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**The Integration of Gypsy Children in Light of the Education
Policies**

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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Reviewing the publications about education in the Catholic Church, we can see that in its role in education through the centuries, the Catholic Church catered primarily to families in better social standing while, not incidentally, paying attention to have an ideological attachment between the family and the religion. Following the centralization of education in 2011, state and local governments agreed to turn over the operation of several municipality-run schools to the Catholic Church and its organizations. Many of these schools are in areas where the majority of the students are most likely to be either gypsies or individuals from other disadvantaged backgrounds. Previous sociological publications (Csongor 1991, Forray 1998, Havas-Kemény-Liskó 2000) have proven that schools with predominantly gypsy students often provide a lower quality education. Even if these students complete their elementary education, many will drop out of the secondary school system, which, for them often means vocational schools offering unmarketable vocations. The goal of my research, performed between 2017 and 2018, was to examine whether the Catholic acquisition of schools likely to serve predominantly gypsy students may provide an opportunity for improvement in the integration and education of children from gypsy and/or disadvantaged backgrounds.

(gypsy children, education policy, integration, church education, community school model)

1. The Hypothesis

I hypothesized that: The integration of gypsy children in the schools acquired by the Catholic Church has floundered. These schools do not have the required pedagogical tools to overcome the socio-economic disadvantages these children face. Church operation of these schools has not resulted in a religious connection with these disadvantaged families, and the values of the Catholic religion that could be advantageous for cooperation with the gypsy community are not prevalent. This is largely due to the Church's historical lack of educational experience in working with students and families of lower social standing in their schools. As such, the changes in school operations following Catholic acquisition have only further strengthened and solidified the existing segregation and educational failures for gypsy children.

However, successful integration could be achieved by transforming these schools into community-based institutions that could serve as the town's social center, where, programs for integration and the tools for inclusive education and school-based social work prevail. This transformation would be aided by the Christian faith, which shares several values, traditions, and heritage with the gypsy community.

2. Sampling process

I considered all of the elementary schools operated by the Catholic Church in the 2016-2017 school year as the base population. Since a student's Roma minority status cannot be documented, I used the following criteria to predict which schools were likely to have a majority of gypsy students:

- a) Schools located in municipalities that are designated as disadvantaged or temporarily disadvantaged based on the government decree from 2015 (*Government Decree 105/2015. (IV. 23.)*).
- b) Schools where, based on legislation, the number of disadvantaged students and students with multiple disadvantages is highest (data from the Educational Authority). This determination was based on data from October 2012 as the numbers were drastically decreased by subsequent changes in the definitions in the Child Protection Law and the majority of schools were transferred to the Catholic Church for operation during the 2012-2013 school year. Schools where the number of disadvantaged students (DS) and students with multiple disadvantages (SMD) reached 40% of the total enrolled students were used in the sample.
- c) Schools located in areas where the 2011 census data indicated a significant number of families that identified themselves as gypsies.
- d) Schools with dedicated gypsy/Roma ethnic programs.

Table 1. The towns of the dioceses in the sample

Diocese/Church Organization	Schools
Diocese of Vác - Roman Catholic	Borsosberény, Cserhátsurány, Mátramindszent, Nagykáta, Nógrádsipek (5 schools)
Diocese of Eger - Roman Catholic	Apc, Borsodszentgyörgy, Encs, Felsőzsolca, Hangony, Hernádkak, Kál, Kótelek, Nagykörű, Sajólad, Sajópetri, Serényfalva (12 schools)
Exarchate of Hajdúdorog – Greek Catholic	Homrogd, Nyíradony (2 schools)
Exarchate of Miskolc – Greek Catholic	Nyíregyháza, Rakacaszend (2 schools)

Diocese of Pécs - Roman Catholic	Pécs (1 school)
Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta	Gyulaj, Tarnabod (2 schools)
Diocese of Debrecen-Nyíregyháza - Roman Catholic	Egyek (1 school)

3. Research questions

- a) By taking over the operation of schools where gypsy and other disadvantaged students are over-represented, does the Catholic Church either strengthen the pre-existing practice of segregation or possibly create new types of segregation?
- b) Can the educational models of the Catholic Church successfully provide solutions to evolving social dilemmas, such as a small settlement becoming gypsy majority, or when both the state and the municipality “give up” their roles for operating the school?
- c) How prevalent are integrated educational methods in church-run schools where students are exclusively gypsy, or where gypsies are overrepresented in the student population? How well can integrated educational methods work in such schools?
- d) Can a Catholic school utilize Christian values in the education of disadvantaged and gypsy children? If so, how? What added benefit can a church operated school provide to their gypsy students over a state-run school?

4. Introduction of the research methodology

During my research, I utilized three research methodologies used in social sciences.

- a) I prepared a questionnaire for the principals of the target schools in the autumn of 2017.
- b) I interviewed teachers in the target schools using a questionnaire in the spring of 2018.
- c) I held focus groups with parents of students enrolled in the target schools. Five separate focus groups, with an average of eight parents in attendance at each, were held in the fall of 2018.

Participation in these focus groups was determined using three criteria:

- Parents recommended for participation by the school principal were excluded due to possible influence over them.
- Only parents who self-identified as gypsies were included.

- At least one focus group was offered in each identified diocese.

I sent out questionnaires to the principals of all 25 schools indicated in Table 1. 84% of the planned sample (21/25) filled out the questionnaires. Surveys were also sent to a total of 302 full-time teachers who worked in the indicated schools. 70.19% (212/302) of these were filled out and returned. I processed the data I received using the SPSS statistical methodology. Data from the teacher questionnaires is reported as averages and percentages. Differences between groups are compared using ANOVA. Statistical significance was examined at $\alpha = 0.05$. Categorical variables were compared using cross tables with significance examined at $\alpha = 0.05$.

I need to emphasize that this data is subjective and based on the image the teachers of the 25 schools have in their heads. This image can be, and likely is, distorted as it represents opinion rather than concrete facts. Objectivity in the sample could have been achieved by comparing the competence measurement results between church-run and not-church-run schools with students of the same social backgrounds. However, such a comparison can still give a distorted result. In order to create well-functioning groups from the questionnaires filled out by the principals, I would have needed 30 to 40 cases for each cell, but often I received 0 answers. In the longitudinal comparison, I primarily used the years 2013 and 2017 since the data from 2013 had fewer missing responses. The Church took over the operation of these schools from the municipalities or the state primarily in 2012. Due to data protection concerns I did not use the names of the towns, as they are more easily identified than the names of the schools.

5. Results

5.1 Based on the questionnaires filled out by the school principals

- a) The different, previously known types of segregation in schools can be identified through the analysis of statistical data using the following criteria:
 - The school is the only school in the town; however, a high number of students from the town are enrolled at schools in different towns.
 - The school is the only school in the town; however, a high number of students from different towns attend the school.

- There are multiple schools in town, but the identified school has very low enrollment compared to other schools in the same town.
 - The school is a member institution, with very low enrollment.
- b) The overall number of students enrolled in these schools has slowly decreased since the Church took over operations. However, this may also be due to demographic changes.
- c) In towns that are classified as disadvantaged according to the government decree, the number of students with multiple disadvantages barely reaches 40% of the total number of students in the school. However, it is unclear whether this low percentage is due to the self-advocacy abilities of the parents or the “influence” of the school itself.
- d) In schools where students with special needs are also enrolled, the majority of the children are disadvantaged or have multiple disadvantages.
- e) The homeschooled status is still used by the schools as a means of discrimination. In schools that have homeschooled students, all of these children are disadvantaged or have multiple disadvantages.
- f) The overall number of students that failed classes and were required to repeat a grade is not high; however, in schools where this occurred, the majority of these students are disadvantaged or have multiple disadvantages.
- g) 62% of schools reported serving children classified as “BTMN” (having social, learning, or behavioral difficulties). Of these children, 50-100% are disadvantaged or have multiple disadvantages. However, the necessary resources for helping these children remain quite limited. The number of developmental teachers has increased to one person in each of only two schools between the Church acquisition of operations and 2017. At the time of Church acquisition, only two schools employed full-time speech therapists. This number was unchanged in 2017. There were no psychologists employed at the time of takeover, and only one was employed in 2017.
- h) If we analyze the secondary school enrollment data, there has been no change in the previous trends since the takeover of operations by the church. While 60.3% of the total number of students enrolled in any secondary school are

disadvantaged students or students with multiple disadvantages, these same students represent only 0.038% of students enrolled in academic secondary schools (gimnázium).

- i) For extracurricular activities both in and outside the school, disadvantaged students or students with multiple disadvantages are either not present, or they are the only ones participating in the programs.
- j) Prior to the takeover of operations by the Church there were 7 reported cases of students repeating a grade because of the number of absences. This number increased to 12 cases in 2016. Five out of these 12 students were disadvantaged, and two were students with multiple disadvantages.
- k) The majority of these Church-run schools also lack adequate infrastructure and technical facilities. Less than half of the schools are in good shape, and nearly a quarter are in need of renovation. Scheduling the gym for physical education classes is a constant challenge, and in 44% of the schools, the daily use of desktop computers is problematic. These inadequacies are not likely to be due to a lack of funding, since the centrally provided per-student-funding is higher than in state-run schools, and additional funding is provided by the Church.
- l) Summarizing the personnel data of the schools: 33% of the schools reported teachers who were teaching subjects they did not have qualifications for. Those schools educating the highest numbers of SMDs were unable to hire more than a single teacher starting their career. In the schools with highest numbers of SMDs, there were no child protective representatives. None of these schools employed social workers, not even those where settlement rehabilitation programs were in effect.
- m) Examining the interaction of these schools with the local community, the relationship with the local Roma Minority Council was rated as least effective. Only 3 schools with over 50% SMD students reported a good relationship with the local Roma Minority Council. These relationships did not improve with available tutoring services. However, only 20% of the schools have daily contact with tutoring services.

5.2 Based on the questionnaires filled out by teachers

- a) The average age of the teaching staff is over 45 years old. Schools with the highest number of disadvantaged students and students with multiple disadvantages also had the highest average teacher age.
- b) If we do not consider being of gypsy heritage as a cause for disadvantage in the educational performance of students with multiple disadvantages, the teachers are more inclusive. If, however, we call the students gypsies, there is a greater division between the averages.
- c) Teachers with the shortest tenure in the school are the most likely to report that gypsy children would benefit from studying in segregated classes.
- d) Teachers consider the student's families to be responsible for the failures of gypsy children in school. The most often reported failures included their parents' irresponsibility, indifference, and the incorrect lifestyle of the family.
- e) 78.4% of teachers think that there are advantages to educating gypsy children in church-run schools, while 21.6% think there are none. The teachers describe the child rearing in gypsy families using largely stereotypical terms including restricted vocabulary, traditions that hold children back, and parental indifference. However, their presence and performance in the church run schools is completely underrated.
- f) 41.8% of the teachers think that there are advantages to segregated education for gypsy children.
- g) The teachers reported that either the students themselves or their families are primarily responsible when the students drop out of secondary school. Statements based on pre-conceptions and stereotypes received the highest scores.
- h) 41% of the teachers are "completely or strongly convinced" that the church acquisition of school operations was beneficial to disadvantaged students and students with multiple disadvantages.

- i) While methodologies such as cooperative learning, project methods, and drama pedagogy, are all compulsory elements of the IPR (Integrated educational system) continuing education program, only 30.59% of teachers reported using any of these methods. Overall, only 14.47% reported using drama pedagogy while 13.71% reported using project methods.
- j) Concerning contact with student's families, teachers reported that their primary reason for seeking to contact parents is educational performance problems. 82% notify parents of behavioral or lifestyle problems. Only 17% of teachers report family home visits, while 19% report that they have never been on a family home visit.
- k) Among the available integration programs, Útravaló was the most widely recognized by teachers, however, this program also got the worst rating. The tutoring (tanoda) program received a rating of 3.88 from 24 teachers, which is significantly lower than expected.
- l) When compared to state-run schools, the church-run schools had a better average in all reported metrics. The teacher-student relationships and the contact with families was rated highest in church-run schools while the children's performance was rated lowest. The teachers felt that the biggest differences were in the relationships with adults, the behavior of the children, and the teacher-student relationships.

5.3 Findings of the focus groups with parents

- Most parents didn't want to change schools when the church took over operations, so they left their child(ren) in the school.
- Parents do not feel there has been a change in attitude from the teaching staff toward their children since the takeover.
- Parents consider religion classes as a positive influence on their children.
- The parents have many complaints about the required educational work in the schools
- Parents do not feel a sense of ownership in or responsibility for the school their children attend.

- Parents feel that the schools’ relationships with their families is lacking.
- While parents consider the Christian approach useful in raising of their children, they often report that they are missing the religious programs from the school.

6. Recommendations

I have summarized my findings in the below table:

Table 2. SWOT analysis of the findings

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Parents consider the possibility of a religious upbringing as a positive.</p> <p>Parents find the Christian approach useful in the raising of their children.</p> <p>The school infrastructure is generally felt to be adequate.</p>	<p>Parents feel that the schools’ relationships with their families is lacking.</p> <p>Parents do not feel a sense of ownership in the school their children attend.</p> <p>Parents do not feel there has been a change in attitude from the teaching staff toward their children.</p> <p>Parents are missing the religious programs from the school.</p> <p>The high average age of teachers, especially in schools with high numbers of SMDs.</p> <p>Few teachers know or apply integrative education methodologies.</p> <p>Teachers are familiar with current integrative programs, but few participate in them and they underrate them.</p> <p>The ratio of DS and SMD is quite high among homeschooled, BTMN, and other students with special needs.</p> <p>The relationship with the leaders of local Roma communities is poor.</p> <p>Tutoring services are unavailable, or underutilized.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Nearly half of the teachers consider the church takeover of school operations to be an opportunity to educate children from gypsy and other</p>	<p>Strong preconceptions and biases among the teachers, particularly the younger ones.</p> <p>Teachers generally support segregated education,</p>

disadvantaged backgrounds.	<p>especially the younger ones.</p> <p>Teachers blame the student's families for the educational failures of gypsy children.</p> <p>Teachers blame either the students or their families when the students drop out of secondary education.</p> <p>Teachers have minimal contact with the families.</p> <p>The ratio of employees directly assisting the pedagogical work is very low.</p>
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From the above table it is clear that both teachers and parents consider the religious elements to be an important opportunity and a strength of the education in a church-run school. On the other hand, we have discovered many weaknesses and threats among the results.

In my hypothesis, I indicated that successful integration of gypsy students could be achieved using the community social model as an alternative to current educational practices. If we consider the values and norms of the Catholic Church and the Hungarian gypsy community, we can find many similarities that could serve as the basis of the above-mentioned model.

Table 3. The comparison of the values and norms of the Catholic Church and the gypsy community

Values of the Catholic Church	Traditions of the Gypsy Communities in Hungary (especially traditional families)
Respect for life	Opposition to abortion
Support for those in need	Respect for the elderly and the sick
The sacraments	Traditions of christening and funerals
Veneration of the Virgin Mary	Visit to holy places, pictures of saints in the home
Respect for families	Upbringing in the extended family
Building on religious communities	Thinking in the scope of gypsy communities

What would the school look like as a community platform?

- Becoming an open school would mean focusing on both the children and their families.
- Holding open presentations to future school children (kindergarten children).
- Organizing adult education for the parents (finishing elementary school, vocational training, and preparation for matriculation).
- Organizing extracurricular and cultural programs while creating inter-generation dialogue.
- Involving the local gypsy advocacy groups, including the minority council and civilian organizations in the work, including shared community cultural programs.
- Full-time support staff, including social experts and social pedagogues, should be employed at every school where the number of disadvantaged students or students with multiple disadvantages is predicted to be higher.
- Methodologies such as cooperative techniques, inclusive educational methods, activities to improve emotional intelligence, restorative conflict management, drama pedagogy, experience-based education (e.g.: board game pedagogy), and music programs should be introduced.
- An educational provider with an accredited program (possibly the Diocesan Catholic Education Authority) should be available to provide mentor-teacher programs. At the same time, the possibility of networking should not be discarded.
- Requiring appropriate sensitization training programs.
- Employing professionals and paraprofessionals to directly assist teachers with their educational work (developer teacher, speech therapist, psychologist, teacher's aids).
- Organizing Christian community activities that involve the whole family, such as pilgrimages, Catholic family days, Bible class for adults, religious classical music concerts, celebration of religious holidays, and parent clubs about topics interesting to the parents.
- Social work needs to be strengthened in the daily life of the schools. Family coordinators should be hired to maintain daily contact with the families. Case discussions should be

held as an introduction to methodologies of social work in education (conferences of teachers teaching the same class, an open room for parents bringing children to school in the morning, charity drives, establishing foundations, establishing a church sponsored scholarship to aid talented students).

- In addition to the already existing elements of talent management, there is a need for the establishment of a 4-year academic secondary school with a dedicated Christian/ethnic Roma program.

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