

BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING: THE CASE OF THE ROMA ETHNIC MINORITY IN SLOVENIA

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ABSTRACT

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Slovenia has a rather comprehensive legal framework and specific implementing policies to regulate Roma issues. Nevertheless, the improvement of the standard of living of the Roma can only be measured in incremental units. A similar finding also applies to education. So, what went wrong? Roma pupils enter primary school without the adequate prior knowledge required in Slovene schools. Thus, they simultaneously need to fill their educational gaps and gain new knowledge. A solution thereto is to be provided by the school. The latter is thus burdened with excessive responsibility and obligations as regards ensuring the development of the Roma minority, i.e. it is entrusted with tasks it is unable to perform. The basic hypothesis of this paper is that preschool education and various forms of non-formal education implemented (if possible) in Roma settlements lead to an increase in the human and social capital of the members of the Roma ethnic minority.

KEY WORDS: Roma ethnic minority, education, human and social capital

IZVLEČEK

Prebijanje steklenega stropa: primer romske narodne manjšine v Sloveniji

Slovenija ima kar obsežen nabor pravnih določb in posebnih politik, namenjenih urejanju romskih tematik. Kljub temu pa spreminjanje položaja pripadnikov romske narodne manjšine na bolje lahko merimo v lekarniških merskih enotah. Podobna ugotovitev velja tudi za področje izobraževanja. Kje je bila storjena napaka? Romski otroci vstopajo v osnovno šolo brez ustreznega predznanja, zato morajo sočasno odpravljati zaostanke pri predznanju in pridobivati nova znanja; za oboje naj bi poskrbela šola. Šoli sta bili naloženi naloga in obveznost, ki ju ni sposobna uresničiti. Temelja hipoteza prispevka je, da različne oblike formalnega in neformalnega izobraževanja romskih otrok, ki se odvijajo (kolikor je le mogoče) v romskem naselju, lahko prispevajo h krepitvi človeškega in socialnega kapitala pripadnikov romske narodne manjšine.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: romska narodna manjšina, izobraževanje, človeški in socialni kapital

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INTRODUCTION

The Roma in Slovenia are a versatile ethnic minority. They are both an urban and a rural population. A population that has traditionally long been settled in Slovenia, while a part of the Roma minority moved to Slovenia from the territory of the former common state of Yugoslavia. They are a population with an explicitly pyramidal social structure: the higher up one goes on the social scale of the general population, the lower the likelihood of finding a member of the Roma minority. One of the causes of such status is the evident lack of various types of capital (human, social, financial, etc.). Another reason that the Roma live under a glass ceiling (Mrčela 2000: 58) is their ranking on Slovenia's scale of ethnic groups. However one turns it, the Roma are always at the bottom. Moreover, and this is probably the worst aspect, the Roma are simply overlooked, as if they were transparent. This may be attributed to a phenomenon known as the invisibility of "others" (Urh 2012: 28). They are constantly reproached for being non-native. Most documents on the Roma in Slovenia, even those dealing with highly contemporary issues, begin by listing their origins. Yet is placing emphasis on the theory of migration¹ or a method to continuously restore the perception of the majority nation about the Roma being newcomers, temporary settlers in our land? This could be one of the many reasons why the Roma remain on the margins of Slovene society. How to move them from the margins of Slovene society is a question heard from many quarters. In the various visions to improve the social status of the Roma ethnic minority, a key developmental role is assigned to education.

This paper attempts to answer the question why – despite plentiful professional efforts and financial resources – there has been only a slight change for the better in the sense of raising the educational structure of the Roma ethnic minority over the past 25 years. Has a systemic error been made or is it only a set of unfortunate circumstances? The material relevant for the paper was collected in the course of the research project entitled *Increasing Social and Cultural Capital in Areas with a Roma Population*.² In order to find an answer to the above question, multiple research methods were applied: participant observation, analysis of original material prepared by educational support providers, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals of selected primary schools attended by Roma pupils.

The main idea of the experiment tested in the mentioned project was to make the Roma settlement the centre of project activities. In the settlements, so-called Roma Education Incubators (REI) were established. A Roma Education Incubator can be a place as well as a programme carried out at such place. It can be a preschool programme or a programme of several activities, including non-formal forms of education: the provision of educational support to Roma children, animation workshops for children and parents, and sport activities.

We tested a methodological innovation: we put an end to the practice of taking Roma out of their settlements to institutions and organisations that are based in settlements of the majority nation, i.e. primarily social work centres or adult education centres.

Through the establishing of Roma Education Incubators in the Roma settlements, the Roma acquired premises where each individual has the opportunity to raise his/her level of education, knowledge, and qualifications. The provision of educational support to children has shown an improvement in the school performance of the Roma pupils involved. Instructors (members of the Roma community) have acquired a certain level of responsibility, which strengthens their self-esteem. These are all elements that contribute to the improvement of human capital.

Within the project, a preparatory nursery school was established in the Kerinov Grm Roma settlement. The transition to the central nursery school (nursery school in the village with the ethnic majority community) was far more successful for those Roma children who had attended the nursery school in the Roma settlement than for those who had not attended it.

1 "Only God knows who told Miha that the gypsy race originated from India; he stated this and so did his comrade in the pub, while the other gypsies say they are Egyptians". (Trdina 1987: 58).

2 More information is available at: www.khetanes.si.

However, successful school entry is only the first step on the path to success; the failure/success of Roma children depends on many factors, some of which will be elaborated below. Prior to presenting the project findings, it is worth mentioning the legal framework regulating individual issues concerning the Roma ethnic community, particularly education.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ROMA ETHNIC MINORITY IN SLOVENIA

Slovenia has a relatively comprehensive legal framework regulating Roma-related issues, and specific implementing policies have been adopted to regulate these issues. However, the improvement in the living conditions of the Roma can only be measured in minute increments. Similar findings apply to education. In 1990, the situation was as follows: the document "Information on the Situation of the Roma People in the Republic of Slovenia" (*Informacija o položaju Romov v Republiki Sloveniji*) adopted by the Executive Council of the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia on 4 April 1991, includes the following passage:

As in other areas, in the raising and education of Roma children in the past and in the present two specific problems can be highlighted: the problems of socialisation and language. Neither the first nor the second can be resolved within a reasonable period, therefore there were not many Roma who attended primary school, although education was compulsory for them, as for all other children; and most of those Roma who attended primary school did not complete more than two or three grades. Even in parts of Slovenia where Roma have been residing permanently since the 18th century (in Prekmurje) and where they have had good access to primary schools, only a few of them attended school at the beginning of the 20th century. Among Roma women, there is still a high percentage who have remained completely illiterate. It was not before the 1970-1971 school year that the first Roma pupil completed primary school. In the 1984-1985 school year, approximately 30% of Roma children in Murska Sobota still did not complete primary school. Despite the relatively successful and high social integration of Roma into the everyday life of Prekmurje, there are substantial differences between the Roma population and the rest of the population in that region regarding primary socialisation in the family and the interest of the parents in the future of their children, which consequently also causes substantial differences regarding success at school. (...)

The social status of the Roma people has a significant impact on the success of Roma children at school. Roma have been residing permanently in Prekmurje for 200 years, they are integrated into the environment, many have regular employment and they have realised that they need knowledge for their future lives; their children are already enrolled in preschool education, their motivation for school education is stronger than in other areas; they are not as absent from school as the Roma in other parts of Slovenia and are therefore more successful. The results of almost 40 years of efforts of schools and social services are evident but not yet satisfactory. In the Dolenska region, on the other hand, the work is more demanding because the conditions are less adapted to the Roma population. However, in the last decade also this region has achieved some positive movement through consistent and continuous work. Teachers in Maribor started to deal with Roma issues ten years ago, when the proximity of the state border attracted larger groups of Roma from the south of Yugoslavia (from Kosovo and Macedonia) (...). (Information... 1991: 19)

In the past 25 years an extensive collection of documents has been issued (Nacionalna... 2011: 29) addressing Roma issues in the Republic of Slovenia. Unfortunately, it has also been established that despite all the efforts of the state, the Roma ethnic minority is still a community lacking everything in general. They lack space, municipal infrastructure, capital of any kind (social, cultural, financial, etc.), tolerance among the non-Roma population, etc. Roma constantly deal with ethnic prejudice and very often also with discrimination. There are no Roma initiators of change (humanistic and social intelligentsia,

economic and political elites) who would take them from the margins of society closer to the levers of management of the common good. Allegedly, the Roma are a devastated society. And the aforementioned characteristics leave negative traces in the educational process.

REGULATING THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Special attention has been devoted to the education of the Roma population. The normative part is extensive: a) Instructions for the adaptation of the primary school programme to Roma pupils (1993); b) Instructions for the implementation of the 9-year primary school programme for Roma pupils (2000); c) Strategy for the Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia (2004), and d) Strategy for the Education of Roma Pupils in the Republic of Slovenia (2011). Roma issues are also mentioned in the Primary School Act³ and the Preschool Institutions Act.⁴

In order to improve the success of Roma pupils in primary school, two correctives have been introduced: a) for schools attended by Roma pupils an additional post of an expert qualified to work with Roma pupils (a specialised staff member) was established⁵ and b) a Roma assistant, i.e. coordinator, was added to the school environment.⁶

The expert, legal, and programmatic framework is extremely extensive and one would expect a significant improvement in the level of education of Roma community members.

The data obtained from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport show that the number of Roma pupils in primary schools has been on the increase. It could therefore be said that the measures have been effective. Data on enrolment in primary school show the following structure:

Table 1: Number of Roma pupils in primary schools

SCHOOL YEAR	Number of Roma pupils in primary schools
2001/2002	1153
2002/2003	1223
2003/2004	1349
2004/2005	1413
2005/2006	1480
2006/2007	1587
2007/2008	1658
2008/2009	1720
2009/2010	1813
2010/2011	1827
2011/2012	1880
2012/2013	1930

3 Primary School Act (official consolidated text). Uradni list RS, 81/2006.

4 Preschool Institutions Act (official consolidated text). Uradni list RS, 100/2005.

5 Rules amending the Rules on norms and standards for the implementation of the primary school programme. Uradni list RS, 65/2008.

6 The occupational standard was published in the Rules amending the Rules on the Standard Classification of Occupations, Uradni list RS, 31/2007.

These optimistic data, however, have a black mark reflecting the connection between social assistance funding received and the attendance of Roma children in the process of primary education. A letter from the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (MDDSZ) that was received in 2009 states, *inter alia*:

When allocating social assistance funds pursuant to Article 32 of the Social Security Act (Uradni list RS, 3/07 – official consolidated text, 23/07-corrected, 41/07-corrected and 114/06-ZUTPG), social work centres have the possibility of concluding agreements on an active approach to resolving social problems in which they can lay down the obligation of regular class attendance of children of school age as a precondition for receiving this assistance regularly. Pursuant to Article 34 of the same Act, social work centres can allocate social assistance funds in the form of functional assistance for the payment of school lunches or snacks and for the coverage of other costs. In the event of failure to fulfil the obligations under the agreement on an active approach to resolving social problems, social assistance funding might be reduced or even withdrawn. (MDDSZ 2009: 2)

The instructions have no ethnic character. However, if we connect them with the aforementioned reasons for the marginalisation of the education of Roma children, it becomes clear that the consequences of these instructions are mainly felt by the Roma population. Coercion instead of encouragement (if your child fails to attend school, you will receive no social assistance!!) entails the degradation of the child, as he/she is thereby treated as an object.

The data also show the trend of enrolment in primary school; unfortunately, exact data on the number of Roma children who finish primary school are not available. The gap between the number of enrolled children and the number of children who finish primary school is huge. It is certain that the majority of those who finish schooling come from the Prekmurje region.

In the National Evaluation of the Performance of Roma pupils in Primary School, drawn up and published by the Educational Research Institute in 2011, the authors established that Roma children in Slovene schools find themselves in an unenviable position.

- The school results of Roma children in the education process are low and in practice the reasons are alleged to be the following: Roma children enter school at a later age, they are absent from classes, they have inadequate knowledge of the Slovene language, the parents' expectations regarding school education are low, parents do not cooperate with the school, a huge gap can be observed between the majority and minority cultures, pupils (Slovene as well as Roma) are not prepared for coexistence. According to these data, the authors have concluded that the schools primarily blamed the Roma people themselves for their failure to achieve success;
- The number of Roma children who successfully complete primary education is low and they advance from one grade to the next with lower competences achieved in comparison to their peers;
- Expectations regarding the education of Roma pupils by their parents and teachers are low, because expectations regarding their schooling are already negative in advance and they are therefore destined to fail;
- Roma pupils are still segregated at schools, which in practice means that they are placed in separate classes (Nacionalna... 2011: 40)

WHY ARE THE ROMA STILL TREADING WATER?

The comparison between the situation in 1990 and the situation in 2011 shows that the situation is only slowly improving despite several projects being carried out in this field and relatively abundant financial resources. What has gone wrong? Has a systemic error been made or is it only a set of unfortunate circumstances? There are multiple reasons for such incremental improvement in the level of educational attainment of the Roma, ranging from reasons of a systemic nature to being the result of unjustified deviations (anomalies) from education standards.

However, successful school entry is only the first step on the path to success; the failure/success of Roma children depends on many factors, some of which will be set out below.

Reasons of a systemic nature

The reasons of a systemic nature include the following:

1. Systemic racism, which is reflected in denying the members of the Roma ethnic minority the status of a traditional, historical (autochthonous in the Slovene legal terminology) ethnic minority and in the treatment of the Roma as a community of members in permanent adolescence; this is the reason why Roma need tutors and caretakers from among the “enlightened” intelligentsia of the majority nation.

Mapping the Roma ethnic minority stirs up different reactions. Some say that creating Roma settlements means creating ghettos through the side door, and a return to the Roma isolates. This is a realistic risk. Some local authorities actually demonstrate the intention to legalise the existing Roma settlements and regulate utility services therein, yet the municipal spatial plans do not envisage any enlargements. Furthermore, there have been proposals to designate greenbelts around the Roma settlements. If such an idea prevails, in just over a decade we will have to cope with the problem of overpopulation, i.e. Roma slums.

Slovenes apply different standards when dealing with minority issues. When speaking of Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries, the concern of the residents of Slovene villages for maintaining their spatial identity is conceived much differently, i.e. as concern for preserving valued national traditions or as a commitment to preserving our settlement areas.

Following independence, the social position of the Roma in Slovenia worsened considerably. An old Roma from one of the Roma settlements once told me, “Prior to Slovenia’s independence, we all had enough money. We could live quite decently on picking and selling herbs, moving from one place to another.”

When land was returned in kind to the original owners or their heirs following denationalisation (after 1990), nomadism became increasingly unwelcome. After independence, the purchase of medicinal herbs decreased. The only thing left was some mushroom picking, or collecting scrap iron. With the decline in traditional means of subsistence, the Roma ended up at social work centres, becoming permanent beneficiaries of social assistance.

The colonial philosophy that considers Roma settlements as ghetto formations that need comprehensive restructuring, if not elimination, has led to the following systemic errors:

2. The exclusion of Roma settlements from the educational system. The Roma usually enter the educational process at the level of primary school. Very rarely do they attend nursery school and kindergarten. The lack of knowledge of Roma children by the time they enter primary school is so considerable that they are often the target of mockery and contempt. No child is happy to return to a school environment that provides nothing but a great deal of discrimination. Instead of being considered an environment where the process of raising social and cultural capital should be started, Roma settlements are being avoided by education policymakers. This is not only a consequence of political decisions, but also the opinion of “experts”, the majority of whom are convinced that providing educational work in Roma settlements entails creating Roma isolates, i.e. ghettos through the side door. However, a thorough analysis of life in Roma communities reveals that it is actually the lack of activities to raise social and cultural capital in the environments (settlements) inhabited by the Roma that creates a path to the Roma ghetto!

3. Owing to the absence of various forms of formal (the Roma usually skip preschool education) and non-formal education in the environment (settlements) inhabited by the members of the Roma community, an educational gap develops that widens until the entry of the Roma into primary school. Roma children enter primary school without adequate background knowledge and therefore need to simultaneously close the educational gap and obtain new knowledge. And the schools are supposed to be responsible for both. The schools simply have to bear too much responsibility, as well as the obligation to ensure the development of the Roma community; i.e. they are entrusted with tasks that they are unable to perform!! The successful education of Roma children will only be possible when the pedagogic aspect is considered together with housing, the family environment, health and nutrition issues etc.

DEVIATIONS FROM EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

The Slovene educational system employs several mechanisms to help children tackle problems related to entering and participating in the educational process: additional classes, remedial classes, postponement of schooling, and homeschooling. All of the above are intended as exceptional methods. In the case of Roma children, however, these measures often turn into deviations. This is particularly evident in the postponement of schooling and homeschooling.

Deviations observed during the implementation of the project

1. It is generally known throughout Slovenia that Roma children are promoted to higher grades without having achieved adequate knowledge. The so-called "gypsy-pass" (the promotion of children to higher grades without adequate knowledge) has been developed to the benefit of teachers, so they are left in peace by the state educational administration and the Roma. However, when this process finally comes to an end in higher grades, the Roma continue their education at schools for the Roma, (*šule*), as the Roma themselves jokingly and cynically call the (former) so-called people's universities (adult education centres), which have different names in the various environments where the representatives of the Roma ethnic minority live. Education is (sometimes) achieved on paper, but the developmental effect of attending such schools is a topic that still needs to be researched in the future.

Is this a path leading to a vicious cycle of poverty for the Roma? You start life at the social work centre and if you are lucky you spend a year or two in preschool, a few years at primary school, which you leave after several years; you formally finish primary school at an adult education centre and the knowledge you have gained is weak. You have no chance whatsoever to finish secondary school. Without a profession, without knowledge, you have no job or income, therefore you are again on the rolls of the social work centre. The maintenance of such a situation is beneficial to all of the aforementioned players and paid minority members, with the exception of the Roma.

You start to depend on social support. And dependence on social support can lead to other addictions, such as drugs and alcohol!

2. The following lines reveal that the teachers' expectations are low: "Among the ethnic minorities living in Slovenia, it is the Roma pupils who achieve the worst results at school. If we connect this finding with the fact that in the teachers' opinion, the behaviour of the Roma pupils is among the most disturbing, the Roma show the least constructive productivity and ego weaknesses, and from the social aspect they are not well integrated in the class, we can conclude that the teachers probably do not expect much of those pupils." (Lesar, Čuk, Peček Čuk 2012: 12).

The progress is very slow, says Taja, when we ask her about the success of educational support at school. Taja provided educational support in the Roma settlement of Hudeje.

Neither the Roma nor the teachers show much interest. This week there was a christening in the settlement and almost nobody attended class. And I think they are not much interested in knowledge. The teachers give them a positive mark, the so-called 'gypsy pass', although their knowledge is negative. Some time ago, I saw a test of a sixth-grade pupil... it was a disaster! In fact, everything that was written was wrong, but he still got a positive mark. And how Roma are denigrated and humiliated by some teachers! Some time ago, during a science class, a teacher said to a Roma pupil: 'Why are you making this wooden house? At home, your mother will use it as firewood anyway!'

3. Another one of the problems might be the additional educational support for Roma children provided by additional specialised staff working with Roma. This may well be an altruistic gesture that could have an undesired outcome. Teachers provide additional educational support during classes. They take pupils from the classroom to a study room where the child is offered additional educational support. The usual practice is that the teacher and the pupil try to find answers to a selected set of questions together and these questions are at the same time questions on the exam. This is in fact education based on the transmission of information. Naturally, such knowledge is weak. Another problem that occurs is that while attempting to strengthen their lack of knowledge in one subject, the pupil fails to gain knowledge in the subject from which he or she is absent as a result of receiving such additional educational support in a different subject!

4. In most texts dealing with the issue of Roma education, the problem of Roma children attending schools for children with special needs is highlighted. A comparison of the data stated in this paper demonstrates that the increase in the number of Roma children in primary school also causes an increase in the number of Roma children in special schools. This problem also needs to be dealt with systematically.

Table 2: Number of Roma pupils at primary schools with an adjusted programme.

SCHOOL YEAR	Number of Roma pupils in special schools
2001/2002	132
2002/2003	126
2003/2004	120
2004/2005	121
2005/2006	119
2006/2007	123
2007/2008	124
2008/2009	141
2009/2010	135
2010/2011	149
2011/2012	161
2012/2013	179

The list of phenomena defined as deviations must be supplemented by two further practices which – when connected with the education of Roma children – often turn into anomalies.

5. Postponement of entry into primary school. The legislation relating to education allows the possibility that "entry into primary school be postponed for a period of one year upon the proposal of the parents, the health care service, or on the basis of a decision on the placement of children if it is established that the child is not yet prepared to enter school".⁷

7 Act Amending the Primary School Act. Uradni list RS, 63/2013.

Field research has revealed how easily Roma can obtain decisions on the postponement of entry into primary school.

6. Finally, home schooling should be mentioned. This possibility is available as an option under Articles 88-92 of the Primary School Act (official consolidated text).⁸

No discussion of the success of Roma education would be complete without asking the following questions: What is going on inside the Roma communities? How is the success of education influenced by the changes in traditional cultural patterns? How do the processes of new social differentiation take place? What is the role of the members of the majority nation who enter the Roma community to marry a member of the Roma community? The role of the female members of the majority nation entering in this way (new Roma women) is often quite strong. How are internal criminal groups organised? We are familiar with the criminal acts committed outside – Roma committing criminal acts against non-Roma – but no research has been conducted on how Roma criminal groups terrorise the Roma themselves. The problems of alcohol, drugs, family violence and incest, early marriages, etc., are mentioned vaguely and with fear (again someone will accuse us of racism!).

During a walk through the settlement, I was shown a small house, more like a hut, probably the worst housing in the settlement; I could not believe that three children, their mother, and father could sleep in such terrible circumstances (approximately four square meters). Two children attend school, the first and the third grade. The father is currently in prison. The oldest son, attending the 4th grade, also lives with his parents, next to them. Sometimes it is useful that we as teachers see how our pupils live. It might help us understand them better. (Diaries... 2012: 3)

The following note arrived from Bela krajina: "This week one boy was absent for a justified reason. His family moved from a house in the Roma settlement into a tent in the forest. In the settlement they had a fight with another Roma family and escaped into the forest" (Diaries...2012: 2).

Pupils have problems with the Slovene language and their vocabulary is very weak. The sanitary conditions are very bad. They very often move from one family to another. Due to conflicts with neighbours, they leave built structures with electricity and water and move with the children into the forest to live in a tent. In such conditions, children cannot attentively attend and follow classes. They are very often sleepy. They also tell the teachers that their parents drank alcohol and partied long into the night. The older the pupils are, the more evident are the differences between them and other pupils. Non-Roma children avoid them. They never choose them as partners. Even their parents advise them not to socialise with the Roma pupils. (Diaries.... 2012: 4)

A further problem is the weak and small ethnic minority elite; a respected group of intellectuals can set an example and convince others how important education is. Its creation and reproduction represents one of the key elements of ethnic minority (non)development. This also applies to the Roma minority. Educated people develop only gradually among the Roma ethnic community. They use their acquired knowledge and social capital to escape from the Roma community and to disappear into the crowd of the majority nation. While carrying out the project we discovered a Roma woman with a university degree in education (an older woman about to retire); I asked her if she wanted to participate in the project. Her response was, "Dear Dr Komac, the information you have obtained about me is correct. I would like to inform you, however, that I do not want to participate in the project." (Komac 2010: 2)

It is understandable that it is easier to survive by means of mimicry.

Therefore, the following conclusion can be made: since education is only a means to achieve a certain goal, to satisfy a particular interest, and to achieve a better life, the majority of the Roma population consider education to be useless!

⁸ Primary School Act (official consolidated text). Uradni list RS, 81/2006.

CONCLUSION

Given the absence of various forms of formal (usually no preschool education) and non-formal education in the environment (settlements) inhabited by the Roma, there is an educational gap that widens until entry into primary school. Roma children enter primary school with no adequate prior knowledge. Thus, they need both to close the gap and acquire new knowledge at the same time. An extremely difficult task, indeed.

It can be concluded that by bringing members of the majority nation (instructors, preschool teachers, football school students) into Roma settlements, we have opened new ways to generate (raise) social capital. We have made Roma settlements more open. Simultaneous activities in the overall Roma settlement territory in Slovenia and tolerant collaboration between the members of the Roma ethnic minority and the members of the majority nation have contributed to the awareness that the Roma are a typical ethnic minority.

By making Roma settlements more open, they lose the negative connotation of isolates or ghettos and become perfectly ordinary villages. What conclusion can be made on the basis of the above mentioned results of the research?

A three-year period is (too) short for a final assessment of a successfully defined methodological sample. We can only speak about impressions. In this respect, the most relevant are the opinions of those teachers-practitioners who have been faced with Roma issues for years and have used various educational approaches and methods in the past. The opinion of the principal of the France Prešeren Primary School in Črešnovci is as follows:

(...) We have realised that the work done at school is not enough to ensure the successful progress of the pupils, because progress also requires activities at home, continuous learning, and homework, but at home the Roma pupils are not provided appropriate conditions for such a learning process.

Through the project Increasing Social and Cultural Capital in Areas with a Roma Population, pupils were provided support at home or at the Kamenci Cultural Centre. Every day they were given assistance by the members of the Roma Academic Club, who also successfully participated and were in contact with specialised staff members from the school. Via this project, we were able to ensure continuous work, studying, and preparation for class, even in the afternoon. Learning support classes in the afternoon were attended by more than half of the pupils from the Kamence Roma settlement and the pupils who were present also became more successful at school.

In this process, the pupils developed working habits, realised the importance of learning and regular homework, were instructed how to study, and also acquired other skills they need for successful work. This is a process that needs to be developed in the long run and I therefore recommend that the project be continued, because by interrupting our endeavours, the work done so far will have been in vain.

For Roma pupils who do not have an encouraging work environment at home, continuous and organised work at home is even more important, it must, however, last for a longer period of time to enable pupils to internalise it, but in the long run positive results will come.

Pupils from the fifth grade onwards are also not integrated in after-class day care, which makes the work via this project even more important for them. We therefore hope that this work will be continued in the future. (Horvat 2013: 2).

The same applies to the nursery school in the Hudeje Roma settlement. Children who had attended the nursery school in the Roma settlement entered the first grade of primary school much better prepared than the generations before them. In the years to come, it will be interesting to see if the Heckman curve applies in this case. (Vonta, Jager, et al.... 2013: 34-35).

In order to start the avalanche of change, tiny stones have been thrown onto the “Roma scree” for years. Ten years were needed to refine the developmental model. We now know that without an integrated approach the life of the Roma cannot change for the better. Such an integrated approach is a combination of three thematic aspects:

- a. Turning the Roma settlement into an environment/space where a considerable number of activities that can raise human, social, and cultural capital take place. Until recently, most activities took place outside the Roma settlement. The Roma were considered a floating ethnic minority. The mentioned forms of capital enable them (like the rest of us) to enjoy greater mobility, employability, and independence. They enable social and spatial de-marginalisation and de-ghettoisation. The Roma settlement is thus becoming simply and solely a settlement.
- b. Active and simultaneous work of all institutions operating in environments where members of the Roma community live: from local government bodies (municipalities) to kindergartens, schools, social work centres, adult education centres, the police, etc.
- c. The active role of the members of the Roma ethnic minority. Members of the majority nation can indeed contribute to building infrastructure and participate in the design and implementation of a policy of non-discrimination, tolerance, and co-existence. From there on, however, the Roma should make it on their own. We cannot attend kindergarten or school instead of them, we cannot receive education instead of them. Knowledge may not yield immediate financial results, as it is merely a path/tool to achieve welfare, but it is also the only treasure that no one can take away. It is the only capital that can be used over and over again.

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