

**Approaching Diversity in Education:
The Case of Roma Pupils**
*Tuvojoties izglītības daudzveidībai.
Romu skolēni: gadījuma analīze*

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Abstract: The present study attempts to address the issues related to education of Roma children, drawing its theoretical basis from the intercultural approach, according to which education within the multicultural society should be unified and include all the collective identities represented in the school. Schools should therefore adopt a concept of national identity, which apart from traditional criteria (origin, language, religion, etc.) is also determined by political (participation, equal opportunities, social responsibility) and subjective criteria (self-identification of the person). In such a context and within the perspective of an overall holistic approach at the institutional and socio-economic level of the problems of the Roma population in Greece, the educational and social position of Gypsy children can be improved.

Keywords: diversity, heterogeneity, ethno-cultural identity, Roma, intercultural education.

Introduction

The present study examines the education of Roma pupils at the regulatory level, in other words, it views the framework of diversity management and the objectives pursued by the respective policies through an ethical approach. Of course, our approach also takes into consideration the analytical level, i.e. the educational reality, but aims to interpret it critically and provide justification through an interpretive framework regarding its various forms. Our theoretical tools for this purpose fall within the concept of collective (social) identity. Such an analysis can only incorporate the social context in which the school itself exists and to which its results return to.

Roma: factual data – existing situation

The term “Roma”, as used in this text and by a number of international organizations and representatives of Roma groups in Europe, encompasses various groups (Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Rodri, Ascali, Yenisi, Dom, Lom, and others), and also includes nomadic populations (nomads). It is also the most widespread term in international literature. However, our work uses synonymous terms, e.g. Gypsies, to remind the reader of the variety of names that refer to this group of people (Exarchos, 1996). The history of the Roma is linked to migrations over a thousand years ago from India or Egypt and from there to southwest Asia and Europe in the 14th century, then further on from Europe to America in the 19th and 20th centuries, while one last migration is linked to the collapse of the former USSR and the ‘eastern’ regimes in the European area – Gypsy historiography lacks homogeneity regarding the Roma population’s specific time of movement (Dafermos, 2012).

Roma live all over the world with most people living in Europe and more specifically in Balkan countries, but also in countries such as Spain and France, as well as Russia, etc. The number of those living in the Middle East, North Africa, Australia and the United States is smaller (European Commission, 2013). The exact number of Gypsies worldwide is difficult to calculate accurately, as many of them are constantly moving and generally elude official records.

In Greece, the Roma population is estimated at 200,000–250,000 people (a survey widely used is that of the National Commission on Human Rights that calculates the number of Roma people nationwide as 250,000 – residents and travelers) (Hellenic Republic, 2009). Their settlement areas are scattered in the Greek territory, with the largest population concentrations occurring in four regions: Eastern Macedonia-Thrace, Thessaly, Western Greece and Central Macedonia. Differences between countries are related to the countries of origin (Romania, Albania, Turkey, etc.), the religious affiliation (Christians or Muslims), to the language of communication, the degree of settlement (settled or nomadic), etc. Greek Roma are Christian Orthodox and speak the Romani dialect that is distinguished in various idioms (Avdikos, 2002, Terzopoulou, 1996).

The degree of settlement at a specific place differentiates the Roma, as follows: those who have a permanent residence, those who are semi-settled, that is to say, they have a permanent residence, but very often and for long periods move to other

places, and those who are in a state of moving (itinerant), living in tents due to their nomadic way of life. The established or semi-established Roma usually have Greek nationality, are registered in the localities of their place of residence and theoretically enjoy the rights of Greek citizens.

The living conditions of the Roma – especially those living in camps – point to a marginalized and disadvantaged social group within the Greek society regarding the access to social goods (health, education, etc.) and their public, social, and institutional visibility (Pantazis & Marouli, 2012). However, there are small or large differences in the economic and social situation between the various Roma groups (Moucheli, 1996). The gypsy population generally experiences a peculiar social racism with obvious effects on lifestyle, socio-economic status and in particular its educational position (Ntousas, 1997).

Scientifically established gypsy reasoning

This chapter presents the scientific discourse on the Roma, which, to a large extent, determines the identification of this nation by the scientific community, institutions and wider social system (Liegois, 1999, Fraser, 1998).

Since approximately the 19th century onwards, the Roma have been perceived as an almost homogeneous population group with unchanging ethnic-cultural characteristics (Okey, 1998). Their ‘character’ – the words “character”, “nature”, “physiognomy” are commonly used in describing the Roma identity – is described as being closest to nature and to a unrestricted way of life, free from the established social norms, filled with a sense of mystery. A wandering people with a cultural reference point in their oral language and social learning through the circumstances of life.

The distinction between Roma and non-Roma is projected as a virtual or real boundary between two incompatible worlds: exotic, primitive and nomadic on the one hand, rational, trained and socially adapted on the other. The utterance of such a word legitimizes the “We-Them” dipole as established and irreversible (Nord, 2006).

Theoretical tools used in the name of differentiation are moving into the field of collective identity. One of these is the concept of race that refers to the classification of populations based on inherent phenotypic characteristics. In case of Roma, the “innate” is perpetuated by endogamy and the nomadic way of life. The race adherents (gypsyologists) imply that any interference or blending is unacceptable and reprehensible, because this alters the collective identity and degeneration occurs (Papadimitriou, 2000). Extreme versions of this term are associated with biological determinism and heredity in the service of racist ideologies – hierarchical ranking of tribes based on inherent characteristics equaling biological inferiority – (Garner, 2010)) with incalculable consequences for overall humanity and the Gypsies in particular – during the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of Roma were killed in the name of racial purity and the implementation of eugenics (Lewy, 2000).

Over time, the criterion of race was replaced – mainly due to its suspicious relationship with biologism – by the criterion of ethnic identity (Mayall, 2004). Based on the ethnic identity criterion, Roma are distinguished as a group that in its

descent and origins differs from the majority national group. This approach does not address the sources of cultural identity, which may be complementary or a part of the national identity (e.g., Vlachs in the case of Greece). In the name of the cultural relativism, the differences on the level of collective identity end up considered natural. Once again, the interaction between ethnic groups is also considered to be reprehensible and unacceptable, not because degeneration will result, but because it violates the right to ethnic differences.

Ethnic-oriented speech, without substantiating the distinction between collective identities on a cross-sectional level, insists on the revival of diachronic criteria (origin, ethnicity, religion, language), aiming in advance to defend national identity in a logic entrenched way. In this context, Romiki identity is completely separated from the Greek national identity. The starting point for ethnic discrimination is the assumption that the Gypsy population is not a component of a continuous history that links the ancient Greek civilization to the modern day Greek civilization.

Ethnic (cultural) aspect as a criterion defining identity is so homogeneous and compact that it traps the entities of the Roma identity into predefined behaviors, teaching that they are altogether different from “others” (the non-Roma) (Gotovos, 2002). The emphasis is on cultural continuity through ethnic “spirit”. In no way does this reasoning change the assumption of alternative identities of the Gypsies in the course of historical time (Gheorghe, 1994).

It is now up to the recipient of the expressed established scholarly gypsy discourse to choose the version of Romani culture (Kabachnik, 2009). More specifically, if he chooses a physiological version of Romani culture, he is then led to a predetermined, metaphysical version of identity (inherent nature), or if he chooses the attribution of collective identity through “free” choice, which, after all, is not too open due to a system of hierarchical relations in any society, where the identity is not made by its supposed body but is attributed by the majority, it is therefore not consolidated and creates virtual borders of marginalization reproduction in the name of respect for differences and the alleged free choice of its providers. From both choices clear societal extensions emerge, as social distinction is attempted through cross-sectional and diachronic criteria.

To sum up, scientific reasoning perceives the Roma as a homogeneous category of people, who differ from each other. Such an approach draws on the so-called ethnocentric example, according to which nations constitute uniform population categories based on diachronic-objective criteria (language, origin, religion, nationality). At the same time, a distinction from cross-sectional criteria lies in the acceptable way of life, according to the patterns of the dominant group – national identity. .

Social representations and stereotypes

School as an institution becomes is called to manage the social recruitment and representation of members representing various socio-cultural groups, which it must teach. In this sense, it is useful to find out what social representations exist for the Roma. By recording these social attitudes, we will be able to broaden our interpretative ability of circumstances concerning Gypsy children in education.

Romani intake at the social level points to a stereotypical representation of the “other”. A normal social engagement sees strange/bizarre, odd and provocative people in the face of the Gypsies, whose gaze raises questions, rejections and fears to the outside observer due to their non-familiar way of life (Bhopal & Myers, 2008). These feelings are exacerbated by the image of a wandering people, along with widespread views of exotic features and a mysterious culture that characterizes it (Hancock & Karanth, 2010).

On another level, the Roma are equated with a socially marginalized lifestyle and living conditions (Vaxevanoglou, 2001: 25). The phrase addressed to someone living in degraded housing conditions due to need, choice or other reasons is well-known: “(How does) He live(s) in a tsantiri”. In this case, the word “tsantiri” is used in a diminishing way and refers to the typical Gypsy home. There is a similar characterization for someone who is financially in a tight position (see stingy) or has a limited sociability: “He is (living) like a Gypsy.” Here the word “Gypsy” collectively identifies the Roma population with the above characteristics.

The understanding of the Roma group takes a more aggressive turn when their lifestyle is perceived as a threat to local communities and to the Greek society as a whole (Landon, 2008). It is the stereotype of the itinerant, dirty and dangerous Roma. In this case, the Roma culture is considered a waste, the gypsy customs, traditions and rituals are perceived as pagan/satanic, the dress of Gypsies (especially females) is interpreted as obscene and their gestures offensive. The response of the dominant group threatens the Roma with eviction from public spaces. This can lead to degraded and unpredictable social situations, such as request for deportation of Gypsies from residential areas, as well as violent camp evictions, demonstrations to prevent Roma pupils from attending schools, and so on. When in such events institutional representatives of local societies are directly or indirectly involved, it results in informal acceptance of racist attitudes and social portrayals.

Another interesting point is that the social position of the Roma is perceived as a situation that goes hand in hand with their civilization and their nature (Divani, 2002). In other words, the social understanding of the Gypsies is the result of an artificial and crafted identity that some either imagine (without having met them) or determine their admittedly weaker and inferior social position in terms of access to material and social resources (Hancock, 2002: 61). It is another matter to say that someone is dangerous (e.g., to public health) and different to link and even identify the state of danger (e.g., living unhealthy) with their nature and culture, which means that the individual’s way of life is not going to change, and that the “healthy” should avoid/expel the “dangerous” in order to preserve their own health.

In similar cases of negative hetero-determination of collective identity, the holders of the “negative” identity internalize the negative image and learn to live and behave in accordance with the stereotypes and prejudices that they are accused of (Fanon, 2008). Such a way of dealing with the situation pours water on the mill of prejudice, and thus perpetuates the vicious circle of marginalization at the expense of the social group that suffers from it (Honneth, 2004: 352). A side-effect is the response of the Roma in an institutional or non-institutional way, which, in turn, may trigger confrontation with the dominant group.

However, in the case of Gypsies, hetero-determination is scarcely identifiable on the basis of formal general categories (origin/nationality, religion, language). Their almost half a century long presence in the area, where inhabitants are called Greeks, may shed some light on things. In the social representation of the Roma, they are less interested in whether they are Greeks, Orthodox or Muslims, and are more concerned as to what they are socially, something that does not always depend upon them, but is determined through their treatment by the institutions of the state and by the majority of society.

Moreover, as it will be analyzed in detail below, stereotypes and prejudices against the Roma and their general social acceptance and treatment undermine the educational position of Gypsy children (Gotovos, 2004).

The education of Roma pupils

Interpreting schooling data

Before entering the theoretical debate on Roma education, we must take into account the profile of such pupils in Greek schools. Summing up the data so far, the schooling rates of Gypsy children at all levels of education are the lowest among all other pupils, whether nationals or foreigners, and their position at school is generally considered the most marginalized – on this subject see: Zachos, 2007, Dafermos, 2006, Gotovos, 2004, 2002, Divani, 2002, Lydaki, 1998, Ntousas, 1997. Kindergarten attendance is very low especially in comparison with elementary school. Secondary education rates are even lower and reliable data for higher education is lacking. A common phenomenon is that Gypsy pupils begin attending primary school and then a gap occurs, which may last for a shorter or longer period, or even remain permanent in some cases. Very often Roma pupils, who are considerably older than the expected age (mainly the children of high school age) are enrolled, and this can be a reason for their withdrawal from school either because they do not feel comfortable being placed with younger children or due to their age they have to cope with various professional and family obligations. An equally important reason for discontinuing schooling is the treatment by teachers and other pupils, and generally by the school institution. For example, at times, deviating from current regulations, the Roma are placed in special classes and not in regular ones with the rest of the children. Furthermore, schools seem to treat the absence or periodic attendance of Roma leniently. Additionally, Gypsy children's school performance is poor and being tackled through compensatory education (e.g., integration division). Generally, these children do not have the support of parents, who have a difficulty to establish a contact with educational institutions, if the parents do not discourage attendance after a certain point. Finally, there is a number of children who are not enrolled in school at all, and this should be an even greater concern. All of the above explains why only a small number of Roma complete primary education and it interprets the high illiteracy rates (organic and functional) of Gypsies – the above picture is about the same in all European countries, see for example: Sobotka, 2011, Wiman, 2009, Levinson, 2007, Council of Europe & Unesco, 2007, Liegeois, 1997.

An easy interpretation of the disadvantageous educational position of Roma pupils is that the profound difference of Gypsy culture from the culture of

school is responsible for everything (Derrington & Kendall, 2004). Romani oral communication, for example, is considered incompatible with the school's and society's literacy code (Poveda, Cano & Palomares-Varela, 2005). Or, the nomadic character of the Gypsies is also considered to be at odds with the static nature of education (Karathanasi, 2000). The Romani guidelines are interpreted on the basis of the cultural criteria or, otherwise, the common cultural elements of the dominant group (values, norms, abilities, orientations, etc.). Such an interpretative formula brings the latter in confrontation with the school or makes the school a threat to their identity (Poveda & Martin, 2004). Consequently, the distancing of Gypsy children from such an institution is perceived as a natural and expected consequence.

What can a physical interpretation of cultural or socio-economic differences mean in relation to the educational problems of the Roma? Firstly, educational mechanisms are relieved of their responsibilities, covered behind the mantle of the school's mission to convey a single socio-cultural code for the inclusion of individuals in society. Secondly, for the sake of cultural or any other difference, social inequality is legitimized in the eyes of the "minority" (in this case, Gypsy), who wants to respect his or her way of life and in the eyes of the majority, to protect their rights or for reasons of national identity, or generally for the convenience of the majority group, wants the difference to be respected. Thirdly, the social position of the Roma as a generating cause of their educational position is not voiced (Kebachnick, 2009). It is well known in the sociology of education that social marginalization has its counterpart in education and thus completes the vicious circle of underdevelopment for the marginalized or "minority" group. Hence, the Roma are convicted and socially stigmatized as responsible for the educational situation of their children (Dafermos, 2006).

In the informal public opinion, the regression of the educational position of the Gypsies in their culture or their temperament is depicted in that "they are not cut out for literacy". The above phrase is mainly used to illustrate the causes of the Roma educational situation and not to declare the results. It ignores the fact that gypsy children may be able to respond to the needs and requirements of the school, if we have previously showed interest in understanding the socio-economic and cultural context of their group.

The school for Gypsies represents the stereotypical image the society has towards them and which, in the context of education, takes on an official character and equates with a system of values in direct contrast to the socialization of children in Gypsy society and with an institution that is foreign to their traditions and social organization. Such a school is considered a threat to their collective identity. From this perspective, it is possible to understand the negative attitude of parents and, consequently, of children towards the school and avoid considering their character as a result or as antisocial/anti-educational behavior.

In short, a holistic approach to the subject must take into account the structural factors that determine the social and educational position of Gypsies, as well as subjective orientations, which are always present and, in their turn, influence the life course of individuals.

Intercultural approach to diversity

The Roma's "misfortune" is that their relationship (common origin) with the ancient ancestors of modern Greeks – those considered "lucky" in this case are the Vlachs, the Arvanites, the Sarakatsans and others –, and, consequently, their collective identity, has not been proven, and therefore they cannot belong to the nation (Greek), even though they have been living within the geographical boundaries of today's Greece for over five centuries now. Included, in this context, is the discussion about the collective identity of the Gypsy group at least from viewpoint of the established Gypsy reasoning. There is an ideological/political and academic view that Roma identity as an ethnic difference should be respected and recognized in school. Since, as the devotees of respect for difference claim, there are no scientific criteria for the prioritization of cultures (according to 'cultural relativism'), each group or collective identity corresponding to one or another culture has the right to desire for respect of their existence on the basis of cultural criteria and to be recognized as such (ethnicity, language, religion, culture) in education and society (Gotovos, 2002). Any other treatment of identity is considered to be synonymous with its absorption or exclusion and its marginalization. But what can such an outcome mean for education and its social legitimization? According to one version, all languages and cultures represented by the collective groups must have a place in school (or in separate schools) according to the logic of cultural enrichment. In another version, the school must carry regulatory neutral meaning either in form of the parallel coexistence of all versions of the collective identity, or eliminating any regulatory message from schools. Let us take, for example, Roma identity as a linguistic identity. In either version, if we accept that Roma culture is basically verbal and incompatible with the official code of transfer of technical knowledge, values and socialization of the school, the questions remain the same. Within which regulatory framework will the selective function of the school as a condition of the respective social identity be called upon to play its role? In which language, formal or informal, will the transmitters of oral verbal identity be asked to communicate and negotiate? Calling upon the right to difference, the Roma will talk in their relevant code of communication, which will differ from that of the dominant group, and, according to the same logic, it will not discount its own communication code. Given the dynamics of power in society, the minority identity will be condemned to a permanently marginal position, since its own code may be respectable and recognizable at the social level, but it will not be functional. It is much more complicated, when the debate is extended to value codes and norms. The question here is indicative and quite exemplary, as follows: Through which procedural system will the differences be solved between the Gypsies themselves or between them and the Greeks? Or, to take it one step further, whether parallel coexistence can continue without tensions between the different collective groups?

In conclusion, maybe the request for respect of differences is to be annulled in practice, when the 'minority', despite any compensatory measures at the educational and social level (social policy), cannot compete on equal terms with the majority group? The question here is how equal opportunities are valued. The answer is, not by intent, but according to the results, because the results are specific, whereas the intention may sometimes be used as a policy of equality and in fact is the cover for

a definite legitimization of inequalities and lack of meritocracy. Indeed, as we have noted above, especially in the case of the Roma, their marginalized social position and systematic distinctive practices yield a negative identity, so any other equality debate is, at the least, inappropriate.

Viewing this from the perspective of the subject, should not the carrier of (actual or nonexisting) difference (supposed or not) be asked, how he would like to define his future in a society, wherein he lives either as a member of a national collegiality or an ethnic group? Every person has a personal identity, assesses and integrates things in his/her own way. Who and according to which lawful right could force anyone to adhere to the common ideas or have fixed identities? In the course of his/her life and due to various circumstances, the conditions for his/her integration into one or the other social identity may change. In this sense, why should a collective identity be considered an *a priori* fact and a sustainable entity?

Intercultural pedagogy as pedagogical reasoning (at regulatory level) and intercultural education in practice come to offer their own answers in relation to the above. We refer to an intercultural approach that begins with the equality of cultures as a starting point in order to arrive at peaceful coexistence within a single society through common education of different cultures represented in it, and not a divided society with separate education for each ethnic group. In order to achieve this, certain criteria must be met, the first of which is to respect the linguistic and cultural capital of “difference”, taking its position in the curriculum and school culture and considering it an important factor for the psychosocial and cognitive development of the students, which represent diversity (Chatzisavidis, 1999, Vasileiadou & Pavli-Korre, 1998). This way, a step towards the so-called cultural “meeting” of the carriers of ethnic diversity would be taken without hierarchies, prejudices and stereotypes (the second criterion). At a later stage, cultural interaction and exchange of different cultural standards in order to bring about the necessary cultural enrichment in school and society (the third criterion) (Damanakis, 1997)

Such intercultural reasoning brings educational outcomes like constant educational products and contents enriched by the different cultures represented in the school environment (Gay, 2010). In this respect, questions arise about the scope of information included. In the name of cultural relativism, can all the values be taught or transmitted? At this point, the intercultural approach is differentiated by the supporters of absolute relativisation of difference. Based on the intercultural theory, what is taught is subject to limitations imposed by common values and commitments based on human rights and the respect for man’s supreme and timeless value. In this case, of course, there is a sort of hierarchical assessment (of which the intercultural approach is accused as being theoretically unreliable). However, the achieved agreement is a result of dialectical contact and communication between the participants of the intercultural dialogue, and this is essentially a cross-cultural process and practice, since the criteria of each group (including the dominant one) are a part of a common study and acceptance, with the exception that the criteria are evolving (Govaris, 2011).

If that is the case, why should the Gypsies’ oral ability hinder a “common” education with the “others”, since it is recognized as a cultural asset for themselves

and a challenge to meet the dominant group in order to understand the Gypsy culture (answering the question, who the Gypsies are), and for their part, the Gypsies could adopt the literate culture, not degrading their culture but instead acquiring a functional instrument in the field of their formal or informal communication with the others.

The answer to the intercultural approach is that the inclusion of experiences (e.g. linguistic) of pupils with different ethnic or cultural references in the school curriculum will not only enhance learning, but will also contribute to an easier and more integrated access of pupils to the educational benefits, as the pupils experience the acceptance of the educational asset they bring to school as a mentally and psychologically liberating process (Gay, 2002).

Through such a process, the demand for educational equality is met at another level. A prerequisite thereof is the adoption of a more open and flexible criteria for collective identification of pupils by schools. Only this way can the school's priority be given to the formation of responsible, participative, conscious citizens, who are destined to live in a pluralistic and democratic society (Calogiannakis, Economou & Dera, 2003).

In this context, the role of the teacher is indisputable, since they are called to act as a channel for the educational content of the school to all pupils, which implies, on the one hand, the demystification of all the stereotypes and prejudices that hold the majority group bound within ethno-cultural unilateralism and, on the other hand, to contribute to the promotion of cultural enrichment – regarding the a general study on the role of an educators, see: Karras, 2011.

Educational programs for Roma in Greece

The first institutional measures for the education of Roma students were taken in the early 1990s and are in line with the obligations of an EU member state. For example, the Resolution of the Ministers of Education took place of the then EEC Member States (May 22, 1989) regarding the school attendance of Gypsies and nomads, as well as the program approved by the European Commission responsible for intercultural education, to which Greece should be aligned. As he did- apparently late – with the introduction of the intercultural dimension in the education of Roma pupils. They were in fact compensatory measures (see host classes, tutorial departments) with dubious educational results. In Greece, a structured pedagogical reasoning and a corresponding educational policy on intercultural education had not yet been formulated and until then interventions were limited to the setting up of working groups and the sending of circulars to the education directorates with a reason that sometimes incriminated the Roma because of their social position. This point highlights the important role of the General Secretariat for Further Education in the implementation of educational programs for the Roma, which continues today with mainly adult recipients – as the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, it implements actions through the Institute for Continuing Adult Education (IDEE).

Following the adoption of Law 2413/1996 “Greek Education Abroad, Intercultural Education and Other Provisions” (known as the Law of Intercultural Education), proposals are submitted by universities and the funding of research

programs by the EU begins as well as national resources for the education of Gypsy children. The program “Gypsy Children’s Education” is aimed at attracting Roma pupils to school, uniting them within it and reducing school drop-out rates – This program was implemented by the University of Ioannina with Professor Athanasios Gotovo as scientific coordinator during the first phase (1997–2001). In the context of the relevant actions during the first phase (1997–2001), a specific language material for the teaching Greek language as a second language and an alternative teaching material to support teaching in orientation classes and learning enhancement classes (*frontistirio*) were produced, as well as the educational material for training of the teaching staff. In the second phase of the program (2001–2004) entitled “Integration of Gypsy Children in School”, the main objectives remained the same, and pedagogical monitoring and support, building awareness and training, as well as and support of producing materials were promoted – This program was implemented by the University of Ioannina with Professor Panagiotti Constantinou as scientific coordinator during the second phase (2001–2004). After a two-year interruption, the third phase of the program started and was completed in 2008 by the University of Thessalia with the overall aim of improving the conditions for Gypsy school attendance through improving the conditions for attracting and retaining Gypsy children, at least during the compulsory education cycle, the improvement of Roma pupils’ performance through altering their education and changing the mentality of their educators, as well as that of Gypsy children’s parents – this specific program was implemented by the University of Thessaloniki, with Napoleon Mitsi as scientific coordinator during the third phase (1997–2001). Based on the data obtained in the evaluation of the above programs, all three phases showed a progressive rise in the number of Gypsy children’s school enrolment and attendance, increasing the time spent at school and reducing the number of school dropouts – for more information see: Omas Synergon Ltd. Evaluation of the project “Integration of Gypsy Children in Schools” [...], 2008, <http://repository.edulll.gr/edulll/retrieve/1285/218.pdf>, (accessed 9 April 2017).

The corresponding three-year program 2010–2013 “Roma Children’s Education” expanded its activities to adult Gypsy education and pre-school education, and involved the Roma in various roles as partners with the main role being that of the mediator – this specific program was implemented by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens/ Centre of Intercultural Studies, with Professors George Markou and Georgios Papakonstantinou and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki with Professor Evangelia Tresso – Fatourou and the Institute for Continuing Adult Education. After an interruption of the program, from 2016 the inclusion of the act “Inclusion and education of Roma children” has been made known in the Operational Program “Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning 2014–2020 – the operation will be implemented by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens in partnership with the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the University of Thessaly, where each institution will implement its sub-projects, taking into account the specific needs of the intervention regions and adapting the strategy as well as its tactics to it.”. The objectives of this Act include improving the school access and attendance of Roma children, the systematic attendance of school aiming at children’s progress in compulsory education, and, regarding those

who have left school, their reintegration into the education system was pursued. The implementation of intervention programs for primary and secondary school, including psychology, prevention of racism, segregation, dropping out, training and sensitization of educational staff, supportive actions with assistance of mediators. The implementation of the above program has not yet begun.

An evaluation of the above programs transcends the limits of this paper and may need to be thoroughly researched in the future. However, some general observations can be made, considering beforehand that the state supports and finances educational actions for the Roma. Our first observation is that the educational position of the Gypsies will not change as long as the social environment remains negative toward them. In this respect, positive intervention measures taking place outside the school context and focusing on the Roma's place of residence or addressing all those involved in the educational process (teachers, pupils, parents, etc.) are of a great value (Parthenis & Tseliou, 2012). However, after almost twenty years of implementing such programs, the problems of Gypsies have not significantly changed, which means that educational interventions should be linked with more general social interventions.

A second observation has to do with the inconsistency of the programs resulting from bureaucracy, which creates discontinuities not only in the implementation of the actions but also in their philosophy. The question is, as follows: Is the philosophy of a program defined by the state (education policy) or those scientifically responsible for the programs (especially when they change so often)?

A third concluding remark refers to the content of the pedagogical discourse and the educational policy of the Gypsy children's scientific educational programs. What is the pedagogical reasoning, and the educational policy? If we accept that the framework for introduction of the intercultural dimension in education was defined by twenty-one year old Law 2413/1996, things get even more complicated, as in our view this law reflects one of the many versions of intercultural pedagogy and education. We therefore come back to the need to formulate a pedagogical discourse on heterogeneity, which links education policy with educational practice in the context previously discussed in the above section.

National strategy for Roma integration

Based on the analysis so far, it is evident that Roma education can only be seen in relation to the social position of that particular group and general policies concerning it. In other words, few things will change for the Roma, if the efforts made at school do not meet with an equivalent effort at the level of society (housing, health, employment, administration) and all the more so, if there is no social awareness of the presence of the Roma as people with rights. In such a context, there is a need for a national Roma integration strategy in Greek society.

At the national level, the first comprehensive intervention for the Roma is part of the "National Program for the Social Integration of Gypsies", which was implemented during the period 2001–2008, with its basic principle of "active participation as a right and obligation of Roma citizens in the process of Social integration" and the main objective – the support of Roma housing in conjunction

with social integration interventions (Lefteriotou et al., 2011: 54).¹ The subsequent national Roma policy is linked to relevant EU policies in the framework of the ‘Strategy/Europe 2020 – the “Europe 2020 strategy” was adopted by the EU. in 2010 – ‘ for sustainable and inclusive growth in the European area. The strategy includes specific objectives related to employment, education, poverty alleviation and social inclusion for specific population categories (see Roma). As an example towards this direction is the European Parliament Resolution (March 9, 2011) on the EU strategy for social inclusion of Roma, which (...) “2. Recognizes that Roma communities face discrimination and / or frequent prejudices against them in many member states and that this situation has been exacerbated by the current economic and financial crisis resulting in job losses; stresses that Roma inclusion is a responsibility first of all the member states and the other EU institutions invite member states to fully cooperate with the EU and representatives of the Roma to develop comprehensive policies, using all available EU funds (...) to promote Roma integration at national, regional and local levels (...) 4. Calls on the Commission to: a) adopt priority areas for the strategy and above all: – fundamental rights, in particular the non-discrimination, equality and free movement, – education, vocational training and lifelong learning, – culture, – employment, – housing, including a healthy environment and appropriate infrastructure, – health care and improvement of Roma health and political involvement and participation of Roma in society, including Roma youth “ (Lefteriotou et al., 2011: 54).

The European Framework for National Integration Strategies for Roma people was adopted in 2011 – the Roma integration objectives were presented in the Commission’s announcement “An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020”, COM (2011) 173 / 5-4-2011 – and on this basis, the member states were called upon designing their policies at the national, regional and local level, committing themselves to significantly improving the living conditions of the Roma by 2020 – announcement from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘Steps towards progress in implementing national strategies for Roma inclusion’, COM (2013) 454 / 26-6-2013 In this context, Greece has developed the “National Strategy for the Social Integration of Roma 2012–2020” with the strategic objective of “removing the conditions of their social exclusion and creating the conditions for the social integration of Roma, Greek and foreign, legally residing in the country”. The above strategic goal is achieved through three sub-objectives: A. Securing and guaranteeing “dwelling”; B. Development of a social support network (in the areas of employment, education, health and social integration); C. Developing social dialogue and consensus through the social empowerment and participation of the Roma themselves.

As far as education is concerned, the overall objective is to increase the number of Roma children enrolled into and following compulsory education, and to ensure acquisition of the corresponding knowledge, skills and competences by

¹ P. Lefteriotou et al., *Whoever knows a lot, goes through a lot [...]*, 3rd edition, Athens, Foundation for Youth and Lifelong Learning, 2011, p. 54

2020. The specific underlying objectives are: a. Ensuring attendance and combating school dropout problem b. School integration of Roma at all levels of education and reduction of school failure; c. Combating stereotypes and prejudices of local communities, as well as the educational/school community; d. Raising the level of social, cultural and functional literacy of the Roma (including adults), and integrating them in the social context; e. Strengthening the relationship of Roma families with the school and promoting the positive effects of education in their lives.

As far as the financing of actions under the National Roma Strategy is concerned, two programs under the guidance of the Ministry of Education with a total budget of 11,287,500 euros were implemented from September 2010 until 2013. The program “Education of Roma Children” with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and a budget 8.387.500 and the program “Education of Romani Children in Macedonia and Thrace” with the beneficiary being the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and a budget of 2,900,000. Additional resources will be committed for the next period 2014–2020.

Despite the measures taken and funded for the social (and educational) integration of the Roma, the progress does not meet expectations, and much remains to be done in this area. Changes are required in terms of social treatment of members of collective identities that differ from the majority. This also applies to the political and institutional representatives of societies, who through their oral communication or actions cancel out the most positive measures or cultivate prejudices and stereotypes at the expense of the Roma.

This leads us back to where we started. Social integration of the Roma is primarily a matter of education through which the so-called intercultural skills are developed and the integration of each individual identity into hospitable unifying collective identities will emerge. The sooner this happens, the greater the possibility of any integration policies at European and national levels.

Conclusion

The educational situation of Gypsy children is a consequence of their social position, which, in turn, is a result of social exclusion and stigmatization of Roma identity as an identity alien to the majority, which is attributable to the very nature of Romani culture. Such a reading leads to two management options of Roma students assumed by educational institutions. The first is to exclude them from the school environment on the grounds that their culture is incompatible with it. The second option is their “parallel” presence in school and, by extension, in society, on the grounds that they have every right to retain the different elements of their culture and this request should be recognized by the majority group as a respect for difference. The results of both options were discussed above and consist in the marginalization of Roma at the educational and social level.

The question here is what kind of society do we want – whether it is to be a compartmentalized society with parallel collective identities claiming their survival in competitive conditions and conflict, or a society with common values and functional prerequisites in the public sphere? If the second solution is to be adopted, which, in our opinion, recommends an appropriate intercultural response to the issue

of managing diversity in education and society, there should also be a shift in the way collective identities are recruited at school.

The primary mission of the school is to create a feeling of a single community/identity in its students. The adoption of a more “open” and “welcoming” national identity on the basis of diversity and pluralism is necessary. A shift from the traditional-diachronic criteria of national consciousness (origin, ethnicity, language, religion, etc.) to a more operational and flexible criteria (participation, equality, social responsibility, etc.), which exempts school and society from unnecessary conflicts, provides the right for individual groups of the population (see Roma) to be a part of collective groups that are not competing with the collective national identity and, moreover, enables self-identification among the members of ethnic-cultural groups.

In the case of Roma students, the most important choice regarding schooling is that they make use of the educational assets acquired during the process, which will equip them with the necessary tools for their future. This presupposes, however, that the educational background of Gypsy children is considered to be educational and useful within the school. In this context, the single cultural code of the school as a cultural asset should contain the elements from all the cultures represented in the school for the sake of common interest (Markos, 2011). This will enable the school to develop citizenship in all students, which is extremely vital in the context of multicultural societies. Hence, the interest in education and political education in today’s school will be restored (Calogiannakis, 2004).

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Kopsavilkums

Pētījumā autori pievēršas jautājumiem, kas saistīti ar romu bērnu izglītību, teorētiski balstoties uz starpkultūru pieeju. Saskaņā ar to izglītībai multikulturālā sabiedrībā jābūt vienlīdzīgai un jāietver visas skolā pārstāvētās kolektīvās identitātes. Skolām ir jāadaptē nacionālās identitātes jēdziens, kas līdz ar tradicionālajiem kritērijiem (izcelsme, valoda, reliģija utt.) ir determinēts arī no politisko (līdzdalība, vienlīdzīgas iespējas, sociāla atbildība) un subjektīvo (piem., cilvēka pašidentifikācija) kritēriju skatpunkta. Izvēloties šādu holistisko pieeju, ir iespējams atrisināt Grieķijas romu problēmas institucionālā un sociālekonomiskā līmenī, tā uzlabojot romu bērnu izglītību un sociālo stāvokli.

Atslēgvārdi: daudzveidība, nevienlīdzīgums, etnokultūras identitāte, romi, starpkultūru izglītība.

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