

TITLE: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL IN IMPROVING GYPSY CHILDREN'S SELF-EMPOWERMENT, RESILIENCE AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

MOTIVATION FOR THIS PAPER

The Gypsy culture is a “culture of survival”... An entire history may crush in an instant if someone may try to prove the contrary. Tolerated or banished, mutilated or discriminated, the Gypsy have survived their own controversial history...

It may be found as fascinating the survival, reflected in Gypsy culture in an original manner and, surely, the historical determination makes possible the equalization between Gypsy culture and the infinite passion for surviving, for living the instant and feeling with all senses the beauty of the life... A history that is also a “sub-history” of many of the peoples with whom the Gypsy lived.

Beyond the exotic of their culture, music, tradition life lived mostly in extremes and with all passion, Gypsy people and **especially** children have been suffering from discrimination and social exclusion in most of the regions and countries they are established, due to the fact that they did not fit any rule, any wider social expectance and always were in conflict with the larger culture. Having problems concretely tied with their identity papers, with high birth rates, school abandonment, unemployment, **even refuse of** keeping a stabile job, involved in infractions like stealing or not having respect for the other people, they were mostly excluded from the local communities and from society... outside the social insurance system, with limited or impossible access to health and educational services, they **aliment the same image and generalization**.

Even there are very capable children, very smart and willing to complete studies in order to attend to a social status and adults that due to poverty could not attend school, the consequence being that they could not get a proper, stabile job – are all victims of generalization, because people put above them a blame that is not entirely theirs. The lack of trust people generally feel when meeting, speaking, interacting with Gypsy people affects the rights of the Gypsy children who suffer from this more or less visible exclusion.

Lately, there are state and national as well as international institutional bodies that have been developing strategies and programs oriented towards society sensibilization regarding human and children rights, especially Gypsy. The Romanian state has been developing programs for a better quality of school and educative system and as full as possible inclusion of minority, disadvantaged categories of children, like Gypsy.

There rises the world of Gypsy children with its particularities...a piece from a wider world of a people considered both strange and fascinating. Some children from a village find ways to go through difficulties when it is almost impossible to go on.

This is the motivation that determined me to research their world seen through their own eyes and emphasize the ways they see school and how attending to school really both helps and enables them to empower themselves, to be resilient and to active participate in their family and local community life.

I wanted to see the real level of these mentioned concepts in Gypsy children's life, as surprising as they may look like for the people around – that in a Gypsy community we can actually prove that there are resilience capacities, empowerment and active participation, even in a vague form.

It is also a personal motivation to demonstrate the unstable character of many of stereotypes and generalizations existent in the society...and the lack of fundament of some of them.

I. ABSTRACT

This paper firstly introduces the reader to the theoretical framework of the concepts used throughout it, such as childhood – a concept subjected to major influence from history, mentality and space... culture and society. A discussion is made on the concept of culture to which societal mentalities in space and time are subjected. The theoretical framework is enriched with sociological and psychological meanings of childhood and other approaches that involve childhood, such as education, the role of school in Romania linked with the Gypsy population and its problems.

The **concepts** of resilience, self-empowerment and participation of Gypsy children are then defined, explained and interconnections are found between them. Examples from the world of marginalized Gypsy children are also brought into discussion.

The second part of the paper **consist in** explaining the methods, techniques and instruments used in research, followed by collected data analysis. **Six Roma children** (age between 10 and 16 years old, 4 boys and 2 girls being in the situation of precarious social-economic situation, school attendance, three with very good results in school, one with learning difficulties and the other two with good results but in risk of school abortion due to extreme poverty) and their mothers are interviewed. The data is analyzed on interviewing structures pointing the main concepts whose existence is to reveal and completed with scientific observation and other sources of information. In the second part there are also presented two detailed case studies of two of the researched children. At the end, there is made a global conceptual scheme using the information from Gypsy children and others significant.

The paper is approaching to enclosure with conclusions and final remarks, then bibliography and annexes.