

Roma Inclusion Policies in a Central European Education System - The Case of Hungary

Pal Tamas*

Corvinus University/Institute of Sociology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Uri Utca 49, H-1014 Budapest, Hungary

Abstract: The paper deals with the limits of cross-ethnic social solidarity in the post-communist era. Combating social exclusion in schools, and especially among ethnic minorities, is one of the major themes of East Central European welfare and education policies. The inquiry presents the main points of Hungarian public debate around integrative education, in which the Roma population plays an absolutely central role. Beyond the Roma issue, these debates concern other integrative measures dealing with other disadvantaged groups. The Roma political debate is concerned with growing segregation, xenophobia and exclusion, presenting the views of integrationists and segregationists, educational modernists, conservatives and beyond – or above them, a “hybrid” state inclusionist program drawing on national and European sources and mixing liberal and interventionist principles.

Keywords: Integrative education, affirmative action for minorities, implementation, state intervention, the integrationist/segregationist debate, Roma policies.

INTRODUCTION

Transition of the post-communist welfare state is usually discussed in terms of less state intervention and cuts in welfare expenditure. The stronger overall impact of competitive and economic rationales in societies responding to the pressure of their international environment becomes more apparent in the changing approach to social policies [1]. In this respect, the orientation towards a “social investment state” in East Central Europe is a key issue. The integration of deprived ethnic minorities, and especially of the Roma population, is not only an issue of social justice, but has a strong complementary effect on investment in human capital, promoting greater participation of Roma in the labour market, and through this economic growth. Social intervention of this kind can be interpreted as a process of setting free and challenging individual capabilities [2-5].

Some patterns and cultures of educational service promotion are more stimulating with respect to the correlated active civil participation of the target minority group than others [6-12]. Programs and developing educational services can directly strengthen the competencies of participants as citizens – or at least the most successful actions of this kind can do so. The Hungarian Roma educational inclusion policies presented here are hybrid entities in this regard [13].

THE DEBATE

Hungarian socio-political debate on education has been influenced by research into the responsibility of schools in the replication of inequalities, and more closely on the role of schools as outstandingly important cradles of integration at least since the 1970s. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the

social justice vector of education policies focused almost exclusively on pupils from working-class and peasant families. This cluster of problems was not resolved, but certainly later in the Soviet-type political systems of Central Europe was not discussed in previous forms.

From the 1970s onwards, however, the social justice debate refocused on another socio-ethnic group, the Roma. For at least two decades, mass employment in low-skilled jobs and central government housing programs moderated the ongoing processes of segregation and deprivation. However, from 1989 onwards, the quickly exhausted resources of the welfare state destroyed the first comprehensive policies in this sector inherited from the state socialist regime.

Consequently, the Roma population plays an absolutely central role in Hungarian public debate regarding integrative education. Beyond the Roma issue, integrative measures dealing with other groups such as the physically disabled were not discussed in public at all. The Roma political debate over growing segregation, xenophobia and exclusion of this ethnic community is almost totally blind in its relationships to other groups and issues. While the special attention is understandable, the selective blindness is not. The ratio of under-15 children in Roma communities is double the national average: 19% of the general population but 38% of the total Roma population is under 15 years of age. At the same time, the ratio of over-59 citizens is four times higher in the general population than in the Roma population [19% and 4.5%, respectively, in 2003].

As a consequence of the economic and social processes connected to the post-1989 transformation, at least 700,000 people were forced into living in permanent deep poverty. A very significant portion of these people belong to Roma groups. This segment of the population is also highly concentrated and segregated geographically. In Hungary there are around 100 settlements that have become entirely

*Address correspondence to this author at the Corvinus University/Institute of Sociology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Uri Utca 49, H-1014 Budapest, Hungary; Tel: 00361 2246740; Fax: 00361 2246741; E-mail: h8756tam@ella.hu, tamas@socio.mta.hu

poor Roma ghettos, and a further 100 which appear at the moment to be heading unavoidably in this direction. The overwhelming majority of the ghetto-type settlements, and those on their way to becoming ghettos, are in the depressed north-eastern and south-western areas of the country which are falling behind in terms of development [13, 14].

SOCIAL (IN)JUSTICE IN THE PUBLIC SYSTEM

The statistical system connected to public education does not provide reliable data in Hungary today about the pre-school and school careers of pupils with multiple disadvantages [15, 16]. The researchers – Kemény [17, 18], Havas [19], Liskó [20], Neményi [21], Kertesi and Ladányi – are primarily concerned with the problems of Roma pupils and Roma education. Even so, their data are mostly treated in debates on Hungarian education policy as determinative in relation to the education problems of the entire portion of the population that is falling behind – which, at the same time, is disputed by some [for example János Köllö]. However, it is very probable, due to the relentless prevalence of the hidden – moreover, often unintentional – and less hidden dimensions of ethnic discrimination, that the disadvantages or lagging behind of children in Roma families living in deep poverty is much more serious than that of children with similar social status but from other ethnic backgrounds. An empirical survey by Kemény-Havas-Liskó showed that nearly half (43.2%) of communities where there is no pre-school institution (in spite of the fact that the number of children living there would justify its establishment) are poor Roma ghettos or settlements heading towards this status. The situation was similar in examined settlements with pre-school institutions. In almost half of these (45.2%), the proportion of Roma inhabitants was more than 25%. Then again, the higher the proportion of the Roma population in a given settlement, the stronger the likelihood that pre-school institutions are overcrowded. If there are not enough free spaces, then the children most likely to be admitted are those who have already turned five and whose parents both work. So it is most likely that children with multiple disadvantages, with parents who have a low level of education, are unemployed or live of necessity on disability assistance, will not gain admission to pre-school institutions.

A NEW WAVE OF ROMA WELFARE POLICIES IN HUNGARY

In the last 15 years, Roma policies – both in education and in other fields – have used up an ever increasing amount of organizational and other resources, but both the political class and broader public opinion have been dissatisfied with the efficiency and outcome of such measures [22].

The 1992-95 Roma educational program underlined the cultural features of the Roma ethnic group and targeted the emancipation of the Roma language and culture in the framework of Romology college programs and textbook publishing. New college programs on Roma culture were started, especially in elementary teacher training institutions. In the context of Roma corrective educational programs, tuition used a chosen Roma language reflecting local requirements. In this period, while the disadvantaged status of the Roma population was naturally well understood, both the authorities and independent philanthropists highlighted multiculturalism and the stabilization of the Roma elite as

the major primary tools applicable in the social emancipation of the disadvantaged. Integration policy measures were already introduced in the 1993 Public Education Act, and in statute 11/1994 of the Ministry of Public Education, sections 39/D and 39/E. In those years, some integrative normative indicators and special pedagogical methodologies, as well as the Integrated Pedagogical Framework and the National Integration in Education Network were also created.

In the 2000s, an increasingly critical view was taken of the multicultural approach as a central goal and classical considerations of social policy started to play a more straightforward role. The Act on National and Ethnic Minorities [Act LXXVII] set out a comprehensive system of minority rights, prescribing the rights of minorities in the educational system and systematising rules and regulations in Roma education. In 1995, the Ministry of Culture and Education developed a proposal for a special Roma Education Development program. Also in 1995, the institution of Ombudsman in the Hungarian Parliament was introduced and the problems of minorities, including problems in the educational sector, were included among the group of issues requiring special attention.

In 1997, the government enacted special State Resolution No.1093/1997 [29/07] on the establishment of a Mid-term Package on the Development of Living Standards for Roma. This package specified the creation of a special educational program for Romani children.

In 2002, Romani MP Laszlo Teleki was appointed by the government as Secretary of State for Roma Affairs, while at the Ministry of Education a special high-ranking post was created responsible for handling Roma education issues [the Commissioner for the Integration of Roma and Disadvantaged Children]. At the same time, there are very few teachers of Roma origin. According to a teachers' survey of that time, in 898 elementary schools with a high proportion of Romani pupils there were altogether only 45 teachers who declared themselves Roma or of Roma origin [out of 27,730].

In the period 2002-2004, new programs were launched for the integration of Roma in the education sector. The process of desegregation involves legislative amendments, and professional and social networking. Parliament amended the Public Education Act (PEA) in September 2003. According to Section 84 of the new law, "the parent can submit a request on legal grounds, referring to a breach of a legal provision, against any decision violating the principle of non-discrimination. For this procedure, paragraphs 6-8 of Section 83 and paragraph 3 of Section 104 of this Act shall be applied, with the exception that failing to meet the deadline specified for the submission of the petition shall entail the loss of rights...."

Section 66 of the PEA blocks schools from freely selecting children. According to Section 89, the creation of "Equal Obligatory Plans" is obligatory, while Section 121 provides definitions of disadvantaged.

Here the prohibition of segregation is a new element and an important tool for the public monitoring of school decisions [23, 24].

The issue of discrimination emerged on the visible national agenda in connection with debates generated by the process leading to the adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law in late 2003 [ETA - Equal Treatment Act]. The law, which is related to Article 13 of the EC Treaty, created the Equal Treatment Authority, an organ responsible for combating all forms of discrimination, not only in education but in all other areas as well. The Authority began operation on 1 February 2005.

Of course, Hungary has ratified almost all the major international legal conventions combating discrimination, including the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, ILO Convention No.111 and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Hungary is also party to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, among others. Educational law and other sectoral laws which previously contained separate and quite inconsistent anti-discrimination provisions have been amended to invoke the provisions of the ETA. The ETA distinguishes three types of exception: [a] general objectives, [b] special exceptions, and [c] affirmative action.

In September 2003, with the modification of the kindergarten regulation [paragraph 65], it is obligatory to set aside places and accept disadvantaged children in kindergartens and day care centres from the age of three, if the parents request it. From this time, free food (meals) are provided in kindergartens for the children of disadvantaged families. These measures were important because in the early 2000s only 11% of Romani children were enrolled in kindergartens, as was shown by Daroczi [25]. Until 2004-5, they were rejected in huge numbers because kindergartens lacked space for them, leaving numerous poor families unable to enrol their children in kindergartens due to the expense of the services provided. From September 2003, the children of socially disadvantaged families were provided with free school books [in the 1st-4th years, and in the 5th-8th years from September 2004]. Special funds were also created for the promotion of integrative programs. The first integrative per capita support provided HUF 60,000 per child per year – totalling HUF 1,052 million in the 2004/5 school year. For another type of support [“support for preparatory training for the realization of potential,” set at HUF 20,000/child/year], a total of HUF 639 million was used in the same 2004/5 school year. Some 32,800 children were involved in the first program in that school year, rising to 49,475 in the second year.

In May 2003, a specific program was developed to promote the integrative education of children with special needs. In September 2003, the definition of special educational needs was incorporated into the PEA [Section 30]. In the same year, the Ministry of Education initiated its “Be the Best” Program with the aim of reducing the incidence of misplacement of the disadvantaged, and especially Roma children, in special schools. In this program, the most important points were improvements in testing commissions, the introduction of stricter rules including medical diagnosis, implementation of better evaluation tools and tests, and periodic re-examination of children. The program has remained especially relevant since the actual segregation of Roma in schools is to a large extent

the result of false disability diagnosis by selection of children to special classes or institutions. As a result of this program, the overrepresentation of Roma in schools for disabled children has been reduced [but even so remains high]. It is quite remarkable that while the EU average of children classified as disabled is 2.5%, the Hungarian proportion is much higher, at 5.3%, even after the introduction of all these measures.

STIGMATISATION OF THE DISADVANTAGED – OR FORCED STRATIFICATION OF THE SYSTEM?

Disadvantaged students have frequently been forced to continue their education in the same year due to failure in class. Their educational careers have been disrupted in this way, as such a measure stigmatises them and increases the risk of their dropping out. Consequently, from September 2004 pupils in the 1st-3rd years need only repeat the same class due to frequent absence from school. In the same wave of reforms, a modification of the 32/1997 MKM decree created the opportunity to study the two native languages of Hungarian Roma – Romani and Boyash – in Hungarian schools. In these years, however, only 30 schools started to teach these languages. In practical terms, the Hungarian Roma population is only partly bilingual, and Hungarian is the mother tongue for the majority. In any event, plans for the “mass Romanization of minority education in linguistic terms” were not realistic, due also to the fact that, for the ministry, integrative programs with mainstream educational structures were much more important. In an important experiment started in 51 schools at this time [the EQUAL program], unemployed Roma were trained and employed as teaching assistants in schools. The same persons were employed as “family coordinators” and trained simultaneously. The program was initiated as a model for future programs, where practically oriented and flexible training modules and stable employment were offered side by side. However, more widespread application of this highly promising form of training and work did not take place, and a systematic evaluation of the program was not provided [26-29].

During this period some 60,000 children were classified as disabled or children with special needs in Hungarian public education. Usually these students are educated in segregated special institutions. The program supported by the National Development Plan tried to reassign 20% of these children into inclusive classes of mainstream schools.

CAN WE BRING AN END TO SEGREGATION WITH SPECIALIZED ANTI-SEGREGATION PROGRAMS?

The procedure of general school enrolment will be modified in the near future so as to counterbalance segregation. It was in December 2005 that the Public Education Act was amended with a provision restricting the right of schools to exercise the same degree of liberty in selecting their pupils from the pool of candidates. The ratio of pupils with disadvantages must already be taken into account during the delineation of school districts. In addition to the preferences of residents of a district, disadvantaged pupils will enjoy priority among applicants from outside the district. If vacancies still exist after meeting all these needs, the school will have to organize a draw to select the candidates it can admit. The provision, which seeks to help

schools become more heterogeneous in terms of social composition, will take effect in the coming years. The aim of the amendment is to prevent pupils with disadvantages from being concentrated in a certain number of schools.

Despite comprehensive legal regulation, however, the Hungarian education system still does not ensure equal opportunities. These institutions are worsening the chances of success of disadvantaged and disabled children in school, and so later on the labour market as well.

PISA studies [2000, 2003] show that Hungary is the country where the social background of the family has the greatest influence on a student's performance [30]. Differences in student performance in this country are explained by the social profile of the given school, so that the impact of family background is expressed even more strongly through the social profile of the school. The socio-economic status of schools explains the PISA results more clearly than children's familial background. On average in OECD countries, 36% of differences in reading achievement could be explained by differences among schools, while this proportion is 71% in Hungary. In the PISA 2009 study, however, the Hungarian results were already partially better, as reading literacy data at the national level showed improvement [31-33].

According to Kadet, following partial implementation of integrative measures in the schools participating in the aforementioned programs [30 basic schools, 30 control schools], the first results proved positive [34]. The elementary school students in the programs [4th, 8th classes] performed better in reading skills tests. Positive changes in the self-evaluation of children also took place. Pupils in the 8th class showed a lower level of social distress, and their thinking was less prejudiced. As a result of all this, pupils from the 8th class in participating schools are proceeding to high schools with better chances of graduation.

The ministry launched special programs and fellowships for the promotion of the above-listed programs. The "Be the Best" program is introduced in elementary schools. In high schools, two other programs – the "Janos Arany College Program for Disadvantaged Students" and the "Utravalo - On the Road - Scholarship Program" – were implemented. A new subprogram of the Janos Arany Program is aimed at supporting talent-nurturing schemes for disadvantaged students in boarding schools. Most disadvantaged children continue their education not in senior high schools but in vocational training institutes, where the drop-out rate is very high [about 30%]. A new, comprehensive program should therefore improve the quality of work in these institutions, with the hope of reducing the drop-out rate.

At the tertiary level, special scholarships and tutors are offered to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. A special affirmative action policy was introduced in 2005. Students whose parents attended only elementary school, who are eligible for supplementary family allowances or come from public care or state-owned boarding schools without stable family ties, can receive special financial support for their studies.

Measure No. 2.1. of the HEFOP (Human Resource Development Operative Program) of the National Development Plan I, which emerged in tandem with the EU

membership of Hungary [under the Ministry of Economy, National Development Agency], develops special tools for the integrative education of disadvantaged students and supports renewal of teaching methodologies, schools in ghetto-type settlements, development of tools for lessening segregation and special funds for the development of day-care activities in compulsory schools. Under the measure, EUR 30,356,701 was made available for the 2004-2008 period [EUR 22,767,525 from the European Social Fund and EUR 7,589,176 from the Hungarian central budget]. The aim is to promote the educational success of disadvantaged students and thereby improve their labour market prospects and social integration. The main points for 2005 provide the key for understanding the major aims and central tasks of the program as a whole. The grant scheme was divided under the following structure: 2.1.4. Promotion of extra-curricular programs to support the success in class of disadvantaged youth: HUF 500 million [EUR 2 million]; 2.1.3.2. Promotion of inclusive education *via* cooperation with schools: HUF 890 million [EUR 3.56 million]; 2.1.7. Elimination of school segregation: HUF 500 million [EUR 2 million]; 2.1.8. Schools with disadvantaged pupils in small rural settlements: HUF 541 million [EUR 2.164 million].

This support is continuing under the National Development Plan II [NFT II] in the period 2007-2013. In this period, equal opportunity-based supportive policies are being developed. The regional focus of the programs is becoming more important and special target programs are emerging [TÁMOP 3.3.]. In the context of this regional focus, special advisories for the sub-regions are employed and positive discrimination measures introduced for the most disadvantaged sub-regions and ghetto-type settlements. A special organisational unit, the National Educational Integration Network and Development Centre, was created in Budapest with representatives from the four most disadvantaged regions. Roma teaching assistants are employed in some schools.

A 2006 investigation [35] into the efficiency of integrative measures shows two new educational forms: skills development and integration preparation. It describes additional grants from the central budget and a special package for integration [pre-school preparation, partnership relations between schools, the introduction of multicultural elements in the syllabus and teacher training, innovative pedagogical programs (cooperative learning, the project method and drama-based pedagogical elements), anti-discrimination training, etc.].

THE LIMITS OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY IN POST-COMMUNISM

The Hungarian government passed a National Action Plan for Social Solidarity 2004-2006 as a special strategy to enhance social cohesion. This program summed up all initiatives to combat poverty and social exclusion over the given three-year period. The top priorities of the plan were grouped into five chapters: enhancement of employment; provision of access to public services; diminishing poverty; provision of child welfare; combating social exclusion. Tasks for the educational system and issues of inclusive education were incorporated into almost every chapter. Here the government's aim was to create an integrated educational

framework for Roma children. The EU benchmark for attainment of secondary education in the age group of 18-22 is over 80% with secondary or tertiary educational attainment.

Equal opportunities must be provided from pre-school to tertiary education, health hazards must be combated, the information society must neutralize the digital divide, and new Roma anti-discrimination networks must be developed. The points given special emphasis within child welfare provision include provision of free food (meals), extensive textbook provision to all disadvantaged children, new child welfare centres in all cities larger than 40,000 people, and the expansion of pre-school institutions in disadvantaged regions with Roma populations.

Combating social exclusion was understood in broader terms within the plan. Regional councils on social policies and roundtables of social partners in the 7 regions support the implementation of the action plan of the EU Joint Memorandum in 2005 to combat social exclusion, signed by the government and approved by decree No. 2321/2003 [2003.XII. 13].

Within the framework of this special action plan, the national educational administration applies four major strategies to handle educational disadvantages: using early preventive measures at pre-school level, focusing on increasing the participation of socially disadvantaged groups of drop-outs [Roma, groups with special needs, etc.] in institutions of general education, continuing to combat school drop-outs, and of course, promoting lifelong learning.

The last point is especially important due to the high drop-out rate in the basic compulsory educational system. In the age group of under 16-year-olds, 14.1% of the total are living under the poverty threshold [in families with three or more children, this ratio was 24% in 2003]. Poverty and the risk of dropping out from school are, of course, enhanced by the size of the household and the number of children. The poverty threshold in Hungarian families is found in those with six members; here again, a disproportional number are Roma families.

At this point, territorial differences are important in two respects. On the one hand, the urbanization curve is very important. The quality and richness of services decreases very rapidly with the size of the settlement. On the other hand, GDP production capacity and living standards decrease along a west-east axis in the country. Per capita net income is 1.5 times higher in the west of the country than in other, less developed regions.

From the perspective of social inclusion, the current Public Education Act distinguishes between socially disadvantaged and special needs children. According to the current legislation, the notion of integrative preparation is aimed clearly at disadvantaged children [living in poverty and/or ethnic isolation] and not at special needs pupils. Handicapped pupils join the same pre-school and elementary school classes as other members of the same age group.

Integrative preparation in this legal framework means the implementation of equal opportunity-based educational programs launched by the Ministry of Education. Disadvantaged children are registered under the Act, which

defines a disadvantaged child and pupil as one who has been taken into childcare protection by the local notary or for whom regular child welfare benefits are paid.

The Equal Treatment Authority may take action in individual cases and may investigate violations, if any, of the principle of equal treatment under an administrative procedure. The Ministry of Education has developed a nationwide system, known as the National Network of Integration in Education, for the provision of support especially to promote the implementation of tasks associated with teaching and bringing up disadvantaged children, particularly Roma in integrated classes. The network has two objectives: firstly to create a system of basic institutions responsible for integrating mainly Roma into mainstream education; and secondly, to improve professional background services on that basis. In autumn 2003, an Integrative System of Pedagogy was introduced in the so-called "basic schools" of the network. The cumbersome and changing rules of financing created hiccups in the implementation of the program, hence its spread and multiplying effect failed to live up to expectations. There were two new per-capita grants, one for unfolding skills and one for integration, introduced in grades 1, 5 and 9 during 2003, both under a progressive system. The latter is available on condition that the recipient uses the Integrative System of Pedagogy.

As a second chance for school drop-outs, school-based adult educational services are theoretically also available. However, the extent of these diminished in the 1990s. In the 1970s there were 451 such schools, but by 2001/2 the number of such institutions had fallen to 57 [while those attending decreased in the same period from 21,000 to 2,800]. At the same time in the late 1990s, 10-15% of adult learners obtained secondary qualifications, while in the 18-22 age group participants in adult programs performed well above average. We can observe that adult education mainly takes the form of part-time learning.

CONCLUSIONS

Roma inclusion policies were used not only to complement and upgrade Hungarian mainstream educational policies, but to develop new programs used as innovative blocks of the entire national policy concept. Naturally, ethnic discrimination, the longer-term dimension of many Roma inclusion projects, has made it more difficult to interpret their results in the short/mid-term scope of national education policies.

The Roma programs have filled gaps in national policy-making processes and have therefore proven an important complement to national policies in terms of adapting delivery mechanisms to reach the target groups on the social margins.

The educational programs have offered new financial resources for the social economy and entrepreneurship among minority players and brought them into contact with new ways of doing things. However, due to time limits and isolation in the local political environment, a large portion of these programs have remained unfinished.

The projects could be interpreted as demand-led programs operating within the structure of current national policies.

In the 2000s, the vocational and social integration of Roma was understood as a major priority of ministerial programs and educational innovations were subordinated to the agenda of inclusion. At the same time, the growing xenophobia and anti-Romani attitudes of the population [first of all in rural areas] – and also often of local elites – has had a significant negative impact on the efficiency of the programs.

In the end, the inclusion programs have demonstrated only limited capacity to contribute positively to priority policy objectives. The decrease or partial disappearance of trans-ethnic solidarity with minority clients of the welfare state in local public opinion has made support of the programs more complicated for policy-makers in rural communities.

The evaluation highlights the need to include minority social players at an early stage and the importance of commitment and “ownership” on the part of political stakeholders representing the given ethnic minority which has been marginalized in the years under investigation. Despite the growing resistance of local bureaucracies, the projects have created a common language and approach to social inclusion across the country [36-39].

A specific policy community for Roma inclusion has emerged among educators and social researchers, with a common vocabulary based around anti-discrimination and social exclusion issues, as well as concepts such as innovation and mainstreaming in ethnic education. This is an important by-product of the 2002-2010 Hungarian education policies, especially now, at a time of their radical redefinition from the national conservative perspective.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Pal Tamas is Head of the Societal Policy Centre, Corvinus University. His current research interests are focused on a book project comparing the social democratic governments of Eastern Europe. Teaching interests relate to graduate programs on good society and social vulnerability at universities in Budapest, Hungary and Jena, Germany.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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