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## AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT. THE CASE OF THE FIRST ROMANI/GYPSY NATIONALITY SECONDARY SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** Educational achievements of national minorities are crucial from the perspective of the particular nationality in question. The goal of this study is to give an outline on a special educational setting: that of the Gandhi School, the very first Romani/Gypsy nationality secondary school in Europe and beyond. The paper offers an investigation of the results of the school in its first 15 years, i.e. between 1994 and 2009, and examines whether the original goal of its founders has been realized during this period. Nationality and national minority are interchangeable concepts according to the author's interpretation.

**Key words:** national minority education, school history, secondary school achievements, Romani/Gypsy students

### 1. Introduction

The Gandhi Secondary Grammar School<sup>1</sup> and Boarding (Gandhi School), located in Pécs,<sup>2</sup> Hungary has been the very first Romani/Gypsy<sup>3</sup> nationality<sup>4</sup> secondary school in Europe and beyond, with the initial goal of the founders of the institution<sup>5</sup> to ensure quality education for the Roma<sup>6</sup>.

This phenomenon can be comprehended as a symbol of the new-born Hungarian democracy: soon after the regime change in April, 1992 self-contained intellectuals and Romani/Gypsy organizations started a foundation named after Gandhi (representing non-violent fight and referring to the origin of

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<sup>1</sup> In Hungary the so called secondary grammar schools are educational institutions providing general academic schooling. Successful secondary school leaving exams attainable after completing this type of education called "O or A levels" in Britain or "Abitur" in Germany are the prerequisites of tertiary education. Therefore having "O or A levels" in Hungary indicates one's chance of social mobility.

<sup>2</sup> The centre of Southern Transdanubia, the fifth biggest city in Hungary with a multicultural environment (nine different national minorities represented at the local municipality) and a recorded history of more than 2000 years, home of the first university in Hungary founded in 1367.

<sup>3</sup> In the present study the terms Romani/Gypsy (adj.) and Roma/Gypsies (noun pl.) are used interchangeably without negative connotation (Ries, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Although in the 19th century nationalism context the existence of the Roma defied the national parameters (Evans 1996, 43) in the Hungarian context the community of the Roma/Gypsies are seen as one of the so-called national minorities (see Act LXXVII on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, 1993). Citizens of Hungary could claim this identity of theirs as "nationality" in the Population Census, 2001 carried out by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (see Population Census 2001). The term "nationality" is used in the Population Census Hungary, 2011 too. Also the Roma in Hungary do have their own political representation since 1993 in the local municipalities. There are ministry supported calls, tenders and applications advertised on a nationality basis – see <http://www.wekerle.gov.hu/?kinek=1882&cikkid=10072&listabol=1> (02/08/2011). In terms of education people belonging to the German minority learn their language at school labeled as "nationality" language, not as a minority one. Therefore it is crucial that since 1993 the Roma have the right to study their so-called *nationality languages* as part of their nationality education in the same way as the Germans or the Croats – even if they do not have a mother country. Therefore in the present paper the terms 'nationality' and 'national minority' are used as synonyms.

<sup>5</sup> See their declaration at the first website of the school, in Hungarian at <http://gandhi.freeweb.hu/suli.htm> (16/04/2004)

<sup>6</sup> The school accepts non-Roma students as well, but most of the teenagers studying there identify themselves as Gypsies (Van Driel, 1999, Carr, 2003, Dezső, 2008)

their target group). The initial purpose of this foundation was to set up a network of educational institutions (kindergartens, primary schools and secondary grammar schools) for the Gypsies aiming at helping to improve the situation of the Roma through schooling. Also, the founders aimed that students who will have been qualifying at their schools would preserve their Romani cultural identity.<sup>7</sup> Via the present paper my aim is to contribute to and complement the little but already existing academic interest devoted to the Gandhi School (Van Driel, 1999, Carr, 2003, Katz, 2005).

The initial research question is to discover whether the goal of the founders of the Gandhi Foundation succeeded by 2009, within the first 15 years of the school. I examine the effectiveness of the Gandhi School through revealing and describing its achievements and challenges (remaining tasks) from its foundation (1992) to the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its performance (2009), i.e. to what extent is this educational experiment successful and multipliable. Discovering and studying an uncovered field is as much as my intention as creating a source for developmental research, focusing on possible perfection of an educational service, or improving the efficiency of relevant educational policies.

After discussing the theoretical framework and applied methodology I sketch the history of the school and comment the achievements of its students. As for the nationality markers of the school I outline the possible scenarios of implicit and explicit realisations of Gypsy studies. In the concluding part of this paper I summarize the significance of my research findings and also outline some possible further related research topics.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

It is almost a commonplace today that the biggest national minority without a home country in Europe is the Roma/Gypsies. Although their cultural, historical background and status is rather heterogeneous<sup>8</sup> in the continent (Crowe, 1995), their everyday needs are focused with a homogeneous approach disregarding inter-group differences in the policy making processes of the European Union, the Council of Europe and beyond. One of the most emphasized policy-making priorities regarding the Roma is schooling and education (Andor, 2011). Childhood<sup>9</sup> and school are inseparable concepts in the European non-Gypsy thinking, which has “a deeply rooted conception of school as an a priori universal, cultural value” (Tauber, 2002, 5). In the case of minorities one’s educational index becomes a significant marker as higher level of schooling would end up in better labour market chances and improved living conditions of the Gypsy/Romani population.

Within the educational challenges concerning the Roma, secondary education is a neuralgic issue,<sup>10</sup> because the social handicap of this minority is the most significant at secondary level (Ferge, 2005). Although the number of schools where A level exams can be achieved has raised to a great extent since the Transition Years<sup>11</sup> (Lannert and Mártonfi, 2003), for most of the Gypsies in Hungary this stage of education remains unattainable. Therefore it symbolises a breaking line that separates our society between those with chances for success and the remaining ones who most likely continue transmitting social handicap (Kertesi, 2005).

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<sup>7</sup> Proving this part of the founders’ original goal exceeds the length of this contribution. The reader can find some data regarding identity-preservation (i. e. those concerning students’ language learning concerning Gypsy languages) and some other publications of the author (Dezső, 2008, Dezső, 2013) and others (Havas, 2007, Orsós, 2008), but a quantitative follow-up research on the self-identification of the graduates have not been conducted yet. See „Conclusion” for details.

<sup>8</sup> Most of the students of the Gandhi School come from different Boyash-speaking (an archaic version of Romanian) Gypsy groups that have not got linguistic relation to Romani (Acton, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Due to the effect of educational expansion (i.e. the number of those attending institutions of education has been growing significantly in the past decades) teen age and youth too.

<sup>10</sup> Priority of elementary education is non-negotiable as its main goal is to stop illiteracy – still this contribution does not focus on this stage of schooling.

<sup>11</sup> The first phase of the period of time (1990-2000) since the Regime Change (1989/1990) in Hungary

Table 1: Educational Index of the Roma Living in Hungary in 1993 (%)

Age	No school	Unfinished primary	Completed primary	Vocational secondary	Secondary w/ GCSE	College
14-19	1,5	32,4	55,3	10,4	0,4	0,0
20-29	1,7	22,4	59,7	14,5	1,7	0,0
30-39	4,6	32,5	47,4	12,5	2,5	0,3
40-49	10,1	39,7	40,8	7,4	1,4	0,6
50-59	32,0	42,3	20,5	3,7	1,4	0,2
60-69	39,6	51,2	6,4	2,1	0,4	0,4
70-	50,9	40,2	7,8	1,0	0,0	0,0

The Hungarian Parliament passed the Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities including the Roma<sup>12</sup> in July, 1993 creating a milestone in the history of the Gypsies in this country as this act legitimised these groups of people as an official national minority and made it possible for them to introduce their minority nationality education. Prestigious minorities (i.e. nationalities) in Hungary, such as the German or the Croats had already had their schools where preservation of their cultures and languages had been possible. From 1993 on the possibility for this way of education opened for the Gypsies as well.

There is nation-wide research outcome evidence (Kemény et al., 1997) that proves what an urging issue, an essential must the education of the Roma was after the political changes of the 1990s. The researchers repeated the survey that they had carried out in the early 1970s as a scandalous act of social studies at those times.

Education is seen as a possible tool for mobility amongst social scientists, so examining the data of Chart 1 is well worth doing. In the year of the research the studied population did not participate in higher education at all concerning the age group below 30. The highest rank of college or university degree was 0.6% among the Roma aged 40-49. The most typical education was the eight completed primary classes among the age group 14-49. Completed vocational training was highest (14.5%) among 20-29 year olds, whereas those who took the A levels were almost not represented at all. Roma aged 30-39 had the most significant representation amongst those who completed secondary grammar education - still the highest rank in their case means 2.5% (!).

In order to understand the concept of minority nationality education we need to examine relevant, existing educational governmental policies supporting the Gypsies/Roma in Europe today. Forray and Kozma (2010) describe that there are two main streams of such educational policies: One policy recognises the Roma as groups with social handicap, and uses education as a means for socio-economic equality whereas the other (i.e. the so called minority nationality education) applies schools for developing Gypsy/Romani cultural identity by conveying and disseminating their cultural heritage (Forray and Kozma, 2010).<sup>13</sup> This latter concept is targeted to be realised in the Gandhi School in order to develop a massive source of human capital, aiming at forming a strong Romany/Gypsy intelligentsia, a significant middle class layer of this national minority within the Hungarian society.

<sup>12</sup> Still the Roma is the only minority perceived as an „ethnic” minority. Using the terms „ethnic” and „ethnicity” therefore has a strong negative connotation even in academic discourse in Hungary as public speech has been using these terms as synonyms for the Roma with pejorative meaning.

<sup>13</sup> Although theoretically there is conscious distinction between the two types of articulations it seems that practice cannot follow the distinct approaches clearly (Pulay and Benkő, 2008, Forray, 2009).

Anthropologists declare that any kind of social or ethnic category is inconstant and neither of them is more homogeneous than other categories of human beings (Eriksen, 2008). Even if proved, this anthropological perspective does not ease political decision makers' and practicing educators' work. Although theoretically there is conscious distinction between the two types of articulations of education policies concerning the Roma it seems that practice cannot follow the distinct approaches clearly (Pulay and Benkő, 2008, Forray, 2009).

When discussing minority nationality education clarifying the concept of separation is also essential. It should be noted that in educational debates separation differs from segregation. While the former is organized on a voluntary basis, the latter is imposed by school authorities or the choice of the members of the majority of the society.<sup>14</sup> Since in case of the Gandhi School there is separation, I will focus only on separation.

### 3. Methodology

Triangulation (cross-examination), in order to give a more detailed and balanced picture (Altrichter et al., 2008) and crystallisation (i. e. "providing a framework in which to balance claims of truth with recognition of the intersubjective nature of all knowledge claims", Ellington, 2008, 14) are the validity assurances of the present qualitative research in the field of the sociology of education; with the intention of applying a multidimensional approach. An exploratory, descriptive, comprehensive, analytic case-study combining the characteristics of research methods (i.e. semi-structured interviews, document and source analysis, literature review) of these types was aimed at conducting.

Concerning literature I focus on volumes available in Hungarian and English. Due to the current nature of my topic, an insufficient volume of literature is available on the subject of Romani/Gypsy nationality education. Most of the bibliography focuses on issues of the Roma related to education in general, especially their inclusion – a topic that is rather significant, however is not my intention to discuss in this contribution in details. As relevant volumes (Forray, 2009; Kozma, 2009; Dupcsik, 2009; Takács, 2009) were published even in the last year of my research I had to apply an ever reflective approach during my work.

### 4. The History of the Gandhi School in Brief

While analysing the institution's representation in relevant articles of local and national papers from the founding years to present days I carried out source research. My content analysis reflects on relevant press exploring the history of the Gandhi School. I chose this technique for sketching the history of the school because although the founders and supporters of the institution have given interviews on the issue examined, information that can be gained by those may contain subjective, nostalgic elements while press items reflect on moments of the actual time without romanticizing their topic.

During the search for the history of the school in the press I have examined more than two hundred newspaper articles focusing on the Gandhi School (Dezső, 2013, 69-98). Among these articles there are publications of numerous genres: interviews, reports, coverage, panels and messages. Several forms of press releases have been focusing on the school and the events that can be connected to this institution since the intention of starting the school became public (April, 1992) up till June, 2009. Amongst this written media we can find Hungarian:

- weeklies, such as *Heti Világgazdaság* (Weekly World Economics), *168 óra* (168 Hours), *Magyar Narancs* (Hungarian Orange), *Hetek* (Weeks);

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<sup>14</sup> Before the regime change in Hungary, children were educated in school districts. As a part of the political liberation process authorities today cannot force anyone to choose a school in the district where they belong to according to their address. Therefore some schools become segregated because in the case the population of a school district consist of mostly Roma, non-Roma parents send their children to districts where the Roma population is not significantly represented. According to researchers the number of the Roma/Gypsy population today is around 600 000 out of the 10 000 000 inhabitants of Hungary (Babusik, 2007).

- educational journals, like *Köznevelés* (Public Education), *Fejlesztő Pedagógia* (Conducting Education);
- University and youth papers: *Faktum* (Facts), *KIDS*, *Pécsi Campus* (Campus of Pécs);
- nationality papers: *Barátság* (Friendship), *Amaro Drom* (Our Road), *Világunk* (Our World);
- national monthlies, such as *Kritika* (Critics) and *Beszélő* (Talker);
- and a county paper of Baranya: *Diskurzus* (Discourse).

Although the sources are rich in my research I concentrate on the most read Hungarian papers described as primary sources. Articles examined can be listed according to particular focuses such as:

- formation of the Gandhi Foundation (1992);
- finding location for the world's first Roma minority nationality school (1992-1993);
- “school start” (1994);
- the Gandhi Foundation transforming into a Public Foundation (1995);
- financial issues;
- philosophies behind the institution;
- portraits of the teachers of the school;
- necrology of an emblematic director, Mr Bogdán (1999);
- initiation ceremony of the gymnasium (sports hall) of the school (1999);
- first A level exams (2000);
- opening ceremony of the real school building (2002);
- 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school - library extension (2003);
- everyday life of the school;
- the school as a (mostly symbolic) venue;
- complaints of citizens living in the neighbourhood of the school;
- debate about the school's new headmastership in the 15<sup>th</sup> school year (2009).<sup>15</sup>

Since the foundation of the school negative attitudes of the majority of the Hungarian society can be disclosed. Citizens of two county centres, Kaposvár and Pécs articulated their disinclination towards the institution several times in forms of petitions in local dailies and at the municipalities. Initially the Gandhi Foundation intended to start its first secondary grammar school (the Gandhi School) in Kaposvár, but the citizens of the town signed a petition against this initiative. Finally, the outskirts of Pécs, inhabited with mostly unemployed people<sup>16</sup> gave place to the school. Its first venue was an office building that used to belong to the local coal mines – this building served as the school, library and student hostel until 2002 (Note that the first graduation took place in 2000) (Dezső, 2013, 69-98).

Although the original idea of the founders of the school was to build a network of Romani nationality educational institutions, only one secondary grammar school was started by the Gandhi Foundation. Building the complete infrastructure of this grammar school (school building, gymnasium, library,

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<sup>15</sup> According to relevant legislation in Hungary every fifth year a competition has to be held in order to elect a headmaster for educational institutions. News reported the claims of two candidates for the headmistress position, Mrs Gida Orsos (later the headmistress of the school between 2009 and 2012), and the incumbent headmistress, Csovecsics, who had been leading the school for ten years, between 1999 and 2009 and of whom, the first Gypsy headmaster of the school, Bogdan she is widowed.

<sup>16</sup> Due to the fact that coal mines, where these people – mostly Gypsies – used to work during the socialist era closed down after the regime change.

student hostel) required more than a decade. Today the architectural solidity of the school is satisfactory.

According to visitors to the school mentioned in the articles (school experts from Hungary and abroad) (Dezső, 2013, 69-98) various pedagogical methods are applied in the classrooms of the school. The overall climate of the institution is mostly represented in a positive way between January 1994 and June 2009. Several prestigious statesmen honoured the school personally. Within this period the leadership of the institution received positive feedback from national and international political and human rights audience (including the visits of the first and third presidents of the Hungarian Republic, ambassadors of the United States and Canada, or the event when Roger Moore as the UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador sent the bouquet of honour to the school). These praises have been given because of the mere existence of the school, and the everyday work of the teachers – without any other specific reasoning.

The analysed newspaper articles however reveal numerous goals of the founders and the school that remain unfulfilled. The teaching-learning work started six months later (February, 1994) than it had been planned originally. Instead of realising the vision of 350-400 daytime students at a time, the average sum of students per year changes between 200-250 young people. Although numerous volumes related to Gypsy Studies have been published by the supporter of the school, a nationwide pedagogical centre for Romani Studies has not been born. Until June 2009 no pre-university courses that would reinforce students' study skills after taking their A levels started at the school.

Due to the weak civil sphere in Hungary, the supporter of the school, the Gandhi Foundation, transformed into a Public Foundation during the autumn of 1995. It means that the Hungarian Government became the main financial supporter of the school as those individuals and organisations that started the foundation did not proved to have enough capital for running it. This setting provides the necessary financial background of the institution as most of the finances is provided from the annual national budget. The support per students is 2.5 times more in the Gandhi School than that in an average secondary school. From June 2009 due to conflicts within professional and political circles the Board of Trustees became unable to take decision.

Based on the information that have been gathered by the social workers of the school we can trace graduating students' attainments in society (Figure 1). Those who succeed to go on in tertiary education specialise in the educational and social sphere. Some of those who graduate as teachers (six persons in 2009) find their ways back to the Gandhi School and start their teaching careers there. (Dezső, 2013, 69-98).

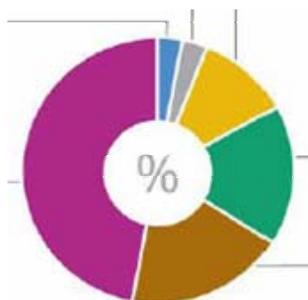


Figure 1: Students' attainments after graduation in %, 2001-2008

*purple (47) – tertiary education, brown (19) – vocational education at secondary level, green (17) – vocational education at college level, yellow (11) – no further studies, grey (3) – other, blue (3) – no data*

## 5. Students' Achievements

According to my source analysis at the school, 281 daytime students during ten graduation years between 2000 and 2009 received their O levels in the Gandhi School (Table 2). Countering the initial goal of the founders, occupations traditionally seen as white collar jobs such as medical doctors,

lawyers, engineers, economists have not been successfully targeted by graduates, a significant number of Romani intellectuals have not been trained in the secondary school during its first 15 years. The drop out rate was highest in the case of the first Gandhi graduates: 18 out of 56 students achieved their O levels after six and a half year studies at the school (Katz, 2005). According to one of my interviewees, the deputy at the school, the drop out rate of the students has been decreasing to around 30 percent of the incoming students by 2008. Most of those who drop out tend to do so at the beginning of their studies. My informant also noted that those who leave the school usually go to secondary vocational education and the social worker of the school help them arranging to find their ways at the new venues of their studies. The school lacks exact statistics considering drop outs.

Between February 1994 and February 1999 students started their education at the Gandhi School after they completed the first semester of the sixth year of their primary education and studied at the Gandhi School for six and a half years. Afterwards the academic training structure changed, newcomer students started their secondary education in September at an optionally six or four year long training. Since September 2004 students normally take part in four graded education.<sup>17</sup> Those who are the most talented but come from the biggest social handicap can take an extra year of competence improvement before starting with the general four grades of secondary education. In 2009 two graduates of the first five year long programme were accepted to preparatory courses at Harvard University.

Table 2: Daytime students receiving A levels at the Gandhi School, 2000-2009

<b>Year</b> <b>(daytime students)</b>	<b>n0 of certificates (A levels) given</b>
2000	18
2001	22
2002	18
2003	26
2004	25 (7+18)
2005	27 (12+15)
2006	37 (19+18)
2007	35 (19+16)
2008	16
2009	57
<b>Sum</b>	<b>281</b>

Looking at the academic grades one can conclude that compared to other secondary school students in the city of Pécs,<sup>18</sup> the achievement of the Gandhi School students is relatively poor (Table 3). Moreover, after 15 years of its functioning, at the end of the first semester in the schoolyear 2008/2009 grades given to students in the Gandhi School in most of the subjects are lower than the grades of students attending other schools in Pécs (Table 4). Science results (Chemistry, Biology and Geography) prove to be the best markers of Gandhi-students, although this data contradicts the university application trends of the students, i. e. that courses of humanities and social sciences are mostly chosen by Gandhi graduates. This contradiction may be due to the strong fluctuation of teachers at the school but also drives attention to the relativity of school grades.

<sup>17</sup> These structural changes of the educational programme may be understood concerning the broader educational context in Hungary. Due to demography declines that started at the Millennium small eight-graded village schools, that had been open to encourage their students to leave them after the sixth grade and join the Gandhi School in Pécs started to become uncooperative. It is understandable as in many cases losing pupils meant that small village schools had to close. The leadership of the Gandhi School considering these circumstances changed its academic training structure.

<sup>18</sup> There is no similar data available from a nation-wide level in 2008/2009, comparison with the results of other secondary grammar school in Pécs, however suggest very low academic performance of the students at the Gandhi School.

Table 3: Markers of secondary schools located in Pécs, Hungary – 2008/2009, first semester

starting number at the beginning of 1st term	drop out during 1st term	students arrived during 1st term	students evaluated	Failure				per cent rate	Average of school subjects										lessons not attended			
				1 subject	2 subjects	more subjects	sum		Hungarian language	Hungarian literature	History	Mathematics	Biology	Physics	Geography	Chemistry	English	German	with excuse verified	no excuse verified	sum	sum average
464	1	1	464	57	18	15	90	19,4	3,36	3,35	3,75	3,07	2,75	2,52	3,38	2,82	3,60	3,01	15144	767	15911	34,29
606	5		598	17	4	3	24	4	3,87	3,91	3,71	3,63	3,53	3,84	4,07	3,61	4,00	3,92	14825	107	14932	24,97
635	8	8	626	60	15	15	90	14,17	3,29	3,33	3,37	2,92	3,73	2,80	3,62	2,96	3,80	3,46	23969	739	24708	39,47
1208	4	4	1191	55	24	9	88	4,4	4,25	4,32	3,63	3,66	3,77	3,58	3,85	3,43	4,09	4,17	36137	1585	37722	31,67
429		3	432	36	13	16	65	15,05	3,47	3,62	3,66	3,02	3,37	2,83	3,05	3,17	3,60	3,58	12470	543	13013	30,12
606	6	5	600	31	19	10	60	9,57	3,60	3,74	3,54	3,49	3,14	3,58	3,80	3,72	3,61	3,80	16796	787	17583	29,31
130	1	0	129	15	4	12	31	24,00	3,82	3,77	3,74	2,86	3,69	3,13	2,40	2,77	4,04	3,71	4863	139	5002	38,78
251	9	3	245	17	10	6	33	13,00	2,97	3,07	3,34	2,64	3,00	2,94	2,86	2,20	3,21	2,95	10844	830	11674	47,65
639	10	3	627	27	12	9	48	7,60	4,24	4,18	3,75	3,74	3,50	3,54	3,88	4,10	4,21	4,21	20355	277	20632	32,91
266	-	1	267	28	7	9	44	16,48	3,69	3,77	3,45	2,95	3,30	3,23	2,86	3,44	3,58	3,73	9820	93	9913	37,13
263	20	2	241	22	8	5	36	8,61	3,24	2,97	3,2	2,83	3,52	2,3	3,41	3,48	3,48	3,38	686	103	789	3,27
830	3	3	826	26	8	3	37	0,045	4,12	4,23	4,09	3,69	4,17	3,67	4,11	3,87	4,23	4,09	26670	108	26778	32,42
234	2	0	231	36	9	6	51	22,00	3,47	3,47	3,40	2,68	3,10	3,03	3,32	3,25	3,65	3,14	10773	124	10897	47,17
249	2	1	248	13	7	2	22	9	4,36	4,37	3,91	3,39	3,81	3,16	4,13	3,06	4,21		7794	194	7939	32,01
402	3	3	402	15	3	9	27	√	3,90	4,60	4,00	3,50	3,80	3,10	3,40	3,60	3,80	3,60	10734	17	10751	26,74
481	6	3	475	30	11	9	50	(12,32)	3,71	3,78	3,64	3,20	3,48	3,15	3,48	3,30	3,81	3,63	14792	428	15216	32,53

(green: Gandhi School –other schools anonym–; red: data found misleading by researcher; grey: sum by researcher)

Table 4: First term end results of Gandhi School students compared to other students' results in Pécs – January, 2009

subject	placing among 15 schools
Hungarian language	14.
Hungarian literature	15.
History	15.
Mathematics	13.
Biology	8.
Physics	15.
Geography	8.
Chemistry	5.
English	14.
German	11. (14)

Also, we must not forget about the very low socio-economic status of the students who attend the school. According to the deputy, parents in some cases are illiterate, and most of the time they have a very low educational index (eight years of primary completed). Families are poor, unemployment is a typical feature. Students living in the boarding (student hostel) for a week in many cases miss their families.

From an educational point of view we must be cautious evaluating students' achievements relying only on the actual academic results they gain. Although it is unquestionable that statistics are needed for decision makers, in order to be able to provide sustainable development through policies, we also need to consider professional (educational) factors while evaluating schools – and students, teachers working in the schools. As there has been no registration of students' input indicators at the beginning

of their studies, the value added assessment<sup>19</sup> remains a challenge for those who run the Gandhi School in the future.

Compared to other schools in Pécs, Gandhi-students seem to attend lessons much more regularly than other youngsters in Pécs. This marker may be due to the fact that students at the Gandhi school have boarding, they live in a student hostel very close to the school building. The drop out rate of the students during the first semester, however is striking: out of 263 students, who started the school in September, 20 left – which means 7,6% drop-out rate, the highest compared to other schools. The school in Pécs that started approximately with the same number of students (266) in September 2008 as the Gandhi School had no drop out at all. During the semester two students arrived so altogether 241 students attended the Gandhi School at the end of the first semester. 14,93% of the students failed one, two or more subjects – meaning the tenth placement out of the fifteen schools examined.

According to the report on the school partners' satisfaction survey taken in 2006, the supporter of the school (i.e. the Gandhi Public Foundation) did not indicate among its expectations the Gypsy/Romani nationality nature of the school, although the realisation of the minority nationality education concept was the initial goal of the Gandhi Foundation in 1992. However, its nationality characteristics are articulated in the curricula of the school: Romani (Lovari dialect) and Boyash Gypsy language classes and Gypsy Studies are taught. Students are motivated to study these subjects; their positive attitude towards these fields can be observed while investigating their grades (Figure 2).

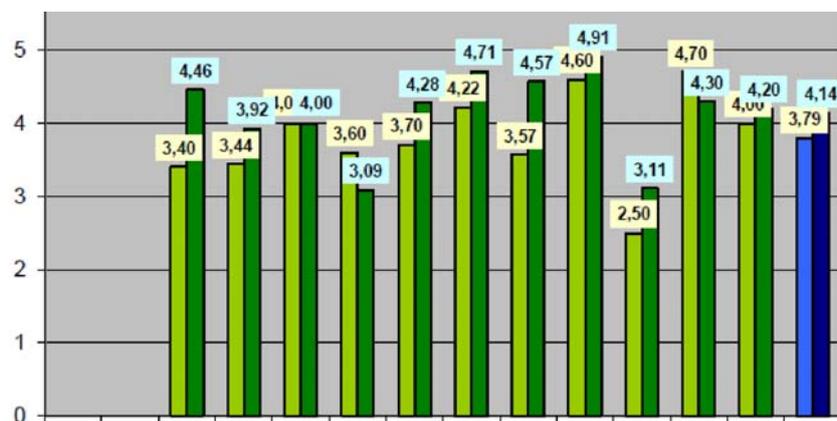


Figure 2: Average grades of students in Boyash (light green) and Romani (dark green) languages 2008/2009 first term end results by classes

*(grades in Hungary go from 1, "fail" to 5, "excellent"; school average in both languages are signed with blue)*

The school often hosts the final session of the nationwide competition in Gypsy Studies. Another cultural event called "Gandhi Days" is organised annually at the school where rich series of Romani/Gypsy nationality programs take place. During the school year the FUND Arts School offers extracurricular activities in preserving the Gypsy culture, such as traditional music and dance lessons for students. The importance of explicit nationality markers of the school may be traced along these events and the positive records and school marks related to students' minority nationality languages, although implicitly we may conclude the lack of significance of nationality markers targeted by the school maintainers in the above mentioned survey taken in 2006.

<sup>19</sup> In the educational discourse value-added assessment (VAA) is an increasingly headway concept. Its idea emerged from public needs, i.e. that citizens and policymakers concerned with the quality of public schooling have been calling for improved standards and accountability. VAA is a system of statistical analysis that summarizes annual gains in student achievement (Stone, 1999). It is one technique that researchers have been developing to identify effective and ineffective teachers and schools. Value-added models do not look only at current levels of student achievement but measure each student's improvement from one year to the next by following that student over time to obtain a gain score. (Doran and Fleischmann, 2005).

If we compare the first name list of the teachers available to that of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary school year we find only one person who had been working for the school for 15 years. In the case of comparison the school years 2001/2002 (“halftime” between the first and the last examined school years) and 2008/2009 we find ten names of teachers being the same out of the 65 persons of the teaching staff. There are eight others who had worked for the school earlier than 2001/2002 and can be found on the name list of the staff of 2008/2009. Altogether there are 18 teachers who had worked for the school for seven years, 27,69%, less than one third of the total number of teachers at that time. One does not have to be an expert of education to conclude that the organisational culture of a school with a fluctuation ratio alike it is a serious challenge to run a school effectively.

Considering the powerful educational influence of positive personal models, the presence of qualified Gypsy teachers at the school is essential. Due to literacy data of the Roma in 1993 (Chart 1), there were two teachers of Gypsy/Romani origin in the staff in 1994, when the school started. This number increased to 11 by the 15<sup>th</sup> year of its functioning. As stated earlier there were six once Gandhi graduates who returned to the school as teachers in 2009. The Department of Gypsy Studies and the Sociology of Education at the University of Pecs contributes to training teachers of Romani and Boyash languages and those of Gypsy Culture.

## 6. Conclusion

The opportunity of Romani nationality education was born due to policy changes in education of the Transition Years. Educational innovation, i.e. practical implementation of this educational concept and experiment in a widespread, structural way however has not been realised between 1989 and 2009 in Hungary. Although establishing a system of Romani minority nationality educational institutions has been the declared intention of the Gandhi Foundation and several governments<sup>20</sup> in the last 20 years, these policies remained unfulfilled.

Twenty years after democratic changes in the political structure of Hungary a particularly significant marker of democracy<sup>21</sup>, i. e. minority nationality education does not show either satisfying or optimistic results. Legislation provides opportunities; governmental practice however has not proven to go hand in hand with a theoretically given framework and real options. As we can see in this contribution although the Act LXXVII on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities provides the right for the Roma to establish their own schools, governments since 1990 have not supported but one school of Romany nationality education, the Gandhi School.

In this sense, the initial goal of the founders of Gandhi Foundation has not come true. A significant number of Romani intellectuals have not been trained in the only secondary school that was established during its first 15 years. The greatest achievement of the school is that it continuously contributes to the preservation of Romani/Gypsy languages and culture. Some of the first few years’ graduates have returned to the school as qualified teachers to work on preserving their culture and serve as creditable model-figures or qualified and found work in the social sector.

Academic results of the students attending the Gandhi School are poor compared to their mate’s results in Pecs, although normative statistics do not tell a lot about the actual pedagogical endeavours of the teachers at the school. In order to receive a clearer picture of the students’ individual development, registering their input indicators and continuous value added assessment would be desirable. In this way the high ratio of teacher fluctuation may decrease (as teachers would have access to feedback of their work) and scandalous serious news-series, such as the one described in the introduction could be addressed with reliable empirical data.

Systematic, ministry or governmental research institution driven follow up research of Gandhi graduates has not been started until June, 2009. Tracking the career of once Gandhi students may be an important research topic<sup>22</sup> as we could conclude the possible effects of Romani/Gypsy nationality

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<sup>20</sup> As the primary supporter of the Gandhi Public Foundation since 1995

<sup>21</sup> Mahatma Gandhi claimed that „You can judge a democracy by the way it treats its minorities.” (Landauer, 2004,7)

<sup>22</sup> Considering the peculiarities of one’s psycho-social self development (Erikson, 1991)

education even at an inter-generation level. Therefore follow up research is considerable amongst those who graduated at the second chance department of the school and their descendents as well.

My results may become a fundamental source for future researchers. Those who consider founding similar Gypsy nationality schools can also learn from my analysis. Because of these characteristics the history of Romani nationality education and the case of the Gandhi School represent a symbolic message of new born democracies of Eastern Europe.

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