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## **Positive Impact of Teacher Activities on the Educational Career of Roma and Gypsy Women in Hungary**

### **Pozytywny wpływ działań nauczycieli na karierę edukacyjną kobiet pochodzenia romskiego i cygańskiego na Węgrzech**

Roma and Gypsy<sup>2</sup> women in Hungary (but also in the whole of Europe) very often suffer from multiple deprivation (Council of the European Union, 2011). One reason for that can be attributed to the different cultural traditions of Roma and Gypsy, which often lead to social discrimination. This is also the case in school education (Óhidy&Furray 2019). Another reason can be assigned to their socioeconomic situation: a host of Roma and Gypsy lives in poverty (ibid.). But there is also a gender-based explanation: The traditional Roma and Gypsy culture defines the place of women within their family at home. An educational career is not considered as a necessity for that (Furray&Hegedűs, 2003; Durst, 2015; Óhidy, 2013, Furray& Óhidy, 2019). Therefore, Roma and

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<sup>2</sup> We use the terms „Roma“ and Gypsy“ as synonyms, because in Hungary there are groups, for example the Boyasch-group, which would feel insulted if you called them „Roma“ – they prefer the term „Gypsy (cigány)“.

Gypsy women can be called the “minority of the minority” (Vincze, 2010: 195). Still, despite their multiple deprivation they are (not only in Hungary) increasingly successful within the education system (Forray&Hegedűs, 1991) and in the political life as well (Bakó& Tóth, 2008; Kóczé, 2010).

This article presents some results of a research project in which the author analyzed the progress of ten Roma and Gypsy women – Adele, Agnes, Barbara, Francis, Jennifer Marianne, Maria, Nina, Rita and Sonja<sup>3</sup>–who, despite of their background of multiple deprivation, have managed to achieve successful educational careers, which are defined by their university degree. The author made biographical interviews with them in 2012 in Pécs and Budapest.

### Theoretical framework

According to the underclass theory of William Julius Wilson, adapted by Iván Szelényi and János Ladányi for the Hungarian circumstances, the Roma and Gypsy minority broke apart along the social class lines after the democratic system change in the 1990s (Ladányi & Szelényi, 2004; Ladányi, 2009). This process means that a very small group of the Hungarian Roma/Gypsy minority has reached a better social position. They have practically become a part of the middle class. This social advancement also means an assimilation process. Their social environment does not define them as Roma or Gypsy anymore (Dupcsik, 2009; Ladányi, 2009), and often enough neither do they themselves (Újlaky 2000). For most of them, however, this process means that they have become a part of the underclass, and have no role in society, suffer from permanent unemployment and poverty, and live in social and regional segregation (Bernáth & Wizner, 2002; CsertiCsapó, 2008; Dupcsik, 2009; Gábos, Szivós & Tátrai, 2013). It is very likely that their children will live in the same situation. This group is called “Roma” or “Gypsy”. Considering these developments, the terms “Roma” and “Gypsy” are synonymous with ethnicized poverty for most people in Hungary (Ladányi, 2009). The reasons for this underclass-formation process can be found in the exclusion of the Roma/Gypsy minority from the labour market (Kertesi, 1995; Székely, 2008; Domokos and Herczeg, 2010), which is closely related to their low educational attainment (Bernát, 2014): According to the 2011 Census, 58% of the Roma/Gypsy minority (over 15 years) has completed primary education

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<sup>3</sup> All names have been changed.

as their highest level of education, 23% have even less. Just 5% have a high school degree and 1% holds a university degree (KSH, 2011).

According to the theory of Helmut Fend about the societal functions of the school system, it plays a central role in supporting or impeding social mobility (Bordieu& Passeron, 1974; Fend, 1980, 2006). This is also true for the Hungarian Roma/Gypsy minority. The school system reinforces the deprivation for most of the group (Óhidy, 2009; Óhidy& Orsós, 2013), but can also help them improve their social position. The interviewed women belong to this second, very small group. This study examines the allocative function of the Hungarian school system. Our research aims were the following:

Description of central factors that promote social advancement through education according to the subjective perspectives of the Roma/Gypsy, and

Identification of various types of social advancement through education by means of contrasting comparison and contextualization.

### The interview studies

The research question of the study was: Which factors had – according to the opinion of the affected persons – an influence (especially positive) on their success in the education system? To answer this, we chose the method of biographical narrative interviews. The intention was to collect as many influencing factors as possible and to investigate the opinions of the Roma/Gypsy women themselves (Schütze, 1983; Glinka, 2009; Küsters, 2009). This point is particularly important, because the perspective of affected people, especially of disadvantaged learners, is often neglected in research. The aim of the research was to learn about the subjective theories of the interviewed women regarding their successful school career. The biographical interviews were conducted by the author in 2012 in Pécs and Budapest. As additional methods, we used expert interviews and analysed statistical and empirical studies as well. Selection of the experts was not based on pre-established criteria, but on theoretical sampling (Mayer, 2006). They were selected based on literature analysis, discussions at international conferences and recommendations from colleagues. In the expert interviews we wanted to use their special knowledge and interpretation skills related to their professional work area and action field (Bogner& Menz, 2005. 43.). In the analysis, the exploratory and the organizing *functions* of the research method were in focus,

but the theory generating *function* also played a role (Meuser & Nagel, 1994; Vogel, 1995; Bogner & Menz, 2005).

The research study had a small group in focus, which can be called intellectual elite for both: the majority of the society and the Roma/Gypsy minority (Óhidy, 2013; Óhidy, 2016). The selection of the respondents was done with the snowball-system and in accordance with two criteria: The interviewed women had to belong to the Roma and Gypsy minority in Hungary (determined by both self-definition and the definition of their environment) and they had to have a university degree. We allowed all degrees recognised in Europe (Bachelor, Master, diploma, state exam, Ph.D.). Neither the subject of their studies nor the kind of course (full-time, evening course, correspondence course/open university) was a selection criteria.

### The interviewed women

Most of the interviewed women (6) belong to the *Boyash (beás)-cigány* group, three of them to the *Vlach (oláh)-cigány* group and one person was *Romungro*.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of the Boyash (beás)-group was the biggest because this group lives in the region of Pécs, where majority of the interviews was conducted. Most of the parents (7) belong to the same group, three women came from an intermarriage, in which the non-Roma/Gypsy parents were Hungarian, Croatian or German (see Table 1.).

**Table 1.** Categorisation of the interviewed women and their parents in ethnic groups (self-categorization)

Father	Mother			
	Romungro	Vlach (oláh)	Boyash (beás)	Non-Roma
Romungro	–	–	–	1
Vlach (oláh)	–	2	–	1
Boyash (beás)	–	–	5	–
Non-Roma	–	–	1	–

<sup>4</sup> The Hungarian Roma and Gypsy minority can be divided into three different groups (based on to their native language, place of residence (region) and the time of their immigration) (Bíró, 2006; Szoboszlai, 2006; Kis, 2007; Lakatos, 2011): Romungro, Vlach (oláh)-cigány, and the Boyash (beás)-cigány. For more about it see Óhidy and Orsós, 2013.

Half of the interviewed women (5) were at the time of the interview between 20–30 years old, the other five between 30–40 years old. The highest degrees of the interviewed women were as follows: three women had obtained a Bachelor degree at a university or a three-year-course at a University of Applied Sciences, six completed a five-year-course at university<sup>5</sup> and one woman had a postdoctoral lecturing qualification (habilitation). Most of them (8) belong to the first generation with a university degree in their family. Only in two families (Francis and Nina) one parent had (i.e. the mother) a university degree. Many parents had only visited a primary school or had no school qualification at all. In one case they were even illiterate (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Highest school/university degree of the interviewed women and their parents

Name	School/university degree	Father	Mother
Adele	University diploma	Primary school	–
Agnes	Habilitation	–	–
Barbara	Bachelor of Arts	Technical college	Primary school
Francis	University diploma (PhD-student)	Technical college	University diploma
Jennifer	University diploma (PhD-student)	Primary school	Primary school
Marianne	University diploma	Technical college	Primary school
Maria	University diploma	High school	High school
Nina	University diploma	High school	University diploma
Rita	University diploma (PhD-student)	No data	–
Sonja	University diploma (PhD-student)	Primary school	–

Only three of the families can be counted as middle class (the parents of Francis and Nina are businesspeople, Maria's father works in the middle management). All other women described their family as "poor" or "very poor" and three families lived in a Gypsy-settlement, which can be defined

<sup>5</sup> Four of them were preparing for their PhD.

as a clear indication for poverty and deprivation (Ladányi, 2009; Domokos & Herczeg, 2010).

**Table 3.** Job/profession of the interviewed women and their parents

Name	Job/Profession	Father	Mother
Adele	Midwife	Factoryworker	Housewife
Agnes	University teacher	Zookeeper	Housewife
Barbara	MA- student	No regular work	Regular work
Francis	PhD-student	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur
Jennifer	PhD-student	No data	No data
Marianne	Teacher in adult education	Miner	Housewife
Maria	Teacher	Foreman	Semi-skilled worker
Nina	Teacher	Security guard	Accountant
Rita	Teacher	No data	No data
Sonja	University assistant	Factoryworker	Kitchen employee

Table 3 shows the intergenerational social mobility: the interviewed women, who already work (7), have higher work positions than their parents. The dominance of the educational profession is not only evident in this study (there were six people working in educational professions: three school teachers, two at a university and one as a teacher in adult education) but also typical in a national context (Forray&Hegedűs, 2003; Szabóné Kármán,2005).

**Table 4.** Marital status, number of siblings and children of the interviewed women

Name	Marital status	Number of siblings	Number of children
Adele	Married	3 half-siblings	2
Agnes	Divorced	4	1
Barbara	Single	1	–
Francis	Single, in relationship	2	–
Jennifer	Single	1	–
Marianne	Divorced	3	1
Maria	Divorced	4	1
Nina	Widow	1	–
Rita	Divorced	3	1
Sonja	Divorced, in relationship	1	2

Table 4 shows that both the number of the siblings and the number of the children of the interviewed women were significantly lower than of the average Roma/Gypsy families, which mostly have 5 or 6 children. The largest part of the women had one (3) or two (3) siblings and only two had four brothers and sisters. Two women have 2 children, four one child and four women had none (yet). The childless women were between 20-30 years old and mostly (3) unmarried (yet). Five women were divorced, one woman was a widow and one married. Two women live with a partner. This data shows first indications that an educational career of a Roma/Gypsy woman is difficult to reconcile with the traditional female role model, which is expected of them.

### School career of the interviewed women

According to the latest Census 58% of the Roma/Gypsy minority (over 15 years of age) account a visit to primary school as their highest level of education, 23% have even less. Just 5% have a high school degree and 1% holds a university degree (KSH, 2011). We can assume that the school system reinforces the deprivation for most of the Roma and Gypsies (Havas, Kemény&Liskó, 2001; Bernáth&Wizner 2002; Óhidy, 2009; Óhidy&Orsós, 2013; Bernát 2014, Boros and Gergye 2019), but it can also help them improve their social position.

Katalin R. Forray and András T. Hegedűs differentiate between two typical ways of school careers: “classic” and “detour”. Based on their studies the “detour” way can be seen in general as typical for Roma/Gypsy women in Hungary (Forray and Hegedűs, 2003; Forray, 2004; Szabóné Kármán, 2005). In our research these two categories of career paths were represented in equal proportions: five women – Agnes, Adele, Maria, Nina, Jennifer – had a “classical” school career. That means that right after primary school they attended a secondary school<sup>6</sup>, where they completed their high school degree. After that they directly went to university and completed their studies in regular time. Five women (5) – Barbara, Francis, Marianne, Rita, Sonja – completed their degree with delays and breaks, mostly in evening courses in addition to family and work.

The most common reason for delays was to found a family: four women – Marianne, Nina, Rita and Sonja – suspended their educational career because they wanted to dedicate themselves to their family. Conflicts with the traditional female role model also played a part (Durst, 2010; Kóczé, 2010). In

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<sup>6</sup> In a high school or in a professional middle school (for more about it see Óhidy, 2007)

order to continue education, some of them had to go through conflicts with their parents. Maria said:

„[...] I could have, even my mom wanted me to marry early. So, at the age of 14 already almost everyone in our family had been married. This is still the custom of our Gypsy-settlement in Kaposvár. However, I explained to my parents that I did not want to get married, I wanted to learn and study”. (Maria)

Rita’s story is typical: „My mother said that I have no other things to do on this earth, but to have children. I should find a husband and have children. [...] I had to choose between my family and a life that I wanted”. (Rita)

Another big problem was the lack of financial resources. Some women worked during their studies (one of them was as a single mother, even the main breadwinner of the family) – hence this also caused delays in the educational career. Sonja said:

“These weren’t easy times, it was very hard, because there were two children. I brought one to the nursery, the other to the nursery school, then I went to the university and when I was in the second year I had to go to work, too. In the morning I was at the University, in the afternoon I worked as a waitress, it was my former profession”. (Sonja)

Higher education of the parents and higher socio-economic status of the family of origin had a positive impact on the school career of the interviewed women: two of the three respondents, which are coming from middle class families – Nina and Maria – had a “classical” school career. When Francis’ school career was interrupted because she didn’t pass the entrance exam, she began her studies in a self-financing form. But this factor was not necessarily a condition either for a successful school career or for the “classical” way to study, because Agnes and Jennifer – who are coming from poor families – achieved their school career in the “classical” way too. The ethnic group affiliation of the interviewed women (see Table 1) did not play an important role as well. In view of these data we can legitimately ask the question: Which supporting factors played a role in their school career? In the following, we examine the answers of the respondents to this question. Firstly, we list all the supporting and impeding factors, which have been named by them. Then we analyse and interpret these answers with the help of the categorisation of Forray and Hegedűs.

## Supporting and impeding factors – based on the subjective theories of the respondents

Supporting and impeding factors, which the interviewed women have named, are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Supporting and impeding factors – based on the subjective theories of the respondents

Supporting factors	nominations	Impeding factors	nominations
Own learning motivation	10	Poverty	4
Parental motivation	8	Conflicts with the family	4
No discrimination at school	7	Discrimination at school	3
Supporting programmes	7	Teachers	2
Teacher motivation	6	Husband	1
Gandhi High School	4	Parents lack knowledge about school system	1
Friends	1	Colleagues	1
Workplace	3	Employer	1

In the interview all ten women named their own learning motivation as a very important supporting factor, very often combined with a “disease to please”, to prove themselves and others what they can achieve. Agnes said: “The story my father often told me was that I was the fourth girl in the family and they just brought me home from the hospital because I was a beautiful baby. But they would have preferred a boy and I always wanted to show them that I am capable and it was no failure to bring me home from the hospital”. (Agnes)

The second important factor was the support of the parents (8). Furthermore, many women (7) named scholarships, support programs and the lack of discrimination. Although all of the interviewed women told stories about helpful teachers in their school career, only 6 named them explicitly as a supporting factor. There were also other factors like the workplace (3), the university (2) and friends (1).

As impeding factors, they named poverty (4) and conflicts with the family first (4). In the second place (3) there was the discrimination at school (especially bullying classmates). Two women named teachers who tried to stop their educational career. There were also other factors like the unwillingness of

the husband (1), the inexperience of the parents with the school system (1), the colleagues (1), the employer (1) and also their own uncertainty (1).

### **Analysis and interpretation**

It is striking at a first glance, that the interviewed women named more supporting than impeding factors. This may be because they have achieved an educational career and can better remember the positive moments. The initial question stressed indirectly the success-perspective – this could be another reason. In the forthcoming analysis we are focusing on the supporting factors and comparing the subjective theories of the interviewed women.

All women pointed out their own motivation and achievement; they considered an *internal factor* as most important. This shows that they know about their special situation as a new elite, which had to fight and pay for the success. But in the end they achieved something very important. Most of them named the role of the parents (especially mothers) as a very important supporting factor: as role models and helpers as well.

Our results show that most families of the interviewed women considered a school career as a chance for social advancement and they knowingly assisted their children (not only the boys but also the girls) in their further education and studies. In comparison with former studies we can assume that in these cases the role of parents and the family in general has changed positively: as the availability of education to women threatens the traditional Roma/Gypsy female role model – not only because the most important role of women so far has been to provide family cohesion, but also because a successful school career often means an assimilation process into the dominant social culture (and giving up the traditional Roma/Gypsy minority culture as well) – an educational career for women was for a long time not considered as a necessary or desirable option. Recently, more Roma/Gypsy families have been willing to support the school career of their daughters, if they are willing to have children and don't neglect the household (Forray, 1997; Forray & Hegedűs, 2003; Forray, 2004). Other studies (Kóczé, 2010; Forray, 2013) show the same results. Based on them we can speak of a strengthening of the learning aspiration and the readiness for integration among Roma/Gypsies.

Another important result of this study is that mothers are no longer alone in supporting the school career of their daughters. The helping, supporting

and motivating role of fathers has increased. For example, in Adele's case: "My father supported me in my school career. [...]Dad was the one, who outlined to me that "if you don't work, there will be no salary and you will starve, that's not good. You don't have to live that way. You should go forward not backward. Later it will be better for your child too... etc." And these phrases just burned into me and I am happy about it. Maybe, if these things would be important in other families as well, there would be more of us, who have learned and studied and I could say: "Thank God, we have a workplace". (Adele)

In most cases analysed here, both parents – occasionally the whole family – supported the school career of the respondents<sup>7</sup>, for example in Nina's case: "Everyone in the family supported me in all possible forms. Both spiritually and financially. During the whole time. My mother, my father, and also other relatives". (Nina)

According to studies on school achievement of disadvantaged students (e.g. Wiese, 1982; Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993; Erikson & Jonsson, 1996; Mägdefrau & Schuhmacher, 2002; Ditton, 2007) we can assume that the own learning motivation and the support of the family are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for a successful school career: they also need *support within the school system*. The educational system is the place where the (re)production of the symbolic capital – the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability– takes place (Bourdieu, 2001). Teachers are in charge in the selection and allocation processes, they act as gate-keepers (Heinz, 1992). They play a big part in the decision of the direction that the school careers of students will take: underclass or middle class? Social segregation or integration? According to statistical data we can say that for most of the Hungarian Roma/Gypsy students this fact reinforces their deprivation (Havas, Kemény& Liskó, 2001).

The interviewed women named the lack of discrimination at school (as a "passive" factor) and the supporting role of one or two teachers, especially their role-model-function and individual help (as an "active" factor), as the main supportive factors. For most of the Roma/Gypsies, who can achieve a successful school career, the supporting programs for Roma/Gypsies play an important role (Havas, 2007; Forray, 2013). The interviewed women named three organizations which helped them: the Gandhi High School in Pécs, the

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<sup>7</sup> Except of Rita and Sonja: In Rita's case the parents didn't support her at all, on the contrary, they were against her further studies. In Sonja's case they didn't support her, but they were not against it. Other relatives (sister, mother in law) helped her.

Romaversitas Foundation and the Department of Romology at the University of Pécs.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the interviewed women considered *internal factors* (their own learning motivation) as most important for their school career. Among the most important *external factors* the women enumerated their family (parents), some teachers and the Roma/Gypsy supporting programs.

### **School career types of the interviewed women**

Katalin R. Furray and András T. Hegedűs developed a categorisation for the school careers of Roma/Gypsy women in Hungary (Hegedűs, 1996; Furray&Hegedűs, 2003). We use this categorisation and also introduce a new category for the discussion of these ten cases:

#### **Type 1: Inheritance of the education level**

In this type the children “inherit” the education level of the parents; for them it is self-evident that their children – including the daughters – attend high school and university. These families usually have a higher socioeconomic status than the other surveyed families. In this study two women – Nina and Francis – fall into this category: both have a mother with a university degree, and they ensured that their daughters could attend university. Francis said: “So this was the case, this had to be like this” (Francis).

#### **Type 2: Social advancement of the parents is a precondition**

In this type – described by András T. Hegedűs (1996) – the relative socio-economic security of the family allows (also) the girls to go to university. Even if parents do not have a high school degree, their higher socio-economic status allows their children to attend school rather than work. In this case, the social advancement of the family is not the consequence but the precondition of a school career. In this study we could place three women – Adele, Barbara and Jennifer – in this category. We did not do it, however, as in their cases the social advancement of the family was indeed an important precondition, but there was another main factor contributing to the school career (see Type 3).

### **Type 3: Parent motivation**

Katalin R. Forray and András T. Hegedűs characterised this type by the term “lucky chance”. The financial safety is in these cases an important precondition, but there is another vital factor: parent motivation. Usually it was the mothers, who would have liked to have learned longer themselves. But as it had not been given to them, they try to support their daughters. We categorized the cases of Adele, Barbara and Jennifer as such a type. Barbara said: “Why could I achieve a university degree? Actually, I owe everything to my mother. She always used to say I should go to school and learn very well [...]. She grew up in an orphanage and had no opportunity to further study after the eighth class, because she had to earn money for her life and she could not stay in the orphanage any longer. She has been working regularly since the age of 14. I think that is why she always said that we should learn and study, that we should not end up as she did, and work from the age of 14”. (Barbara)

Jennifer’s mother systematically prepared her daughter for her school career: “How did she support me? When I was six years old I already could write and read. So, she had already started to train me in the kindergarten. [...] And she sent me every week back to school and somehow, she scraped the money together for it. That was also important”. (Jennifer)

In the case of Adele her father was the main motivator: “My father always insisted that I have to learn and he never let me stop it. I think he would have disinherited me if I had ever told him that I would not study further. After my high school graduation, I wanted to go to work, because I wanted to earn money. I wanted to go and work in a factory. A reward for my thoughts was a slap in my face”. (Adele)

The motivation of the family/parents played an important role in other cases too. For example in the case of Marianne, whose mother learned to read music notes to be able to assist her daughter with the preparation of her homework in a music school.<sup>8</sup> The most important difference is that although the parents act as a role model (e.g. through their reading habit or their interests) and support (financial or with helping in the household) the school career of their children, the main motivation does not come from them, but from the children themselves (see Type 5).

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<sup>8</sup> For more see the special issue about the situation of Roma women in Europe: Increasing success in education (Hrsg. mit Katalin R. Forray). In: Hungarian Educational Research Journal 1/2019. <https://akademai.com/loi/063>

**Type 4: Help of supporting programs for Roma/Gypsy**

In this type – described by Forray and Hegedűs (2003) – the Roma/Gypsy supporting programs play the most important role: Representatives of the programs – for example the teachers of the Gandhi High School in Pécs – convince families to allow their talented children to continue their school education. This opened the path to pursue a school career and achieve social advancement not only for the sons, but also for the daughters. The fact that in this study there was no case in this category, shows how successful these programs already are: There is no need any more to convince the parents or the girls to go to “Gandhi”. On the contrary: they already knew about this opportunity, appreciated it, and consciously built on it by planning the school career for their children. For example, in the case of Adele, who was sent to the Gandhi High School when due to an unexpected death in her family her financial situation deteriorated: “It was an interesting thing, because I was admitted to the Zoltán Kodály Secondary School and I already started the term there. Only an unexpected death and financial chaos caused by it led me to Gandhi, which I do not regret. At that time, I was not badly affected, I accepted the situation that I had to change school and go there, where the books and the meals are for free. It cost much less and so I found myself in the Gandhi”. (Adele)

Jennifer’s family chose the Gandhi High School as well – not because of financial considerations: “I thought at the time that this decision was too early and I was not really happy about it, but my parents were positive, because they knew that they wouldn’t have enough money to help me”. (Jennifer)

There is an important difference compared to results of former studies (e.g. Forray & Hegedűs, 2003): In the cases of this study the idea of a school career for the daughters did not come from the supporting programs but from the parents, who looked for the best available option for their children – and were happy to use the opportunities on offer.

New category:

**Type 5: Individual learning motivation**

In this study we have 5 cases (Agnes, Marianne, Maria, Rita and Sonja) in which the own learning motivation of the interviewed women was the decisive factor (though of course the family socialization and their school experiences also played a role): “This is probably due to one’s personality, that is how

persistent I am, how much I want to achieve the goal, and of course the other side is also important, how helping they are". (Sonja)

„For me it was very natural, to learn, to learn, to learn. I have always known that I have something to do in this world". (Marianne)

Based on this study we would like to add one more category to those from Forray and Hegedűs: the *individual learning motivation* (Type 5). For this type it is characteristic that the respondents and their families consciously and actively seek and use the supporting institutions, programs, and role models to achieve their aims. In order to learn longer the interviewed women were willing to risk conflicts with their family: "[...] Even my mom was obliged to marry early. So, at the age of 14 almost everyone in our family was already married. This is still the custom of our Gypsy-settlement in Kaposvár. However, I explained to my parents that I did not want to get married, I wanted to learn and study". (Maria)

And if it was really necessary they fell apart with the family: "My mother said that I have no other things to do on this earth, but to have children. I should find a husband and bear children. [...] I had to choose between my family and a life that I wanted. [...] I made the decision". (Rita)

Also, in cases, where the respondents could plan with the support of their families, the idea to study and the motivation to learn came from themselves. This was associated with a very strong urge to show what they can achieve and to fulfil the requirements of their families, teachers and their social environment. Agnes said: "I could say that I got here because of my parents, but that is not true. Because if I don't want to learn, it doesn't matter what my parents do. I had a terribly strong urge to please and a very strong learning motivation. To show everybody what I can achieve". (Agnes)

The interviewed women consciously decided to achieve a school career and took high risks for it. Because on the one hand there was the possibility (and often the reality) to lose their home communities (no Roma/Gypsy-husband, high risk of divorce, conflicts with the family) and on the other hand it was not certain that their efforts will be rewarded. The integration into the majority society and the improvement of their social position are not in the least secured. Rita said: "Because I had to bring extremely tough sacrifices for my school career, for my studies, and for being useful for the society, I had to leave my family, I had to break with them. But from society I don't get the message that they really need me". (Rita)

## Comparing the typology of the school careers of the interviewed women

A common feature for types 1, 2 and 3 is that the aim of the families was to keep, strengthen and optimize their (usually higher) social status through the school career of their children. Accordingly, these families were a major supporting factor for the school career of their daughters. In type 4 Roma/Gypsy interest groups play a prominent role, whose aim is to create a new Roma/Gypsy intellectual elite. They use the allocative function of the school system to achieve social policy goals. What these four types have in common, is that they represent a *collective perspective* – of the family or of the ethnic minority group – and that they generate an *extrinsic learning motivation*, which becomes internalized during the school career.

By contrast, type 5 shows an *individual perspective* and an *intrinsic learning motivation* (see Table 6). According to the observations of Judit Kármán Szabóné students from families in a low socio-economic position usually belong to this category (Szabóné Kármán, 2005, 25). This is characteristic for this study too, except for one person, Maria, who comes from a middle-class family.

**Table 6.** Categorisation of the school career of the interviewed women

Dominant perspective	Collective				Individual
	family			supporting programs for Roma/Gypsy	own learning motivation
Name	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5
Agnes		x			
Rita					x
Adele		x			
Sonja	x				
Jennifer		x			
Marianne					x
Barbara					
Maria	x				x
Francis					x
Nina					x
Σ	2	3	-	-	5

In summary, we can say that in the case of the interviewed women the interaction between *individual* (own learning motivation) and *collective* (support from the family, school and from others) factors has led to their success in the school system. The results of this study suggest that – in comparison with the results of Katalin R. Forray & András T. Hegedűs (2003), a shift can be demonstrated in the learning aspiration of Roma/Gypsy women and their families from the collective to an individual perspective and a sharper focus on their individual life and career planning.

### Teacher activities as supporting factor

There are a lot of empirical studies regarding the impact of a positive student-teacher relationship, which provide evidence that these are fundamental to both academic and social-emotional development of students (Ditton 2007). Especially for students at risk of school failure (like the children from the Roma and Gypsy minority), where a supportive student-teacher relationship could serve as an asset.

In this study seven of the interviewed women have named the lack of discrimination (as a passive factor). Sonja and Jennifer said: “I was not insulted and teased in class because I am a Gypsy. That’s something special today”. (Sonja)

“[...] there were no incidents and I never have experienced any discrimination because I am a Gypsy”. (Barbara)

“I can’t tell anything about visible discrimination. In our case there was no teacher who would have said that we should go to “special” schools. But we knew that there were a lot of other Roma and Gypsy children who were in this situation”. (Marianne)

Six of the interviewed women named the supporting role of one or two teachers, especially as role-models:

“[...] in the upper grades, I had a great Russian teacher, who was my role model for a long time. Later we became friends and it was very important for me. And actually, I treat her as my role model. She graduated the schools she sent me to, then I also became a Hungarian-Russian teacher as life went on. So, her life was a model for me. I think, she is still a very important person for me, especially her motivation, that I could do it and achieve something. It was indeed the hardest thing for me to believe that I could be successful”. (Agnes)

“There was this teacher at the elementary school. I had a role model. It was a German-Biology teacher from the Roma-minority. Very few children have a role model like this, who can be respected and who shows that it is possible to do this. I think this gives a lot of motivation”. (Jennifer)

Their individual help was very important, for example by appealing in opposition to the family decision against a school career. Rita said:

“The question of choosing a high school caused some problems for my family. Not only because of financial problems but also – I had to realize – because my family didn’t have the aim to help their children to have a school career or a profession. My teachers came to us several times to highlight its importance. At last my art teacher took me to the entrance exam and I passed”. (Rita)

### Assessment and evaluation

According to the gate-keeper theory of Walter R. Heinz (Heinz, 1992) teachers act as gate-keepers, they allow or forbid access to different school levels with the help of evaluations, assessments and tests. What did the interviewed women say about that?

They said that verbal communication and personal praise or criticism were more important to them than written notes and certificates. They liked to have individual feedback (see Table 2). They suspect that often not their personal performance but their ethnic affiliations or social situation were evaluated.

They are positive about assessment and evaluation, when teachers evaluated their individual performance and did not practice negative discrimination against them:

“I was a good student, the teachers liked me. They made no difference (between Roma and Non-Roma)”. (Jennifer)

“I accepted that there are subjects I can achieve very high marks in, and there are others I cannot” (Marianne).

“I remember a scene at the university. It was my first year and my first week there. Everybody was there for the lectures to learn about the exams. At my very first lecture about ancient history there was a big crowded room, but nobody wanted to sit near me. Some students were standing and I had two free seats on my side, but nobody wanted to sit there. Then the teacher came in and said, he will not teach racists, he slammed the door and left us. It was very memorable”. (Jennifer)

The interviewed women interpret lack of personal attention as hostility, as non-supportive teachers deepened their self-doubt, made them hesitate and caused breaks and delays in their learning career:

“In the high school my head teacher was a Geography-Technical Studies teacher and he did not like me. That is what I felt during these four years. [...] I think, he was afraid that I would lower the level of the class or its prestige or something like that. Therefore, he was always watching me and I felt very embarrassed. When somebody lost something they always started to search me first”. (Agnes)

“My head teacher could have said, that with my good grades I could attend high school, but he did not say anything. I needed seven years to achieve my A-levels”. (Sonja)

“In the seventh class we started to talk about career choices. Our school headmaster, who was my mathematics teacher – and as I said, mathematics was not my favourite subject – came to us for a family visit. At that time our teachers knew us personally and made family visits regularly. Therefore, the headmaster knew us very well. He came to us and started to agitate my parents not to send me to high school, because I would have a bad time there as the only Gypsy. Because there are not any Gypsies there and they do not like Gypsies and I cannot be successful there and would be very unhappy”. (Marianne)

The women have an ambivalent attitude towards positive discrimination. Some of them are happy and grateful about it:

“I can only say positive things. [...] For example, it was very positive for me that I got an extra point (for the entrance exam) because my mother only visited a primary school as her highest level of education. I had an extra point for it. Therefore, it was easier for me to be accepted for a subject, other students had to have a high-score at their language exams or a special kind of A-levels”. (Barbara)

“I enjoy the positive side of being a Gypsy. Because I am one of them – it sounds strange – I could visit places like the USA and England, I was also in Strasbourg and in Finland, many times in many places. I know not only the negative side of being a Gypsy, but also the positive one. I think I am very fortunate”. (Sonja)

Still, it is very disturbing for them when their own success – for which they usually worked very hard – is not perceived as self-achieved, but as a political “gift” because of their ethnical affiliation or social situation:

“At the university I took part in the OTDK<sup>9</sup>. It is a Scientific Conference for students and there were a lot of people who were wondering that I would dare to take part. I won the special award of the Hungarian Historic Society<sup>10</sup> with my paper and they said that I got it because of political correctness. I did not know what to think about this statement, because I worked hard on it. I had also very positive feedback from other places that what I have done is good”. (Jennifer)

**Table 7.** Helpful and unhelpful teacher behaviour by assessment and evaluation according to the opinion of the respondents

Helpful	Unhelpful
Personal feedback	Impersonal assessments
Verbal	Written
Concrete	Abstract
Individual praise/criticism	Marks without explanation
Individual reference standards	Collective (social/factual) reference standards
Emotional arguments	Only cognitive arguments
Democratic behaviour	„Official” and authoritarian behaviour
Individual support	Plenary settings, „chalk and talk” no perception/treat men as a person
Face-to-face-interaction	No interaction

“I was accepted into the graduate program with a scholarship. There were a lot of people who told me – for example a university teacher – that they accepted me because I am a Gypsy. Because the university wants to show that they are so tolerant. It was not pleasant, especially not from a university teacher, from whom I would expect something else. They tried to interpret my results as a political decision. I really did not know what to think about this statement and I still do not know today. I do not know whether it is true or not, but I hope not”. (Jennifer)

That is why their most important hope and demand is that *teachers evaluate their personal performance and not their ethnical traditions or economic or social situation*. Table 7. summarizes which factors of teacher behaviour are regarded as helpful and which are not.

<sup>9</sup> Országos Tudományos Diákköri Konferencia (National Scientific Student Conference)

<sup>10</sup> Magyar Történelmi Társaság (Hungarian Historical Society)

## Summary

What can we say about the educational career of the interviewed women? We can see that they and their parents made great efforts to make it possible for them to advance. The women had a very strong learning motivation and were ready to battle with the traditional female role model. Nevertheless, we could see that they tried to do both: to be a good mother and housewife *and* to achieve educational success. If they were forced to choose they decided to continue their studies, even for the price of parting and divorcing. But increasingly they can count on the support of their families (Óhidy 2016a). Their parents play a very important and sometimes a very positive role in this success; their support is necessary to overcome hard times and not to give up.

Teachers played also a very important role as examples to follow and also as individual supporters. Most of the women had positive experiences with teachers, which was very significant for their success. The negative experiences had a great impact on their life too, because non-supportive teachers deepened their self-doubt, made them hesitate and caused breaks and delays in their learning career.

What can we learn from these interviews in regard to the following question: how to promote school success for female Roma and Gypsy in Hungary? What should teachers do? They have to give individual and personal feedback, provide verbal and concrete praise and criticism in a face-to-face-interaction. It is very good if the teachers use individual reference standards and emotional arguments when they evaluate. It is especially important that they cultivate a democratic behaviour and give individual support. But the most important thing is: *to perceive the Roma and Gypsy student as a real person, as an individual like everyone else* and help them realise their – in this study very strong – learning motivation, for example talk to their parents and argue for their school career.

The interviewed women belong to the small group within the Hungarian Roma/Gypsy minority, who were able – with the help of the educational system – to improve their social position. They questioned or even gave up the traditional female role model and experienced strong identity crisis because of the incompatible attitudes of the majority and minority culture. The departure from tight and constricting family relationships (like Rita's parting from the family and the divorces of most of the women) were very distressing. But they

also experienced the freedom of decision, they could develop their talents and took their life into their own hands, which altogether strengthened their self-esteem. All of them said that they really liked their work and a good job was as important a life-target as to raise their children. They can be defined as a prototype of the modern woman, who tries to have a family *and* work (Dausien, 1992; Beck-Gernsheim and Wilz, 2008). They managed to reconcile their existence for others (family, children) with the claim to have some independence (career, self-fulfilment). They can move confidently between the two worlds of the majority and the minority society. Although they have an “offer” from the majority society to assimilate, they still define themselves as Roma or Gypsy and work for different ethnic organizations. They would like to be Hungarian *and* Roma/Gypsy. Their aim is not assimilation (to be a part of the majority society for the price of losing their cultural traditions) but integration. That means to live together with the majority in the same society and keep the Roma/Gypsy culture. This goal has not been fulfilled yet and there is still a long way to go to achieve the integration and the social advancement of the *whole* Roma/Gypsy minority.

**Abstract:** Roma and Gypsy women in Europe suffer from multiple deprivation (Council of the European Union 2011): Firstly, a large part of Roma and Gypsy people live in poverty. Secondly, their different cultural/ethnic traditions often lead to discrimination in school education. Thirdly, they also have disadvantages through the gender aspect, because the traditional Roma/Gypsy culture defines the place of women to be at home with the family and an educational career is not necessary for that (I. Forray, Hegedűs 2003; Durst 2015). That is why Roma and Gypsy women are often called the “minority of the minority” (Vincze 2010: 195). Despite of this multiple deprivation, Roma and Gypsy women are (not only in Hungary) more and more successful in the education system (Forray; Hegedűs 1991) and they increasingly take part in the political life as well (Bakó, Tóth 2008; Kóczé 2010). The research study focuses on Roma and Gypsy women who have come from a background of multiple deprivation but managed to achieve successful educational careers (defined by their university degree). To answer the research question “Which factors are regarded as beneficial for success in education from the perspective of Roma and Gypsy women?”, we chose the method of biographical narrative interviews. Additionally, we analysed statistical and empirical studies and used expert interviews as well. The aim of the research was to learn about the subjective theories of the interviewed women. The selection of the respondents was done through the snowball-system. The analysis of the interviews was based on

the methodology of Fritz Schütze (Schütze 1983). The underclass theory of William Julius Wilson (Wilson, 1978; 1987) adapted by Iván Szelényi and János Ladányi for the Hungarian situation (Ladányi; Szelényi, 2004) and the theory of Helmut Fend about the functions of the school in society (Fend, 1980; 2003) served as the theoretical framework for this study. For the interpretation we used the categorisation of factors for school success of Hungarian Roma and Gypsy women from Katalin Forray R. and András Hegedűs T. (Hegedűs, 1996; Forray, Hegedűs, 2003). The study shows that all interviewed women had a very strong learning motivation and were ready to have conflicts with the traditional female role model. Their parents and teachers played mostly a very positive role in this success, but the most important factor was their individual learning motivation.

**Keyword:** Roma women, labor market, education, educational policy, school career

**Streszczenie:** Romki i Cyganki w Europie doświadczają wielorakich trudności (Rada Unii Europejskiej 2011). Po pierwsze, duża część ludności romskiej i cygańskiej żyje w ubóstwie. Po drugie, ich odmienne tradycje kulturowe/etniczne często prowadzą do dyskryminacji w edukacji szkolnej. Po trzecie, znajdują się oni również w niekorzystnej sytuacji ze względu na aspekt płci, ponieważ tradycyjna kultura romska/cygańska określa miejsce kobiety w domu, w rodzinie, a kariera edukacyjna nie jest do tego potrzebna (l. Forray, Hegedűs 2003; Durst 2015). Dlatego też kobiety romskie i cygańskie są często nazywane „mniejszością mniejszościową” (Vincze, 2010: 195). Mimo tej wielorakiej deprivacji kobiety romskie i cygańskie odnoszą (nie tylko na Węgrzech) coraz większe sukcesy w systemie edukacji (Forray; Hegedűs 1991) i coraz liczniej uczestniczą również w życiu politycznym (Bakó, Tóth 2008; Kóczé 2010). Studium badawcze koncentruje się na kobietach romskich i cygańskich, które pochodzą ze środowisk charakteryzujących się dużą liczbą przypadków deprivacji, ale z powodzeniem realizowały swoją karierę edukacyjną (określoną przez stopień naukowy). Aby odpowiedzieć na pytanie badawcze „Jakie czynniki są uważane za korzystne dla sukcesu w edukacji z perspektywy kobiet romskich i cygańskich?”, wybrano metodę biograficznych wywiadów narracyjnych. Dodatkowo przeanalizowano badania statystyczne i empiryczne, a także wykorzystaliśmy wywiady eksperckie. Celem badania było poznanie subiektywnych teorii badanych kobiet. Wyboru respondentów dokonano za pomocą systemu kuli śnieżnej. Analiza wywiadów opierała się na metodologii Fritza Schütze (Schütze 1983). Za ramy teoretyczne tego badania posłużyły teoria Williama Juliusa Wilsona (Wilson, 1978; 1987) zaadaptowana przez Ivána Szelényi i Jánosa Ladányiego do sytuacji węgierskiej (Ladányi; Szelényi, 2004) oraz teoria Helmuta Fenda o funkcjach szkoły w społeczeństwie (Fend, 1980; 2003). Do interpretacji wykorzystano kategoryzację czynników sukcesu szkolnego węgierskich Romek i Cyganki z Katalin Forray R. i Andrása Hegedűs T. (Hegedűs 1996; Forray, Hegedűs

2003). Badanie pokazuje, że wszystkie badane kobiety miały bardzo silną motywację do nauki i były gotowe do konfrontacji z tradycyjnymi wzorcami kobiet. Ich rodzice i nauczyciele odegrali w większości bardzo pozytywną rolę w tym sukcesie, ale najważniejszym czynnikiem była ich indywidualna motywacja do nauki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Romki, rynek pracy, edukacja, polityka edukacyjna, kariera szkolna

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