than their parents have.

H2: It is assumed, that the target group (the group of those students who were member of the OBK Association) became educated professionals of their own fields and at the same time they have strong Roma/Gypsy identity and feel engagement in order to support Roma, Gypsy population.

H3: It is assumed, that the Amrita OBK Association applied such innovative pedagogical tools and methods in its school supportive extracurricular programmes from the 1990's, what helped Roma/Gypsy students to succeed in school.

Questions relating to the qualitative (life path interviews) research:

1. At what level happened intergeneration or intrageneration social mobility in the life of these Roma/Gypsy people?

2. How does the education effects the labour market situation of Roma/Gypsy youth?

3. What kind of supportive factors and obstacles could be identified in the life paths of Roma/Gypsy adults?

4. What kind of 'school life paths' (educational mobility) could be identified in the life of Roma/Gypsy adults?
5. What do the Roma/Gypsy adults think about Roma/Gypsy – Hungarian identity and intellectual identity?
5. At what level have changed the lives and the values or norms of these youth Roma/Gypsy adults as they reached higher education?
6. How do these people visualise their future?

As the part of the qualitative research the teachers and other professionals from the Amrita OBK Association (who were members between 1994 and 1999) participated in half structured interviews. The related research questions were:

1. What type of professional experiences and qualification they had at the time of their Amrita OBK Association work between 1994 and 1999?
2. What kind of pedagogical methods and values did they use and felt important?
3. What was the opinion of the colleagues about the integration of Roma population?

Research methodology

During the research quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The founders and colleagues of the Amrita OBK Association (those who worked for the association between 1994 and 1999) provided information in the interviews. In addition, they contributed the research with different documents as well, such as letters, photos and the „Csodalámpa” student magazine (written by former students of the association). Based on these information and documents from the period of 1994-1999 the former students of the association from this time could be identified (60 students). 35 students of these participated in the research that were founded by the help of snow-ball method and by the help of the above listed information.

Results of the research

The first main question of the research was that at what level happened intergeneration or intrageneration social mobility in the life of these Roma/Gypsy people?

Based on the interviews it turned out that all of the asked former students reached higher education and better social situation than their parents did. They have better life conditions than their parents. It means that intergeneration mobility happened in their life. In addition, they reached not just secondary but higher education level as well, what means they were first in their families who entered to a level of education what was absolutely unknown before for their parents. However, it is important to see that the example of them was unique most of the time in their communities, their siblings or cousins and peer relatives did not follow them expect in really few cases. It means, that these Roma youth people succeeded alone, but intergeneration social mobility did not happen. Their life style and life conditions have changed a lot comparing to their parents and families. This difference in their lifestyles articulated in a physical and emotional distance as well. The further studies and than the new lifestyle provided new norms and approaches to these Roma youth people what they tried to communicate to their families but at the end most of them settled down in a distance from their families and parents. Nowadays some of them are working for Roma people, but not in their hometown. Only two of them stayed in their hometown, and try to work for the local Roma people.

The results show that higher education decreases the determination of social disadvantage and prevent the reproduction of poverty. Due to their higher education, their motivation and social capital the interviewed educated Roma people have better chances on the labour market than their parents had.

Among them those had even more difficult situation comparing to others who was in child protection programme or raised by foster parents. In their cases the importance of social capital and different helpers, such as peers or teachers is even higher than the other students who were raised by their own family.

The interviewed Roma people said they wanted to continue their studies in vocational schools, but Amrita OBK Association changed their decision and helped them in career choosing. Only one of the students attended to vocational school, the others entered to high school. It turned out, that this association and its programme changed the school selection mechanism in the case of these students. These Roma youth, who entered to high school, they continued their studies even when they already had jobs and/or family. Those dreams what they had as children could become true due to their studies and better social statuses.

Education mobility of the interviewed Roma people

The Amrita OBK Association aimed to help its students to enter high school. Only 1 of the students could not succeed his high school studies, but all the others have succeeded and continued on different life paths. The research identified 4 main categories of these life paths:

1. *University right after high school:* these Roma youth went to university as they succeeded in high school.
2. *Replanning:* These Roma youth have also applied to university after the high school, but they were not accepted. Some of them started other type of higher education (OKJ) or started physical work as they could not get an intellectual job with secondary education.
3. *Labour market:* These Roma youth did not wanted to go higher education after high school, so they started to work or in Hungary or abroad, mainly some type of physical work. However they had 2 type of decisions, some of them continued to work as they had no other support and needed the money. But some of them

realized that without higher education they won't have the chance to earn more money or they just didn't want to continue as physical workers.

4. *Attending to international programmes:* These Roma youth attended to different international programmes after their high school studies and just after these programmes entered to higher education.

Roma/Gypsy identity

It turned out, that the interviewed Roma people have 2 main type of how they identify themselves or how they think about their Roma/Gypsy origin. One type of „strategy” is that they identify themselves as Roma/Gypsy and try to integrate to the society together with this strong identity, undertaking all the positive and negative effects what come along with it. These people think about themselves as good examples, and by working hard and showing good examples trying to change the everyday stereotypes relating to Roma.

The other strategy is rather an assimilative way of living. Some of these Roma people have even changed their name in order to avoid all the influences what could reach them just based on their origin. These people try to prove rather to themselves and their families, and to the society that they are good professionals on their fields.

It is obvious that all of these Roma people still have difficulties in their every day lives and they try to prove to themselves and to their society. Even though, they share similar difficulties, they still 'fighting' alone in their everyday and have not established yet a strong Roma intellectual community. The personal successes of these Roma people shows that there are Roma intellectual adults but they are not visible yet as a unit. Building career is not just the goal of man but also Roma women among these Roma adults. They feel important and they support the educational success of their children. Beside the good economical status these

people are seek to gain cultural and social capitals as well. Beside the good job and stable income they feel important to gain appreciation as well in the society. They have long term plans what shows they gained different values and norms than what their parents had/have.

Conclusion

In the course of the research it became clear that the career orientation, chances and disadvantage compensation program implemented by the examined association was organized from the bottom, reflecting the problems and needs of the target group (disadvantaged mainly Roma students) in the period following the regime change. It was a great advantage of this association that it provided services directly and in a targeted way to the target group. Its novelty lies in the fact that in addition to the preparation of the subject, the students succeeded in school through extra-curricular programs aimed at compensating for the various socio-cultural disadvantages. The founders and employees of the organization shared similar values and agreed that one of the keys to social integration was to increase educational opportunities for disadvantaged, mainly Roma students. The association was innovative in its methods, as it incorporated less-known and / or applied project education, reading camps, individual and group subject preparation and experience-based learning into its complex services and activities following the regime change. The workshops tried to promote students' success in school through direct and indirect educational methods, whereby personal attention - (patronage) - in addition to preparing students for the subject - was also focused on solving their individual social problems.

The uniqueness of the programs of the Amrita OBK Association was in the personal services, reflecting on the individual problems encountered by mobilizing the community's resources (eg experiences, memories). The tutoring system only

officially meant that a professional (eg teacher, social worker) or co-worker was assisting, supporting a student in solving problems, because in fact, behind the tutor there was a whole professional team, a network, which helped the given students. In addition, to their personal and professional qualities, the implementers also created a professional community using their social capital.

According to the research results, 20 years after the program, the majority of the responding young people have graduated and even have a university or college degree. The members of the Amrita OBK Association went to high school at a historic time when further education was less visible for Gypsy students and their chances were low.

The extracurricular complex program of Amrita OBK Association for School Success, which promotes school success, was a social experiment for disadvantaged, mainly Gypsy youth, reflecting the social problem of the time and space, thus becoming an innovation model. It was not called a school, but there are many examples of activities and services in the late 1990s that began in the early 2000s as civilian school initiatives. Nowadays, social space and time have also changed, problems have differentiated, and it can be seen and experienced that promoting disadvantaged and mainly Gypsy students to school success and reducing early school leaving is more of a systemic problem in education. The program of the Amrita OBK Association focused on Gypsy youth living in the South Transdanubian region, the number of young people enrolled in the research period was 60, and due to its relatively small number it was able to function as a “family-like community”. If we want to increase the number of Gypsy students at school, increase their chances and equalize them, their access to quality education as a service needs to be improved. The AMRITA program provided the most opportunity to adapt the experiences and methods they have gained in helping and supporting Gypsy students to develop today's school-based career guidance

programs, community and identity building initiatives and out-of-school empowerment services.

I believe that the Amrita OBK Association's empowerment program as a social innovation is not primarily measured by the adaptability of services and activities. But in the past decades, practitioners and Gypsy youths who have previously worked at the Association have been pursuing professional and life-cycle reflection on current societal problems and have launched new (eg Collegium Martineum, Wlislócki Henrik Specialist College, Roma Specialist College, etc.) innovative and equal opportunity programs inside and outside of the education system. The Gypsy youth, the "Amritás" who used to plan the future as a primary school student, live in our everyday lives, people, women, men, professionals, gypsies, parents, helpers and role models, "ordinary Roma heroes".

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