

University of Pécs
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
"Education and Society" Doctoral School of Education

Trendl Fanni

Student Society as an opportunity

Study of Gypsy/Roma Student Societies and their students between 2001 and 2018

Doctoral (PhD) thesis – thesis booklet

Supervisor

Prof. Dr. Forray R. Katalin

Dr. habil. Híves-Varga Aranka

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Introduction

During the mass growth and expansion of education, we have to pay attention to several factors: the aspiration of parents and children to obtain the highest possible level of education, increasing social demands, and the democratic requirement to increase the "schooling" and "education" rates. (Coombs, 1971) Educational expansion can also be observed in Hungary, which has affected different groups of Hungarian society to varying degrees. In terms of educational attainment, we are witnessing major changes and continuous growth, which has reached even the most disadvantaged groups most affected by social inequalities. Today, the gap between the Gypsy/Roma and non-Gypsy/non-Roma population in obtaining primary education is getting smaller. Due to educational transition, clearly visible differences and inequalities are shifting higher and higher, towards secondary and higher education. At the same time, however, due to the more failed learning events that start already in primary school, characterised by failure and repetition of the year, early school leaving poses a greater threat to Gypsy/Roma students. At secondary level, selection between school types, the risk of early school leaving, and graduation as a glass ceiling stand in the way of multi-stage mobility. The few in this group who reach the top level have overcome countless obstacles and become resilient.

The dissertation presents and examines institutions, also known as "vocational colleges", aimed at supporting social mobility for mainly Gypsy/Roma students attending higher education, most of whom are socially disadvantaged. These students and their families are affected by the aforementioned inequalities, but they have reached higher education and are striving towards a position significantly higher in society than their parents.

The thesis aims to contribute to the examination of the issue of social mobility with educational attainment. The research presented in the dissertation fits into the series of domestic (Kende, 2005, Bakó-Tóth, 2008, Feischmidt, 2008, Kóczé, 2010, Szabóné, 2012, Durst et al., 2022, Óhidy, 2016) and international (Garaz – Torotcoi, 2017, Bereményi – Carrasco, 2017, Mirga – Redzepi, 2020) studies. Research results and proposals can contribute to a deeper understanding of the functioning of social mobility programmes in higher education and help to identify the needs of disadvantaged Gypsy/Roma youth participating in social mobility. Accordingly, the thesis is not without precedent, since researchers working in the field of sociology and sociology of education have been interested in this topic for a long time, as well as in higher education pedagogical research in Hungary (Forray - Boros, 2009, Forray – Marton,

2012; Galántai 2013, 2015, Máté, 2015, Ceglédi et al., 2018b, Lukács – Dávid, 2018) deal a lot with the topic of vocational colleges – history, membership, mission, operation – so this doctoral thesis is based on numerous scientific results and tries to thread them together into a well-followable thread of thought. What is new is that vocational colleges supporting Gypsy/Roma university and college students have so far been examined in few doctoral dissertations and scientific research.

Research questions and hypotheses

In this dissertation we sought to answer the question of how, despite the existing social inequalities, it is possible to support individual educational mobility in Hungarian higher education in the most effective way possible. We started the discussion of this question by considering the social phenomena presented in the theoretical framework: social inequalities, social mobility and education, as well as social coexistence strategies in relation to Roma in Hungary. We then looked at the characteristics influencing educational mobility: disadvantage and multiple disadvantage, intersectionality and resilience. Subsequently, we reviewed the currently observable, measurable (individual and organizational) outcomes and solution options with the help of educational research: equity, inclusion, dropout and talent management.

Taking all this into account, we sought answers to the following questions and formulated the following hypotheses.

1. What are the objectives of the two organisations supported by Gypsy/Roma youth studying in higher education, and what social strategy do they pursue?

We assumed that in addition to the same objectives of Romaversitas and WHSz, differences appear at the levels of the Articles of Association and organizational operation, which can be identified along different social strategies.

2. What characterizes the students supported by the two organizations studied?

We assumed that the students of both Romaversitas and WHSz were first-generation intellectuals. That is, they jump at least one degree of education compared to the level of education of their parents, but in most cases two degrees of schooling.

3. Is there talent management in WHSZ, and if so, how does talent management work?

We assumed that, as a college of higher education, the WHSZ also places great emphasis on talent management for Collegium members, by which we meant involvement in scientific life and participation in the Scientific Students' Association Conference.

4. We were curious about the pedagogical characteristics of WHSZ in relation to the content elements of inclusion.

We assumed that the Henrik College for Advanced Studies in Wlislack has a mutually inclusive pedagogical environment that supports students' stay at the university, their involvement in scientific research and talent management.

5. We also had a question: what characterizes the success of WHSZ students?

We assumed that the students of the Henrik College for Advanced Studies in Wlislack are less characterized by dropping out and leaving institutions without qualifications compared to the total students of UP.

Method(s) and instrument(s) of the research(es)

We have been conducting our research since 2011 at the Henrik College of Wlislacki of the University of Pécs and at the Romaversitas Foundation. In chronological order, the last examination was completed in autumn 2018 at the College for Advanced Studies. It can be stated that in the dissertation we can see a longitudinal process, at certain points and moments in time the investigations were realized. Each research has different topics, so the methods of investigation used are also different. In this chapter, the order of the results presented later determines the presentation of the research methods used. During each research phase, we kept in mind Babbie's basic principles of social science research. (Babbie, 2002)

In the first chapter presenting the results, the thesis aims to present the organizational form, objectives, membership and pedagogical program of organizations operating in the (higher) educational mobility of the Roma / Roma population in Hungary after the change of regime in 1989-1990. This is when the Romaversitas Foundation will be presented. To describe the history, operation and pedagogical program of Romaversitas, we used the available

literature sources, which proved to be insufficient, so we conducted structured interviews with the persons who held the position of director between 2000 and 2016: Gábor Havas and Gábor Daróczi.

We learned about the characteristics of the students participating in the educational program of the Foundation from several sources. In 2006-2007, under the leadership of Gábor Havas, a research project was launched, in which all students of that time were visited and interviewed on their life paths. The results of the research were published (Havas, 2007), and Havas provided us with a table of hard data from the interviews, so we could use it in manuscript form, as a primary source. Gábor Héra published a monitoring report for the 2010 and 2014 membership, so we used it for secondary analysis.

In different ways both in time and space, the Henrik College for Advanced Studies in Wlisslock was established in 2001 in connection with the Department of Romanology and Sociology of Education of the University of Pécs. Among the programs supporting Gypsy/Roma university students, however, we highlighted this as the second, operationally significant organization. Compared to Romaversitas, we had more resources about the WHSz, both in terms of its history, membership, pedagogical program, and the effectiveness of the latter. Relying on these sources and expanding them, we have conducted empirical research ourselves at various times, focusing on equity, inclusion, dropout, and talent management.

With regard to the foundation of WHSz, we carried out a documentary analysis of the Articles of Incorporation and the application material on which the launch was based. They are placed in Annexes 2 and 3.

In this case, too, we refer to two executive interviews with the founder of the organization: Katalin R. Forray and Aranka Varga, who has been leading the organization since 2004. The skeleton of the interview with them is identical to the skeleton of the interview with the directors of Romver.

We conducted a survey among WHSz members in 2013 and 2015 using the same self-completed questionnaire. The questionnaire is placed in Annex 5. The answers in the questionnaire are collected in a simple descriptive way and communicated in the thesis.

We carried out a comparative document analysis regarding talent management: we compared the elements of Balogh's talent management model presented in the Hungarian literature with the pedagogical program of the WHSz valid between 2013 and 2018 and tried to identify the elements. In addition, by presenting the results of the study summarising the scientific work of WHSZ students, we try to prove that the examined organization has achieved significant results in talent management in higher education.

For the presence and operation of equity and inclusion, we second-analyzed the results of a complex research conducted in 2015 (Varga, 2015) using a process-based model of inclusion. In the research, the researchers examined the elements of the complex scholarship program operated between 2013 and 2015 along the indicators expected by the participants and the sponsor. In the 2015 research, the results of questionnaire, in-depth interview and focus group surveys were examined using a model that is new in educational science (Varga, 2014).

Regarding student dropout, the author of the thesis began his own empirical data collection. We considered it important to place the data of professional collegium members in an institutional context, so with the help of colleagues working with the Neptun Study System of the University of Pécs, we collected information about the graduation and dropout data of WHSZ students between 2013 and 2018, which we then compared with the data of UP for the same period.

Summary of the results of the thesis

The author of this thesis started his professional and scientific work at the Department of Romanology and Sociology of Education and at the Henry College of Wlislack for Advanced Studies because of his personal motivation and commitment to reducing social inequalities. During his own student years, he experienced as a student that both WHSZ and Romver play an important role in the lives of the participants, especially in terms of students' academic progress and community experiences. This dissertation was completed after long professional and scientific work. It is important for the reader to know that the author was present in the life of the organizations and Collegium members presented in the thesis as a student, professional implementer, teacher, tutor and researcher. This, of course, raises the question of the feasibility of researcher objectivity. The author leaves the judgement of this to the critics, opponents and the general public. What is certain is that now, while writing these lines, the author feels that the sentences written so far "sound" authentically. It is a difficult task to write about social inequalities and their changeability, especially in a society where social disadvantages – economic, educational, housing – are combined with nationality/ethnicity and thus the prejudice of the majority society. Yet we have attempted. For this, we used the terminology of the sociology of education and Romanology, as well as research methods and points of view. As a first step, we presented the changes in social inequalities in education and education in relation to Hungarian society, then we continued by outlining social coexistence strategies in order to understand the operation of the presented vocational colleges. We continued the discussion of

the topic by reviewing research on the educational attainment of Roma in Hungary, and then pointed out the characteristics and phenomena that further nuance the failure of Roma in the Hungarian education system. This is how disadvantage and multiple disadvantage, intersectionality were clarified and resilience was interpreted. After the input characteristics influencing school participation, we turned to the possible outcomes that can have positive and negative results of this process: equity, inclusion, talent management, dropout.

The results of the various studies are described in two major chapters. In the first of these, we presented and compared the characteristics of the history, operation and membership of Romver and WHSz. In addition to detailed descriptions, we summarized the results of literature history, executive interviews and our own empirical research using tables and timeline plotting. As a result of the comparison, we were able to identify two types of strategies – separation and inclusion – that appeared both implicitly and explicitly in the documents of organizations. Furthermore, we drew attention to the similarity of the target system, which also determines the operation of Roma vocational colleges established since 2011.

We found clear evidence of upward educational mobility of students in both Romver and WHSz, also plotted using a summary table. It can be said that two-thirds of the students studied are first-generation intellectuals, i.e. they are the first in their families to obtain a degree, which means at least one, but in the case of most students, a two-step leap compared to their parents' educational qualifications.

After upward educational mobility was proven in the case of both organizations, we sought to answer the question of how, in addition to compensating for disadvantages, talent management is implemented in WHSz. For this, a comparative analysis was carried out. The elements of Hungarian talent management models (Balogh, 2012) and the activities included in the pedagogical program of the WHSz became visible, identifiable and correspondable. To justify the activities carried out in higher education scientific life, we referred to the table summarising the TDK results, conference appearances and publications of WHSz students.

Talent management and disadvantage compensation can be present and effective in a pedagogical organization at the same time if they are done in a personalized way, responding to the individual needs and demands of the participants, treating their differences as values. And we can do that in an inclusive environment. The creation of this was explicitly mentioned in the pedagogical program of the WHSz, so the examination of it was essential for our topic. Using the process-based model of inclusion (Varga, 2014), a secondary analysis of the results of a complex research conducted in 2015 (Varga ed., 2015) came to the conclusion that inclusion has been achieved in certain aspects, but at certain points – involving students in the

design of programs, providing differentiated, individual content – further developments are needed to create a mutually inclusive environment.

Last but not least, in order to verify our above statements and research results, we examined the education and dropout data of WHSZ students between 2013 and 2018. For this, we used objective indicators and data contained in the UP study system and drew our conclusions: 17% of WHSz students left the University of Pécs without graduation. This raises the question of the degree of inclusion: can the organization actually respond to the needs and demands of those within it? However, if we compare it with the total university data of UP, which shows a 30% dropout, we can see that WHSz is more successful in keeping students at the university than UP.

Further research directions

In addition to writing my dissertation, I am constantly involved in research groups in this field of science, where the path of advancement in higher education and becoming intellectuals of Gypsy/Roma youth is examined. The Inclusive Excellence Research Group provided an opportunity for a questionnaire survey with current Collegium members, which we recently published. Our study highlighted the importance of an inclusive environment, including family, in a resilient life path. (Varga-Fehérvári-Trendl, 2023) The twenty-year anniversary of the Henrik College for Advanced Studies in Wlislack is accompanied by a complex study conducted jointly with the Collegium members, relying, among others, on the analysis of 50 interviews conducted with former Collegium members. We have already shared our first results at conferences and an edited volume has been prepared. (Trendl-Varga, 2023) Analyses are currently underway to give an account of as many sides of the topic as possible.

Further questions are also formulated along the questions asked and answered in the dissertation. In the case of both Romver and WHSz, it would be important to record retrospective interviews and analyze them in order to determine exactly how and in what ways the two organizations supported young people, and in case of their failure, what else would have been needed. Compared to the Roma vocational colleges established since 2011, we would consider it important to carry out similar research in order to provide even more effective support to the Collegium members currently in the "system".

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Biography of PhD candidate Fanni Trendl

Fanni Trendl was born in Budapest in 1986. His mother's parents were not Gypsies, working class, his father's parents were gypsies musicians from Újpest. He spent his childhood in Gyomaendrőd in Békés County with his enterprising parents and two younger brothers. He spent his secondary school years on the banks of the Tisza in Szeged, at the Compactkény István High School. He started his university studies at the University of Pécs in the autumn of 2005, Department of Romanology and History. In the summer of 2006 he was admitted to the scholarship program of the Romaversitas Foundation. In the winter of 2009 he became a member of the Henrik College for Advanced Studies in Wlislack, where at the beginning of 2010 he started working as an acting student leader under head teacher Aranka Varga.

In 2011 she received a special prize for her participation in OTDK, her supervisor was Aranka Varga. In the same year, he obtained his diplomas and was admitted to the Sociology of Education Program of the Doctoral School of Education "Education and Society" for full-time training.

During 2011-2012 he was a member of EQUITY – Association for Equitable Public Education and founder and president of the Eclekta Association.

From 2013 she participated in the complex scholarship program implemented at the Henrik College for Advanced Studies in Wlislack as project element coordinator, and since 2016 she has been leading the College together with Aranka Varga.

The College continues to operate actively with 17 students, providing space and opportunities for young people's academic and professional progress.

In 2014, he obtained an absolutionary from the doctoral school, submitting his doctoral thesis in autumn 2023 to the public procedure entitled "College of Advanced Studies as an Opportunity. Examination of Gypsy/Roma vocational colleges and vocational colleges."

Since autumn 2014 he has been working as an assistant professor at the Department of Romanology and Sociology of Education at the University of Pécs. As a teacher, the relations between the education system and society, the education level of the Gypsy/Roma population, inclusion and cooperative learning organisation are among others included in his course topics. Between 2017 and 2021, she worked as a professional expert in the EFOP 315 – Support for institutions at risk of dropping out of pupils led by the Educational Authority with national scope, where she participated in the development and implementation of trainings for teachers on the topic of educational segregation.

Between 2018 and 2019 he worked as a training developer and trainer in the EFOP 312 project entitled Methodological renewal of public education with a view to reducing school leaving without qualifications, where he participated in the further training of teachers in several South Transdanubian public education institutions in the field of cooperative learning organisation.

In 2019, he participated as secretary in organizing the XIX National Conference on Education. From June 2022, as an employee of the Romaversitas Foundation, she was the coordinator of the Budapest Roma Internship Program organized jointly with the Municipality of Budapest, currently titled Let's Go to Activism! program, from 1 February 2024 he will continue his work as the professional director of the Foundation.

He lives in Pécs. His daughter Anna is 4 years old.

Publications

The most important individual publications at the topic

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The most important co-authored publications at the topic

Aranka Varga, Anikó Fehérvári, Fanni Trendl: The Power of Community: Supporting the Learning Path of Roma University Students. Sosyal Bilgiler Egitimi Arastirmalari Dergisi / Journal Of Social Studies Education Research 14 : 3 pp. 117-144. , 28 p. (2023)

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