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Investing in Culturally Inspired Education

*A Chance for Roma and non-Roma Children to
Celebrate Diversity and Equality*

Supervisor: Prof. **Paolo De Stefani**

Candidate:
Athina Iliadou

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Abstract

This research is grounded on the problem of Roma people's ostracism within the European social borders. Whilst Roma communities' marginalization in the receptive European countries is a discourse that has been raised time and again, Roma's social image rather worsens than improves. In this context both Roma and non-Roma communities are trapped in a circle which regenerates discrimination and distrust, impeding them from a sincere social interaction. The paper pursues alternative solutions, arguing that, what has been done so far is either dysfunctional or superficially effective. It seeks for more radical and genuine social processes of engagement and it presents three key components whose dynamics, if combined, are likely to bring auspicious responses: Culture, Children and Education. After showing that mutually driven social integration means recognition of the respective cultural identities, the paper explores the issue of cultural pluralism in education, suggesting that the latter is still the most powerful mechanism to strengthen human rights-based social behaviors. Eventually, it engages Roma and non-Roma children into a project of educational cultural interaction, expected to build cultural bridges between them and create a strong foundation for the future generations' peaceful living together.

This paper is dedicated to my parents who invested once more in my education, despite the fact of having a daughter whose chaotic nature never lets her settle down and choose her destination in life.

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INTRODUCTION

In one of her recent speeches, Miss Katerina Stenou¹, finely outlined in short term the main features of cultural diversity: 1) Self reflexivity, 2) Capacity to accept different visions of the world and 3) Ability to embrace new horizons for conviviality². She added in a remarkable tone: “Claiming Human Rights is nothing without the mental disposal of what is good and what is not. We need fresh arguments and new political choices. Different cosmological approaches”³.

The exclusion of Roma people in Europe is neither a new discourse, nor a problem which ever met radical rooted remedies⁴. Extreme rates of poverty, humiliating life conditions, deprivation of access to social services, discrimination in education, are just some of the depictions of Roma life which are invariably present in reports, newspapers, literature and many other forms of European and International documentations. The description of the facts is always high charged and its tone progressively warning. Slight progression though has been done. The recent denial of a French town’s mayor to bury the dead body of a Roma family infant, flared up anger and reaffirmed with the most disheartening way the flawed nature of non Roma people’s coexistence with Roma⁵. Whilst Roma is the largest, by far, minority group in Europe, with an approximate number of population reaching 10 to 12 million⁶, the relentless indifference of European governments to seriously include them in society, turns the issue susceptible into a bitter joke. The matter is certainly arduous and the solutions other than transparent. From their side, countries have to encounter several challenges, such as the availability of sufficient resources and the hesitancy of an ethnic

¹ Manager and Coordinator of the Intersectoral Platform on Culture of Peace, UNESCO.

² Stenou, Conference on “Challenges and Opportunities on Human Rights-based Intercultural Competencies”, University of Padova, March 2015.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ “Roma in Europe: Demanding justice and protection in the face of violence, Amnesty International, 2014.

⁵ “Roma baby buried in France as probe launched”, 2015.

⁶ European Commission, The situation of Roma in an enlarged European Union, 2014.

group to do the minimum of attempts to assimilate, due to considerably hardcore commitment to family and community traditional norms⁷

Research Hypothesis

The hypothetical foundation of the present paper is rooted in the idea that somewhere beyond this never ending game of social and cultural boundaries between Roma and non Roma communities, there are two, still unexplored worlds: The world of children and the world of culture. The assumption is centrally based on a more philosophical-anthropological approach and is divided in two smaller suppositions. According to the first, children are the purely innocent victims of two opposing worlds of adults. This victimization is clearly conceptualized in the mainstream educational European environments, where Roma children are persistently put at the margins. But Roma children are not the only victims. Non Roma young generation also grows up in the same social framework, nurtured by images of intolerance and prejudices against a diverse ethnic group. Both Roma and non Roma children run the direct or indirect risk of living an undignified life. According to the second, one of the largest enemies of ethnic minorities is the fear of cultural uniformity. For Roma people their culture is the highest confirmation that their identity still survives, just like for most ethnic minorities. A major part of their fear to enter in the mainstream social sphere is the fear of losing their cultural identity. The Romani culture is as rich in grace as any other, but scarcely was given the chance to be promoted more publically.

Over the last years the importance of cultural diversity has been a central issue in many public and official debates. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), is one of the most active promoters of cultural diversity through intercultural dialogues and practices of cultural interaction. Education always occupies a principal position in these debates, as a powerful mechanism to raise sensitivity for the issue.

⁷Matras, 'Roma Culture: An Introduction, retrieved from <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/index.php/culture/introduction/roma-culture-an-introduction>.

Research Question

What exceptionally triggered the desire of the present research was a prior affiliation with the education of Roma children, in the framework of my pro-bono action for ARSIS, an NGO, whose headquarters are in Greece. What my experience taught me is that, the desire of Roma children to learn is strong, their approach to education much different from the mainstream, though. The dialogue on cultural diversity and Miss Stenou's speech sparked my inspiration further.

The present analysis aims to pose under question the dynamics of the triptych children-culture-education. It will be promoted both as a grassroots and as a bottom up functional social mechanism. By elaborating on these three terms, we will observe the possibilities that the new generations of Roma and non Roma have to build the bridges between them. More concretely, it will be argued that the Romani culture has to be introduced in the social sphere more substantially before any discourse on social assimilation is initiated. We will suggest that cultural appreciation and respect can be more successfully reached through the right means of education and through education from an early age. We will precisely target the primary school by claiming that students are in a suitable age for emotional education. Within this cadre we will be given the chance to examine the general dynamics of education in society but at the same time the dynamics of education with reference to minorities and children's self-determination. Eventually, through this multifaceted analysis we will create a colourful puzzle which will present some suggested educational activities able to promote cultural engagement and include equally Roma and non Roma children.

Structural Development

The main body of the paper is constructed by three chapters:

The first chapter is devoted mainly to the discussion on cultural rights and diversity. The initial part is attributed exclusively to the Romani culture so as to boost the discourse on

the significance of culture diversity. It then elaborates on how Roma and non Roma can have a fruitful social interaction through their cultures.

The second chapter explores the dynamics of education in society considering the student both as member of the society and as an individual. It then focuses on alternative methods of education and their powers with connection to children in general and to minorities in particular. Then, the inclusion of the cultural element in education is evaluated as long as the concept of creative education.

The third and last chapter encloses all the above diffusive reflections in a common context, by suggesting an educational project of cultural engagement between Roma and non Roma students. It ends by highlighting some of the principal expectations and the main challenges.

Methodology

The present paper's development was exclusively grounded on a desk research. The type of the analysis is descriptive and based on a socio-political and anthropological approach. With respect to this, the main sources that were used for our research derived, in first place from literature and articles. In second place piece of information was collected by International and European documentation, including reports of different organisations on Roma issues, declarations, especially on cultural rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Finally, artistic sources and personal experiences attributed their inspirational contribution in a productive way.

CHAPTER 1

From tolerance to the respect of cultural diversity

Introduction

Culture, as defined in the preamble of the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Declaration on Cultural Diversity, should be considered as the set of material and non-material characteristics of a social group encompassing art, literature, lifestyle, moral values which, as a whole, attributes to this group its distinct identity.⁸ Similarly to every culture around the world, the Romani culture is considered to be among the richest and oldest ones regarding their unique way of living⁹. Our reflective starting points on the issue of the exclusion of Roma children in mainstream schools should be profoundly based on the admission that part of the problem derives from the cultural gap between a Roma and a non-Roma child¹⁰. The reluctance of local communities to include holistically Roma children into schools, likewise Roma's families' reluctance to trust non-Roma people, is deeply rooted to the fact that two largely different groups with almost nothing to share in common are now asked to coordinate indirectly by bringing together their sprouts in the same educational environment. That is because the contextualisation of education within an ethnic or national community is influenced, at least partly, by the cultural identity of a particular community. This chapter's development is grounded on the assumption that respect for cultural identity is required before any attempt of social interaction between a minority and a majority. The initial section of the chapter is exclusively dedicated to a quite extensive outlining of Romani culture's richness, simply because it is usually considered by non Roma populations as "inferior", unimportant in the best case¹¹. Some declarations and positions of European and International instruments will follow, to enhance a shared understanding of the concept of cultural diversity. Consequently, in the

⁸ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Declaration on the Cultural Diversity, 2001.

⁹ O'Toole, 2008.

¹⁰ Georgiadis, Zisimos, 2012, pp. 47-54.

¹¹ Moscaliuc, 2004, p. 381.

final section we will discuss, on a theoretical, mostly symbolical, level some cultural lessons that a Roma child can give to a non Roma and vice-versa. This symbolic interaction between the children will help us pass to the thesis' further step through which we will examine and suggest some ways to actualise this interaction

1.1 The Richness of Romani Culture

The culture of Roma is one of the most multi-dimensionally shaped cultures, due to the exposition of the Roma population to continuously changing images, surroundings and social settings as the inevitable outcome of their perpetual travelling and moving across Europe and Asia¹². Indeed, a determinant, characteristic of Roma, one that has forged their social status for centuries, is their nomadic life, which importantly defined their mentality. For as much as they live nomadically, Roma people can be hardly enclosed into standardized social frameworks¹³. Ranking from central to eastern and south eastern European countries, Roma people have been collecting multiple cultural fragments from all their different settling places, gathering them into a uniform contextualization which later constituted the Romani culture. What should be taken into account is that, regardless of the fact that in recent years Roma communities show a greater tendency to settle down rather than being on the constant move, their culture has always been considerably impressible.

Before proceeding to the exploration of Romani culture, it is of vital importance to acknowledge from the very beginning a minimum of similarities between Romani and non-Romani culture. The explanatory basis of this admission simply lies in the fact that Romani culture is a conglomeration of many non-Romani cultures¹⁴. The principal reason why the comprehension of the above mentioned statement is necessary, is the subsequent possibility to examine how the particular cultural characteristics that distinguish a Roma from a non-

¹²Marushiakova and Popov, "ROMA CULTURE", retrieved from <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/index.php/culture/introduction/roma-culture>

¹³"Gadgo Dilo", Toni Gatlif, DoruMitran, 1997.

¹⁴Ibidem.

Roma child could be reconstructed under a common new order, able to raise opportunities for equality and inclusion of Roma children in mainstream schools.

Whereas having being long criticized for their bizarre and vagabond way of living, street begging and their weakness to assimilate in non-Roma communities, few non-Roma people have ever zoomed seriously to the Romani culture. Indeed, it is reasonably difficult for a non-Roma person (especially in modern Europe) to conceptualise or show empathy for a Roma, due to their particular lifestyle. Meanwhile, we wish to mitigate this extreme positioning towards Roma people with the following remarks, because we believe that Romani culture deserves a deeper observation.

Roma people have fascinated and inspired various musicians, directors and artists all over the world, showing that Romani culture put some colour to the global cultural heritage, part of which is distinctive European¹⁵. An interesting example that reveals the neglected face of Romani culture, is the story of the famous composer and pianist, Ferenc Liszt, who was so highly enticed by the unique sound of Gypsy melodies that decided to write a whole book on Gypsy music and its impact to the Hungarian nation: “The Gypsies and Their Music in Hungary”¹⁶. Apart from their rich music traditions, Roma people are skilful dancers, using often a spectacular combination of singing and dancing in the streets, to make a living out of it¹⁷. For Roma people their culture is all their property. All their wealth is their culture. They care to protect its “purity”, something that can be easily understood by the way they hand their traditions down to the next generations¹⁸. Relevantly, the narration of a Roma girl who recalls her childhood memories, presents us in an impressive and transparent way how the Roma culture is kept imperishable in time: *“Instead of going to school, my siblings and I, like many children from travelling families, were taught about the arts, music and dance. Our education was learning about wildlife and nature, how to cook and how to survive. I*

¹⁵Shapiro, 2002, retrieved from <http://www.rootsworld.com/rw/feature/gypsy1.html>

¹⁶O,Toole, 2008.

¹⁷Shapiro,2002, retrieved from <http://www.rootsworld.com/rw/feature/gypsy1.html>

¹⁸ Freeman, 2009 retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/sep/07/gypsy-childhood-prejudice-education>

didn't know about my time tables but I could milk a goat and ride a horse. I could identify ink caps, puff balls and field mushrooms and knew where to find wild watercress and sorrel. By the age of eight or nine I could light a fire, cook dinner for a family of 10 and knew how to bake bread on an open fire"¹⁹. Always in reference to the non-materialistic features of Romani culture, someone can distinguish the Roma people's commitment to their family as an institutional norm²⁰. The way how the Roma communities organise their large households indicates their direct familiarity with terms such as responsibility, dedication or protection, words whose meaning Roma people discovered out of their necessity to travel in compact and coherent groups to confront the adversities of wandering life. What we need to keep in mind though is the idea of responsibility and care related practices as deeply rooted in Romani moral system.

The general neglect of Romani culture does not only concern their spiritual world, but also their practical skills. Roma are famous for their expertise in craftwork, creation of wooden domestic tools²¹. Their wagons are often distinguishable by the nice, colourful paintings on them, mark of Roma's inclination to art creations. The way in which Roma families plan their everyday life at practical level, perfectly mirrors their moral mind set and beliefs, even if the last ones were shaped under their need for survival. For instance the Roma man's traditional role of collecting old materials in order to shell them and feed his family is a representative occupation within the Romani culture which shows a methodical way in working, rather manually, than mentally²². The collection and trading of old materials is a traditional field where Roma people are extremely active²³. Not only that but, ranking from the division of various tasks among the members of a Roma community to the undertaking

¹⁹Ibidem.

²⁰Matras, "Roma Culture: An introduction", retrieved from <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/index.php/culture/introduction/roma-culture-an-introduction#Morality,spiritualityandreligion>

²¹Romaninet, "A multimedia Romani course for promoting linguistic diversity and improving social dialogue: Report on Roma people" pp. 25-26.

²²Ibidem.

²³Henriques, 2012, pp. 317-319.

of multiple responsibilities out of the house, Roma people seek for an energetic rather than passive life²⁴.

1.1.1 The Gypsy's Pilgrimage/Les Saintes Maries de la Mer

Whereas probably widely known in Europe, it is worth to mention one traditional event which takes place every year in South France and depicts the zenith of Roma culture's manifestation. For the reasons of the following description we may take the role of an objective, but observant spectator. The Gypsy's Pilgrimage in Saintes Maries de la Mer is mainly a religious ceremony where the presence of masses of people, either Roma or non-Roma, pilgrims or not, turn this event into a really fascinating one. The duration of the celebrations is three days, during which someone being there could empirically realize, in the form of a shortcut, the essence of being and living like a Roma. Besides the religious atmosphere, which is strong and present all around, plenty of Roma street artists, by others called Gypsies, either in collective groups or individually, pour out in the streets, spreading all around their music and dancing vibes. What is by far the most enchanting element of all these spectacles is that the wandering Roma, besides the all day long and free entertainment that they offer to the audience, reveal at the same time their professionally performed skills²⁵.

After the above short but vivid enough depiction of this event we have still the role of the observant, as much objective as possible, spectator. We are impressed from the spectacle just like any other around, however our theoretical objectivity brings as face to face with a still unanswered question: Does all audience's fascination stop to the spectacle itself? We will try to link this question with our next brief commenting upon the term "folklore".

²⁴Ibidem.

²⁵Description as perceived from personal attendance at "The Gypsy's Pilgrimage, The Saintes Maries de la Mer, May 2015.

1.1.2 Above a Superficial Folklore Identity

One of the main factors that usually hinders a deeper understanding of minority groups is the majority's refusal to accept what their ethnicity or culture really means for them²⁶. In the case at issue, people's weakness to evaluate differently Romani culture is reflected in their often labelling it as "folklore"²⁷. And the term folklore has been connected for a long time with negativity, superficiality or something rather fake compared to the "original"²⁸. This perception has partially stigmatised Roma, as ethnic group, in a sense that for a large number of people Romani culture is nothing more than a colourful, entertaining spectacle. And here, we again, as the objective spectators, we argue that this superficial view ignores what there is underneath, ignores the essence. Now, bringing back in our mind the depiction of the above described Romani event, we may explain in short terms what we consider as essential in Romani culture: Whilst full of colours, traditions, and sounds, Roma manifest their culture in the simplest and most ordinary way. However, their emotional self-satisfaction through this "unsophisticated" manifestation draws accurately Roma people's particular relation with their culture. It is a relation of dependency. In a life of poverty and long lasted exposition to suffering due to harsh conditions, culture for Roma people is the principal and most precious heritage that they carry with them wherever they are²⁹.

In the above sections we made a passage through various images of Romani culture. Our presentation is possibly susceptible to excessive analysis or exaggeration. Nevertheless, our focal intentions was, first to enlighten a bit more a culture that is often left behind, and second to give food for further thought on the next discussion about cultural diversity with relation to social assimilation of minorities.

²⁶Skutnaab-Kangas, 1999, p. 56.

²⁷ Moscaliuc, 2004, pp. 381-382.

²⁸Tracy, 2015, p. 256.

²⁹ Milligan, 2013.

1.2 Maintaining the Culture of Roma People Unspoiled within the non-Roma Reality. The Importance of Cultural Diversity.

Roma and non-Roma worlds have yet large steps forward to do in order to get closer. In spite of the fact that they have been living together for so long time in the same territories, the local non-Roma communities show indifference and apathy towards Roma culture and communities ,refusing to know more about the Roma population, that is the largest minority group in Europe³⁰.

One of the basic factors that makes a meaningful inclusion of Roma people in local communities such an unattainable goal is that non-Roma populations give to social assimilation a meaning synonymous to acculturation³¹. We argue that this definition of social inclusion sounds threatening to Roma, who feel that their culture is put under risk. Apparently, the same complexity is mirrored in the problem of Roma children's school marginalization. Local communities do not accept them the way they are. Nevertheless, this strong pressure that local communities put on Roma for cultural homogeneity, rather weakens than reinforces the chances for social adaptability and involvement. Here emerges the great necessity of keeping Romani culture unmarred in order to show them trust and increase their self-esteem³². The recognition of cultural diversity among the nations, minorities and ethnic groups, its sustainability and contribution against the plague of racial and ethnic discrimination, is a thematic that has been put on the table by different International and European actors through various illustrative concepts.

1.2.1 UNESCO on Cultural Dialogue and Cultural Diversity

Among the leader actors, UNESCO, in its World Report has brilliantly stressed out the value of cultural diversity and its protection, in the global realm, as a key guide for the universal implementation of human rights³³. One of the alerting issues which is emphasised

³⁰Zagora, 2015.

³¹ Crondahl and E. Karlsson, 2015.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Investing in Cultural Diversity and Cultural Dialogue, UNESCO World Report., 2009, p.5

in the Report is that stakeholders and decision-makers should recognise the utter significance of cultural diversity, thus, starting projects where intercultural dialogue and exchange would be at the forefront³⁴. Discovering the culture of Roma and consequently leaving free space for them to participate in the construction of the social image in European countries by using their own, original and authentic capacities will not merely facilitate their inclusion, but also help local communities to realize the prominent dynamics of a Roma/non-Roma mixed society. It could also create a fertile ground for a “living equally together” project, proving in this way how important is to appreciate cultural uniqueness in order to safely open new social chapters³⁵. UNESCO focuses also on the value of cultural dialogue as a powerful tool to enter into the perceptions of a diverse group and build, thus, a mutual understanding³⁶.

1.2.2 Declaration of the Council of Europe on Cultural Diversity

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on December 7, 2000 has included in their agenda some Guidelines on cultural diversity as a reconfirmation and fortifier to the European Cultural Convention³⁷. As far as the question of this research is concerned, some parts of this declaration are particularly worth being singled out. The second paragraph of Art. 1 underlines that cultural diversity can be truly manifested, only when creative methods of expression exist³⁸. According to the next article of the declaration the expression of cultural diversity has to be followed by its sustainability. Education is presented as one of the highest contributors to the accomplishment of keeping culture’s sustainable³⁹.

³⁴Ibidem, p.18

³⁵Winkin, Yves, 2002, p.21.

³⁶Investing in Cultural Diversity and Cultural Dialogue, UNESCO World Report, 2009, pp. 56-57.

³⁷ European Cultural Convention, Council of Europe, 1954.

³⁸Ibidem.

³⁹Ibidem.

1.2.3 Open Society Foundation for the First European Roma Institution

In the pursuit of the aim of protecting Romani culture in Europe, the Open Society Foundation in collaboration with Roma leading figures has recently initiated plans to establish the first European Roma Institution meant to officially safeguard the cultural heritage of Roma communities, under the financial help of the Council of Europe⁴⁰. In support of the above analysed aspects of the cultural diversity, this freshly expressed need for the institutionalisation of Romani culture comes to reconfirm Roma populations' fear of losing their identity.

1.2.4 The Declaration of Fribourg on Cultural Rights

On May 8, 2007, the Observatory of Diversity and Cultural Rights, launched the Declaration of Fribourg on Cultural Rights (Déclaration de Fribourg sur les droits culturels), after twenty years, during which various actors have been working on it⁴¹. The Declaration at issue was presented as an aggregate document where, all the already known but dispersed in various instruments on cultural rights would be set forth again and gathered altogether⁴². The first article of the Declaration, which includes the fundamental principles, manifests the universality of cultural rights and their being indivisible part of human rights. More particularly, the fourth and fifth paragraphs [letters (d) and (e)], emphasise the restriction of any attempt to impede the complete manifestation of cultural rights, but also that the cultural dimension of human rights should always be taken into account⁴³. Furthermore, within the context of the following articles, cultural identity is described as interrelated to people's dignity, and a cultural community as the group where this cultural identity can be protected and fostered concurrently⁴⁴. Art. 4 is of high importance for our analysis so far as it highlights

⁴⁰Soros, Jagland, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/why-we-are-setting-european-roma-institute>

⁴¹Universite de Fribourg/UniversitatFreibourg/University of Fribourg, retrieved from <http://www.unifr.ch/iiedh/fr/recherche/diversite-et-droits-culturels>

⁴²Ibidem.

⁴³University of Fribourg, 2007, p. 4.

⁴⁴Ibidem, p. 5.

that no cultural identity shall be imposed to a cultural group without their consent⁴⁵.As for Arts 6 and 8, the former refers to the education as a basic intermediary mechanism for the promotion of cultural rights, whilst the latter encompasses the right to cultural cooperation between communities⁴⁶.

This brief outlook on the positions of important organizations and institutions on cultural rights, supports our argument on the necessity to respect Romani culture. The existing documentation on cultural diversity and its protection is of great significance, as far as they address in a coherent and official tone the value of cultural richness. Notwithstanding, theory is never enough. A meaningful and complete application of written obligations should be accompanied by efficient practices. Efficient practices should assure that “diversity” is not merely accepted, nor is simply understood as the word which explains how different we are. On the contrary, we must seek for practices which use diversity as the main spring for social progress through cultural interaction. Given that, a much deeper understanding of Romani culture should be the basis upon which local actors, governments and organisations could build the bridge between them and Roma. An effort of deeper understanding should be also done in educational environments where Roma and non Roma children meet each other. And this is because in order to specify the presence, the role and the potentialities of a Roma child in a non-Roma schooling environment we need to observe further the opposing cultural backgrounds⁴⁷. Like this the educational methods could be directed according to the best interests of both groups of children. In order to seek for these educational methods, we need to examine also the weaknesses of Roma and define the minimum attempts that they should do to facilitate the process.

⁴⁵Ibibem, p. 6.

⁴⁶Ibidem, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁷Freeman, 2009.

1.3 The Adaptation of Roma in the New Social Demands

In mixed social environments such as in European countries, where non-Roma and Roma population share their living, their diverging needs are an ongoing heated debate. Education and the relevant policies that contemporary societies are demanded to adopt regarding the effective “marriage” of two considerably different cultural groups, are challenging issues⁴⁸.

The receptive community’s will to welcome and include respectfully Roma people in their social sphere comes undoubtedly in the first place. Notwithstanding, the will of Roma to do some steps forward and get closer to local standards is another important, contributory to the above mentioned engagement, factor. The latter claim may be justified also by other strong argument. Meanwhile, before proceeding to our arguments we have to support the assumption that the intricacy of Roma child’s inclusion in the educational mainstream system, is partially credited by Roma. As mentioned in the introductory part of the paper at issue, one of the most representative features of Roma culture is their closed communities where family’s prosperity is a priority. At the same time fear and lack of confidence for outsiders is predominant, especially because they want to defend themselves against any attempt to exploit or treat them bad⁴⁹.

Obviously, after so many centuries of Roma presence in Europe their perpetual reluctance should be considered as an important hindrance to social engagement. This can be partly justified by the argument that in modern societies there are more and more initiatives and projects fighting for their equal and qualitative participation in the society. Said so, with the boost of local communities Roma people’s selective perspective needs to be substituted by more openness and trust. This is primarily because Roma’s inclusion and interaction with the local community should be understood as a reciprocally reinforced venture, such as any other effort to bring together two diverse collective groups. Illiteracy and lack of basic

⁴⁸Gynther, 2007, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁹Matras, “Roma Culture: An Introduction”, retrieved from <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/index.php/culture/introduction/roma-culture-an-introduction>

knowledge are among the major factors which increase the vulnerability of minorities; similarly happens to Roma⁵⁰. Moreover, looking at the general living conditions of Roma people in European countries, Roma communities have done and still do many appeals to governments for the conversion of this scene to a less miserable one⁵¹. Evidently, Roma's exemption of poverty, violence and prejudices against them, scarce chances for job and education, should not be at all linked with any fear of losing their cultural identity. This is precisely the detail where our attention has to be carefully shifted: Asking for the cooperation of Roma communities in order to achieve a fruitful for both sides social engagement, at the same time raising their opportunities for a better future in Europe, should not insinuate that any kind of coercive policies for cultural homogenisation are acceptable.

1.4 The Beneficial Face of a non-Roma Reality for a Roma

Accordingly to the argumentation on the necessity of Roma people to partially adapt themselves to the local environments, local communities should adopt policies supporting the importance of the Roma culture. They should let them feel, through convincing ways, that their identity is not at risk. This suggestion is founded on the idea that a durable and essential social interaction of Roma and non-Roma communities needs to be based on neither coercive nor, egocentric tactics. The appreciation of the non-Roma culture by Roma people encompasses the acknowledgement of how the latter could profit from the former. At this point it should be clarified that when we talk about the non-Roma culture we must mostly define it as the culture of the already existing and functioning social settings and norms where Roma are settled. Because this already established mainstream social order is the basic fear of Roma community⁵². Their long exposition to discriminatory treatment, the outsiders' beliefs of their culture being out of the ordinary and persistent prejudices have persistently triggered the refusal of Roma communities to integrate⁵³. Nevertheless, a beneficial non-

⁵⁰Gynther, 2007, pp.3-4.

⁵¹Amnesty International , Human Rights On The Margins, Roma in Europe, retrieved from http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/roma_in_europe_briefing.pdf

⁵²Henriques, 2012, p. 319.

⁵³Ibidem.

Roma society should be included in our dialogues and reflections on the problem of Roma marginalisation and educational exclusion in Europe. The industrialised, modern way of living in a non-Roma society, though mainstream or even indifferent might sound compared to the Romani culture, should be regarded as the key response to the question of how Roma people can assure themselves a better future. Furthermore, the beneficial image of the assimilation process of Roma people should be grounded on the thought that the possibility of social interaction does not mean losing ethnic and cultural identity. On the contrary, the co-existence of the diverse groups of Roma and non-Roma should start being understood as the potential solution against the former's isolation, which is basically chosen as the only safe way to manifest but also protect their culture from extinction⁵⁴.

Trying to outline the general image of Roma people within the frames of non-Roma communities in Europe and taking into account the analysis that has been done so far, we may end up to the following statement: From one side Roma people, whilst afraid and reluctant to an extensive connection with the local, either intentionally or out of necessity, do want to achieve the basic knowledge and skills for adaptation/integration. This can be assumed by the fact that a considerable number of Roma families in Europe send their children to mainstream schools, recognising, thus, the value of education for their life's facilitation⁵⁵. From the other side, there is the European society where, local communities not only neglect to fulfil Roma's rights but in some cases also outrageously, violate them. That being said, out of the two parts of the above assumption we can draw the general picture of the unwillingness of both sides to understand each other or simply show empathy for the other group's diverse roots, perceptions and points of view. However, the attendance of Roma children in mainstream schools should raise our hopes for change. And this optimism should be preserved regardless the lack of governmental support, regardless the discrimination of local communities, regardless the reluctance of Roma people. There should

⁵⁴ Barth, 1998, pp. 10-12.

⁵⁵Matras, "Roma Culture: An Introduction", retrieved from <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/index.php/culture/introduction/roma-culture-an-introduction>

be no more excuses, but rather persistence and willing to create the right circumstances. With respect to the latter statement from now on we may shift our point of attention from Roma and non-Roma people to Roma and non-Roma children. Therefore, the following and last section of this chapter will draw a picture of what could, Roma and non-Roma children, learn from one another.

1.5 A Roma and non-Roma Child Face-to-Face: A Chance for Change

The exclusion of Roma children from mainstream education should not be regarded as devastating solely for them. The persistent denial of local communities to respect Roma children's human rights lead to spiralling reproduction of discrimination and intolerance. Discriminative schooling encloses dangers of short and long term. The short term impacts are the direct bias against Roma children, the deprivation of their right to education and potential psychic disorders affecting those children⁵⁶. The long term impact lies in the risk of feeding more and more generations with the same mentality of intolerance for ethnic diversity, subsequently turning them passive or, even worse, prone to racism and violence⁵⁷. In this way, education, while originally provided to empower individuals and broaden their mental horizons for their contribution to an open, functioning society, is now taking the form of a huge boundary between two groups of people who could have been living harmoniously together. People should be introduced to recognition and respect for different cultures since an early age in their life⁵⁸. What is more, the school has to be a dynamic promoter of cultural dialogue and cohesion in societies where people suffer from xenophobia, racism and fear. Children must be facilitated to lift themselves up, by showing one another why their cultures and ways of living do equally matter.

Having already outlined the most distinctive and important features of Romani and non-Romani culture relations, it could be of extreme interest to give the children the roles of

⁵⁶European Commission, Report on discrimination of Roma children in education, 2014, p.5.

⁵⁷Ibidem.

⁵⁸Wardle, retrieved from

http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=548

educators. Which would be the most precious lessons that anon-Roma child could give to his/her Roma peer? What are those features that do exist in the life of a Roma child but miss in the life of a non-Roma young person? How could the jigsaw of cultural values be completed?

1.5.1 What a non-Roma Child Can Learn from a Roma Mate

If we would like to capture an image of non-Roma social reality this could be one, where time runs fast, where being a prosper citizen demands adaptability, strong competitive skills and participation in mainstream mechanisms. By accepting this reality as a fact, without critically assessing it as right or wrong, it is arguable that cultural expression through arts, traditions or entertainment has been long now neglected in a prevalent framework of flat social standards. Most of non-Roma children in Europe are nurtured with the idea of bridling their desires in order to achieve success in the education and later on in the labour market⁵⁹. They are educationally trained according to a model of “good citizen”⁶⁰ That being the case, it seems that a non-Roma life tends to leave behind, little by little, those activities which feed the spirit and soul. Individuals restrict them, usually unconsciously, in order to match with the generally accepted social model of a fast running citizen. Here comes a Roma child, whose childhood encompasses opposite empirical examples. Familiar from an early age with music, arts and dance, it is simple for a Roma child to perform regularly without particular effort or special courses⁶¹. Arts do not always require private or academic knowledge to be performed, as a non Roma child is often told. Moreover, he/she is able to take responsibilities concerning family issues from a very early age, knows how to set a household, and often spends a major part of his/her childhood working in the streets either alone or with other family members. Lack of fear, durability in adversities but also the ability to be still hopeful and carefree in hardness, are just some of the lessons which a non-Roma child could likely take from a Roma peer. In support of all the above mentioned, the heterogeneity of the

⁵⁹ Wiener, 2014.

⁶⁰Ibidem.

⁶¹Freeman, 2009.

cultures being at risk in the modern world of global and universal morals, must not be a neglected point of view⁶².The Roma culture, still resistant enough to “liquidity”, has the stamina to remind in Europe the glory of cultural uniqueness. In any case, the cultural backgrounds of a Roma and non-Roma child in Europe share common roots, as Roma culture has been largely formed, as already said, out of various traditions, morals and values that Roma gathered from all their travelling passages in Europe, putting them together into an original set⁶³.

1.5.2 What a Roma Child Can Learn from a non-Roma

From the other side we have the picture of Roma people in the European national or local communities. Proud and happy of who they are, massively harassed from unequal treatment and discrimination, though. Whereas struggling for better days, their negativity or reluctance to sympathise with the mainstream social models remarkably complicates the problem. It is urgent to let them recognise the positive side of being socially adapted. Roma people, having decided to seek for better living conditions by settling in places which they share with non-Roma populations, have apparently made, at the same time, an informal kind of contract with them, a contract regulating their social interaction. To put it differently, Roma populations should accept the idea that their relation with non-Roma apart from potentially fruitful, it is a relation of necessity. Roma, only by showing trust to non-Roma they can secure a beneficial access to society. According to the abovementioned, a non-Roma child could be a good example, by showing to a Roma that patience and self-restraint are necessary for participation and social interaction. Non-Roma children toughen in a culture of “must” or “should”. This image may be hopefully helpful for a Roma child to be smoothly absorbed by the new, bizarre reality. Non-Romani culture is as rich, in beauty and uniqueness, as the Romani. Non-Roma children very often grow up into environments where, ideas, morals and values are transmitted through the emotional sensibility that arts and music

⁶²Henriques, 2012, p.318.

⁶³Ibidem.

offer. That being the case, education should care about teaching to both groups of students how their social images can obtain a complementary role.

By giving to children the role of teachers and learners we tried to highlight, in a metaphorical sense, how Romani and non-Romani cultures can reinforce each other once the right premises for this to be possible are found. Among the strongest premises is the very nature of children, whose flexibility, adaptability, and resilience is the focal question of our research.

Final remarks

In this chapter we went through an intense exploration of Romani culture to raise the debate on cultural diversity and the importance for its respect in relevance with social assimilation of minorities. We stressed particularly out some reflections upon the complexity of Roma people's inclusion in modern societies by examining it as a multifaceted problem. In this extend we argued that both groups need the minimum of efforts to get closer to the other instead of tending to polarization. Ultimately, through the linkage of the above diffusing reflections we inserted the concept of cultural interaction in the discussion, accepting its likelihood to bring closer Roma and non Roma. Children were finally presented as key contributors for this interaction to be initiated. In the following chapter the education will be analysed as the key mechanism for the empowerment of cultural interaction between Roma and non Roma communities.

CHAPTER 2

Observing Education and its Dynamics for the Student into Society

Introduction

In the former section we set forth the crucial importance of creating a social environment where fruitful interaction and equal participation of Roma and non-Roma could be improved. Education has been accepted as a key contributor to enhance tolerance and appreciation of culture and diversity. At this point, we must emphasize the importance of primary education, respecting the argument that the earlier Roma and non-Roma children enter the game of cultural engagement the stronger the foundations of its sustainability will be⁶⁴. Following the same logic, it is also estimated that the earlier the children are educated on issues concerning discrimination, the more enlarged are the potentialities to share real emotions and feelings or show empathy for disadvantageous groups⁶⁵. Nevertheless, acknowledging the complexity of the integration of Roma people in the non-Roma world, education should also be understood as a domain where there is space enough for reconstructions, upgrades and creativity. The entire venture of cultural exchange through education and between children should be characterized as a very delicate one, especially, due to the fact that hopes for radical social changes are pinned on this idea. With respect to all the above reflective points this chapter will examine education from multiple approaches. The construction will start from a generic observation of education and its role into the society. Further on, we will raise the issue of how the image of education changes according to the student's expectations, shifting then our attention to the Roma student. Finally, through an analysis of alternative methods of education, we will elaborate on the triptych: non formal education-culture- children to shape a dynamic combination.

⁶⁴Wardle, retrieved from

http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=548

⁶⁵Naughton, 2006, p.4.

2.1 Education as Requirement for Social Adaptability and Participation

In societies where ethnic minorities are mingled with the host population one of the major challenges that the society has to face is the interconnection and synchronization of two diverse settings of needs, capacities, and cultural characteristics. Only if this interconnection is reached, can we open discourses on a new emerging social image which could be reformulated mutually by both groups. The educational system represents one environment where the above mentioned challenge is crystal clear. Nowadays for Roma communities which are settled in Europe, the basic knowledge, especially speaking and comprehending the local language, is more than necessary for their interaction with the local population at multiple levels. Needless to say education is a powerful tool against humiliation, discrimination and exploitation to which Roma populations are still persistently exposed. Despite the fact that local communities largely fail to include Roma children in schools, disregarding, thus, their dignity and pride, we should not underestimate the essential meaning of basic educational skills. Particularly, Roma people should consider the acquirement of basic knowledge, as one of their substantial rights, rather than something that puts at stake their cultural identity the right⁶⁶. The access to basic knowledge should be understood by Roma, both as a right and a duty, for the accomplishment of a fair assimilation⁶⁷. The annual report of the Roma Educational Fund (REF), published for the year 2014, showed that over 54,000 Roma parents were involved in their initiatives concerning inclusion of Roma in education⁶⁸. This number, even if not big compared to the whole Roma population in Europe, is indicative of the willing of Roma communities to be educated without hesitations or fears of losing their cultural identity. Currently, for Roma children in Europe access to primary education must be recognized as the very first step to avoid what their parents suffered in the past and, at the same time, as the stepping stone to prepare the ground for a more prosper life⁶⁹. Even if a young Roma does not have great

⁶⁶Gynther, 2007, pp. 231-233.

⁶⁷Ibidem.

⁶⁸ Roma Educational Fund, 2014, p. 9.

⁶⁹Gynther, 2007, pp. 231-233.

expectations for academically oriented education or career, basic knowledge skills are still of considerable importance. If, for instance, he or she follows, traditionally, the job of trader, speaking the local language is an obvious requirement to reach good agreements with the “outsider” partners⁷⁰. Beyond the benefit and strengthening of Roma children, basic knowledge is an issue which can be hardly overlooked, regarding the modern way of living. Similarly to every developed or even developing country, in European countries where Roma populations are settled, though cynical it may sound, the factual reality changes extremely fast, through a process of constant social reformation. Apart from the more sensitive persons that could be more cooperative, the major part of the populations in industrialized societies are scarcely motivated to slow down their everyday rhythm and compromise with the standards of minorities. By recognizing as meaningful the latter assumption we could also label the status of the official educational policies as unavoidably necessary for the Roma child. This could be alternatively explained as the minimum requirement for a smoother access of a Roma child to his or her peers’ world, and the other way round, but also later, as an adult, as necessary to enter the challenging social environment, wherever this might be⁷¹. Access to basic education, as the main means of accommodating the harmonious co-existence of the two groups in the same territory should fall within the scope of legal national or international provisions⁷².

2.2 The Ambivalence of “Success” in Education

2.2.1 The Power of Education for the Student as an Individual

Beyond the role of education as the powerful tool to prepare students for their entering into the mainstream society, the education should also be assessed according to the correlation of its dynamics with the pupil as an individual. The complete mission of education is accomplished only if knowledge is perceived as interrelated with the particular personality of each child, its inclinations and aspirations at the same time. The United Nations

⁷⁰Ibidem.

⁷¹Churchill, 1986, pp. 120-125.

⁷²Gynther, 2007, pp. 3-4.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is maybe the most determinant international document, having been ratified by the striking majority of UN Member States⁷³. Its 54 articles obviously outline the overwhelming consensus of nations, governments and populations on the recognition and protection of the rights of the children⁷⁴. Among them, the right to life and development and the right of the child to education are being set forth in the Arts 6 and 28, respectively⁷⁵. In the first paragraph of Art. 29, the talents, the personality of the child along with its mental and physical abilities are described as essential contributors to the child's appropriate development process⁷⁶. Out of a simplistic interpretation of this article, the educational system needs, at times, to put aside its mainstream functioning so as to focus to the children's special impulses and expectations in life. In other words, a fairly constructed educational system should be inclusive of pedagogical methods which would potentially be at odds do with the mainstream accepted educational models. The main argument in support of this claim is that the majority of educational mechanisms are considered to be functional when the students manage to reach a set of goals which all together shape part of the generally approved social status in modern societies: strong competitive skills to achieve high grades, later on access to the highest level of education and finally find a well-paid or prestigious job⁷⁷. However, prosperity and quality in life should not always be understood as fixed, objective concepts⁷⁸. What is more, we may argue that the image of a child in education depends importantly on his own unique personality as well as on his life out of the school⁷⁹. With respect to the child's particular personality but also to the different influences that the child has out of the school, education must include teaching activities, methods and materials directed to this plurality. Creative means of learning should also be at high level in the hierarchy of educational methods because they promote

⁷³Woodhead, 2005, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, 1989.

⁷⁵Ibidem, art. 6 par. 2 and art. 28.

⁷⁶Ibidem, art. 29 par. 1(a).

⁷⁷Woodhead, 2005 p. 82.

⁷⁸Veerman, 1992, pp. 40-41.

⁷⁹Ibidem, p. 39.

importantly self-determination⁸⁰. Listening to the student's voice, respecting their talents and supporting their inclinations can be claimed a bottom-up educational approach, whilst the classic model of formal education is a top-down⁸¹. This is because the latter prepares the students to enter the society according to a standardized social student-model, while the former seeks to examine deeper the student's characteristic needs and desires, building, thus, his or her personality up from zero. The central aim of this alternative educational approach is to familiarize children with the two following reflections: Firstly, success in life does not necessarily depend on following a path whose characteristics are defined by the social majority. Secondly, that a successful individual is not merely someone who has great skills and competences but that one who can also determine these abilities by his/herself and apply them in the optimum way. For instance, a student whose desire or inclinations concern more a technically oriented job should be encouraged as much as another one whose expectation is relevant to an academic career.

2.2.2 The Significance of the Education for a Roma Child

Acknowledging the differences between the educational systems in Europe, it is generally estimated that Roma students fail to achieve satisfying performance in schools due to low grades, drop outs or poor attendance. School segregation of Roma justified by claims that they have mental disabilities or merely because they belong to another ethnicity is a case which has a de facto negative impact on children's educational progression⁸². Meanwhile, just like for all children, the Roma child's performance evaluation in schools must take into account its surrounding environments and culture. When we claim a Roma child's educational failure we have to double check their own perception of success, as long as their willing to succeed. In accordance with this, our central question is: How Roma student's performances would be evaluated, had they been directed through different forms of education? As mentioned in the precedent section the conditions of a child's life out of school

⁸⁰Holden, 2014.

⁸¹Ibidem.

⁸²European Commission, 2014.

play a vital role in the development of its personality. Similarly, when it comes to Roma students we should respectively observe their conditions of life and culture before the assessment of their capacities. Not only because they should be equally treated, but also because there is a risk of drawing conclusions based on abstract assumptions which could rather decrease than reinforce student's self-esteem. It should be clear that becoming a musician, a dancer, or an artisan is not of lower social value than becoming a doctor, a bureaucrat or a lawyer. On account of the above reasoning, the challenge with minority students is double: from one part efforts must be done in order to avoid making them feeling shame for their ideals, from the other part their self-determination should be supported just like any other child's. This approach initially accepts the Romani cultural identity as equal to the non-Romani, thus, giving to the Roma child the liberty to make their own choices for the future. Obviously, these choices might be linked to academic achievements. In the framework of its projects for the vocational support to Roma students, the Roma Education Fund (REF) provides annual reports which illustratively reveal the ambitions of many Roma students for an academic oriented career⁸³. Besides the role of school in promoting the student's self-determination, when it comes to a minority group in a school of majority it is of extreme significance to keep them exposed to their own culture including their language⁸⁴. This is because it is not enough to provide them with superficial teaching tools which will merely contribute to a basic social assimilation⁸⁵. The real challenge is to give their lives an existential meaning equal to the majorities. When the cultural image of a minority group is absent in school curricula, then, the fear of identity loss emerges⁸⁶. What is more, introducing the majority children to a new culture and language, in our case we speak about Romani, should not be understood as harmful for them, but on the contrary, as beneficial⁸⁷. The inclusion of both minority and majority languages in educational environments will be a determinant factor in the pursuit of a beneficial cultural interaction between Roma and non-

⁸³Roma Education Fund, 2014, p. 17.

⁸⁴Skuttnabb-Kangas, 1999, pp. 45-48.

⁸⁵Ibidem, p. 48.

⁸⁶Ibidem, p. 47.

⁸⁷Ibidem.

Roma students. In any case, direct participation of the children in the decision making that concerns their own lives must be considered as an educational approach which extends significantly the sphere of human rights of the child⁸⁸. Especially, if this approach reaches individuals during the early ages of their educational experiences, those most crucial for their future⁸⁹.

From the above syllogism on education and its dynamics for the students in society, what we should predominantly take into account is how relevant the object of education could be according to the particular subject-receiver of the knowledge. Apparently, the subject at issue is the student and the factors which influence the dynamics of education are the social standards, their own character as well as their surrounding experiences and environments. This ideal type of education which could equally focus on all of these elements requires a lot of efforts and it is a hardly achievable goal. The sense of what is socially profitable or not for somebody is formed both by the opinion of the average person and by the personal perceptions of the individuals. Finding the balance in between is a very challenging venture, precisely when an educational system is asked to attain the social integration of minority students. With regard to this exhausting mission of education, for the reasons of our research our interest leans towards alternative and less intensive educational methods in local schools, which, through cultural interaction, could be mutually advantageous for Roma and non-Roma students. In order for this to be done we have to go through the different forms of education and how their dimensions alter in schools with mixed ethnic groups of students.

2.3 Formal and non-Formal/Informal Education

2.3.1 Formal/Official Education

The formal education, as officially defined, is the institutionalized education provided by either public or private national institutions and may vary according to each nation's

⁸⁸ Bath, 2011, p. 4.

⁸⁹Ibidem.

different social structures and legal frames⁹⁰. The generally accepted central structure of formal education is based on a period of studies which start from primary education and is prolonged till the end of university studies⁹¹. It is accomplished in schools where fixed unit courses take place in fixed timetables⁹². Its primal aim is to train students, either for academic or future job carriers in order to enlarge the feasibility for a prosper life into the industrialized, modern societies. Over the last decades entire societal settings have been functioning according to the official educational model which illustrates its efficacy and importance for the past and present generations. Nevertheless, this image is reshaped when education should include minority groups, like Roma. This is because the fast and intensive curricula that fit satisfyingly to the majority students cannot be, in most cases, followed by minority in the same efficient way⁹³. The formal schooling requires most of the times a quick adaptability of the student to the curriculum, something that most of the times seems to be an arduous goal for the minority groups⁹⁴. The majority of the used methodologies in mainstream education, like for instance, learning by heart, are very unlike to correspond to minority children's needs, similarly for Roma students. Formal education adopts, mainly, a single direction knowledge model, limiting in this way considerably the chances of the student to self-direct their own choices⁹⁵. We could claim so that his de facto restrictive effect deprives Roma students from their right to a qualitative education as well as from their right to non-discrimination. Apart from this, the flat, non-flexible nature of formal education can be assessed of poor suitability for an equally fruitful interaction between Roma and non-Roma pupils. Whereas formal education, when initially introduced in society was considered very likely to bring about development and better life conditions, this image was later distorted, reshaping, thus, the original expectations of people⁹⁶. The rates of poverty were increased, the chances of

⁹⁰United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, 2014, p.6.

⁹¹Smith, 2002, retrieved from http://www.infed.org/foundations/informal_nonformal.htm

⁹²Ibidem.

⁹³Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999, p. 45.

⁹⁴Ibidem.

⁹⁵Zaki Dib, 1988, p. 300-315.

⁹⁶Werquin, 2010. p. 22.

employment became less and the gap between the social classes was rather enlarged than mitigated⁹⁷. Assuming that the context and structure of education are interrelated to the permanently changing social reality, then it is reasonable to believe that the educational materials, methodologies and means of teaching should be regularly updated. The above analysis does not imply to criticise the pedagogical significance of formal education. It is rather destined to open a debate on its effectiveness when minority students are included in it.

2.3.2 Non Forma/Informal Education

Around the 1970's a new form of education made its appearance as a response to the failure of formal education to meet the original expectations of societies⁹⁸. The non-formal education was introduced as any form of gaining knowledge and experiences which is organized and developed out of the institutionalized educational standards⁹⁹. It is important to make the distinction between non formal and informal education which are often mistakenly perceived as one and the same. Despite of the fact that there is no officially agreed definition of informal education, it is generally believed to be the long lasting process of acquiring knowledge from a variety of experiences and sources, extended over somebody's lifetime¹⁰⁰. The basic element of informal education is its random and abstract organization in space and time, with contrast to non-formal which is more precisely organised. Travelling, for instance, is an informal way of accumulating knowledge resulting from the exposition of the traveller to various cultures, places, people and mind-sets. In order to facilitate the comprehension we may understand the non-formal education as a part of a wider form, which is the informal type of education. Some of the core and most important, for the purposes of

⁹⁷Ibidem, p 7: According to the author the necessity of the existence of formal education in countries depends on the social demands of each national context. So, it is not at all impossible that a formally rooted educational system could not be so efficient in specific countries.

⁹⁸Rogers, 2007, pp.1-3.

⁹⁹Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰Ibidem. p. 3.

our research, characteristics of non-formal education, as these were outlined by Simkins, are the following: short term, specific, focused on the individual, repeated and practical¹⁰¹.

The educational community has estimated that the dynamics of non-formal education are considered to be more favourable for minority students, predominantly because they give enough time and space for a smooth assimilation¹⁰². Roma students show a great educational gap vis-à-vis non-Roma students due to lack of prior similar educational experiences and especially language skills. As concerns the precedent discussion on the definition of success, it should be stressed out that the broad spectrum of non-formal education is not only addressed to the needs of minority students. On the contrary, it can potentially empower also non-Roma students whose needs do not fit perfectly with the standards of formal mainstream education. It is imperative to clarify that in our pursuit of encouraging educational methods for Roma children we must equally include non-Roma students, to preclude the risk of narrowing their benefits. Other than this, equally inclusive methods indiscreetly respect the right of the children to education. Subsequently, our anticipation hinges on the idea that the educational practices which respect equally minorities and majorities would, eventually, teach to children how to respect equally each other.

2.4 Education and Culture: a Reciprocally Empowering Combination

Either formal or non-formal, the image of education and its meaning for the students would be remarkably different if culture, both as a term, but also as an idea, was to be introduced with the pupils in mixed school communities. The culture, as described in the first chapter, is the radical connection of ethnic minorities, with their particular identity, language, traditions and morals. The survival of a minority's culture within social conditions that are predominantly defined by the majority is essential. The comprehension and appreciation of the culture becomes more vital when it takes the role of a powerful impetus to the process of assimilation. UNESCO, in its extended report on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue

¹⁰¹Werquin, 2010.

¹⁰²Ibidem.

highlights the penetration of culture related curricula in schools as a prerequisite for an education of quality¹⁰³. This argument can be enhanced by the idea that in mixed communities, culture, ethnicity and language are taken for granted by the majority, they are inextricable parts of their lives without any necessity to fight for their maintenance¹⁰⁴. Nevertheless, as it has been repeatedly stressed out above, for the minority group this is not at all the case. Regardless the fact that Roma people's identity and cultural characteristics still leave their mark in European societies, the governments have yet to leverage these same elements in a way that can boost Roma communities to move a step forward¹⁰⁵. And it is exactly at this point that the substance of civil, social and political rights emerges. The real dignity in life is found only after the individual is offered the necessary means to use for their own advantage. This means in order to be given in a right and complete way require a long term process and education seems to be the fundamental tool for this investment. The cross cultural educational policies have been long recognized by several organizations and actors, on an international level, as a key approach to foster human rights and respect for cultural diversity¹⁰⁶. Moreover, many discussions have been done so far on the importance to include the mother tongue of minority children in schools for an equally shared educational experience for both minority and majority¹⁰⁷. Scientists have underlined how bilingualism in mixed schools could be really vital for the best interests of the child-student from many different aspects¹⁰⁸. Regarding the hypothesis of this paper we may argue that whereas language is one of the most valuable cultural features for an ethnic group, it is still part of the entire set of their culture. Given that, learning and comprehension of the diverse culture can

¹⁰³United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2009, p. 113.

¹⁰⁴Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵Ibidem, 57.

¹⁰⁶ For further information see the brief on Education and Culture prepared by the Technical Support Team (TST) which is a cooperation between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations development Program, available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18290406tstisuesedcult.pdf>

¹⁰⁷Skutnaab-Kangas, 1995, p.54.

¹⁰⁸Ibidem, p. 54-55.

be advantageous for both Roma and non Roma students¹⁰⁹. The common dimension between the meaning of education and culture has to be found in the substance of development. The UNESCO in the Declaration on Cultural Diversity acknowledges the necessity to promote equally the culture, in a world where globalization and standardization of morals enclose the risk of loss of uniqueness¹¹⁰. The same document addresses the young generation as a high contributor to the promotion of cultural diversity¹¹¹.

The inclusion of minority cultures related topics in mixed schools will be a positive project from which students can, hopefully, reciprocally benefit. Moreover, regarding the long term effect of this project, it might be estimated as a strong starting point to create a future social environment where xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance will not be as much piercing as they are at present times. The investment of learning and teaching through culturally based methods and activities shall not be an exhaustive one as long as mainstream education and academically oriented knowledge are equally necessary for children's progression. It should rather be considered as a large potentiality to increase the chances for dignified life conditions for both Roma and non-Roma children. The stereotypically repeated narratives about Roma child's lack of required skills for adaptation to mainstream education, should be replaced from the following question: What are the common virtues of a Roma and non Roma child and how these virtues, combined, could become empowering tools in children's hands?

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, Tove Skutnaab-Kangas points out how bi-educated people, implying those who have acquired knowledge of another languages or culture apart from theirs, develop abilities of understanding deeper both sides and thus act as bridging builders, Skutnaab-Kangas, 1995, p. 56.

¹¹⁰ UNESCO, Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001, p. 61.

¹¹¹ Ibidem, p. 51.

2.5 Seeking for Combined Policies Which Respect Equally Roma and non-Roma Children

2.5.1 Culture and non-Formally Oriented Educational Methods

The main challenges that schools have to address in the pursuit of a fruitful engagement of children in mixed educational environments are the linguistic gap as well as the diverse cultural backgrounds¹¹². Additionally, the use of language in a Roma pre-school environment, which is basically the family, is rarely compatible with the form of language that is adopted by formal educational methods¹¹³. In other words the way a Roma child uses the language does not permit him or her to read or write¹¹⁴. Whilst not the only one, the linguistic gap between a Roma and non-Roma, as part of the culture, represents quite clearly the relevance of knowledge in a mixed class of students¹¹⁵. Under these circumstances, the usual underestimation of Roma children's performances and skills can be claimed virtual, simply because the mainstream educational standards demands for a set of already fixed requirements as those where shaped by particular norms, morals and social conditions. The non-formal methods of teaching and acquiring knowledge as prescribed above seem more suitable to overcome these difficulties. We may not be stuck to the generally accepted definition of non-formal education but rather to the idea that the classic form of mainstream education is insufficient. A simple example supportive of this argument is that a Roma child could hardly be able and satisfied at the same time to read a book and learn out of it about a culture whose elements are scarcely defined in his perception¹¹⁶. The key elements that predominantly carve out this educational type's suitability are the flexibility in time and methodologies, but also the children centred approach. Focusing more on students in primary school, we may argue that less strict teaching methods could increase the likelihood for

¹¹²Reger, 1999, p.169.

¹¹³Ibidem, p. 170.

¹¹⁴Ibidem.

¹¹⁵We stress out the fact that a non-Roma child who had prior experience with books and literature in the family environment is relatively prepared to cope with the demands of formal education rules.

¹¹⁶Reger, 1999, p.171.

comprehension of concepts of high complexity, such as culture. The same methods are also permissive of a more actively participation of the students.

The reporting Committee on Culture and Education of the Council of Europe on 15 December, 1999, presented a drafting recommendation on the recognition of non-formal education and its supplementary role next to formal¹¹⁷. The document included some good examples of countries where cultural consciousness is being raised through non formal ways of learning. Among the other countries the Danish model of non-formal education proved to be satisfyingly successful. It was estimated that after this model was tested the participants, among whom the majority were adults, kept on being even more motivated to be involved in similar non formal education initiatives¹¹⁸. Whereas this example is not totally comparable to our case it shows how effective and fruitful can be the interaction between people and different social actors when culture is being promoted by non-formally directed educational methods. That being said, similar activities could be even more likely inclined to positive outcomes, when children are among the central actors. The flexibility in participatory activities that a non-formally constructed educational environment provides, gives the student the opportunity to understand more substantially the concepts that text books explain in a theoretical level. In other words, in formal models of education the students are usually passive listeners¹¹⁹. However, like the formal one, non-formal education will not achieve sustainable results alone. It has to be supported by governments and local communities. According to this statement we have to recognize that these alternative forms of education would reveal more effectively their dynamics into the frames of institutionalized buildings. Or, otherwise, the formally oriented curricula in mainstream schools have to be partially sacrificed in order to give some space for the non-formal educational methods to be tested

¹¹⁷Council of Europe, 1999.

¹¹⁸Ibidem, section 3: Activities of non-formal education.

¹¹⁹ Cole and Scribner, from an anthropological-social perspective, described once the formal educational system as the “learning to learn” system. That is to say, students, in modern official teaching methods, learn how to conceptualize the objects of given knowledge in a quick, easily digestive way that usually blocks the process \ of a profound, real comprehension. This argument, whereas not absolute, could be supportive of our view on non-formal teaching methods, Ogbu, 1982, pp. 292-293.

practically. The inclusion of non-formal practices in formal education settings could be also constructive for non-Roma pupils who would explore, and perhaps strengthen their capacities, through an alternative mode of interaction.

2.5.2 The Polish Educational System and other Good Practices

Poland, some years ago, has been estimated to be one of the European countries where attendance of Roma children in mainstream schools is at a very high level¹²⁰. Nevertheless, 90percent of Roma students fail to continue their studies after primary education, due to a combination of various factors that we have thoroughly discussed in the precedent sectors¹²¹. This number represents the striking majority of Roma students. And the failure of a striking majority in society, must raise always concerns on whether a social mechanism is truly functional or not. In line with that, the Polish policy which was adopted for the education of Roma, exemplifies how a little bit of innovation in schools can bring positive results and lift up children's will. Governmental support was of decisive contribution, though. What the Polish educational model decided to reject was the "learn by heart" teaching method which is the dominant method followed by the majority of educational systems today. Instead, they experimented more participatory-interactive activities where the student plays a double role: that of the listener and that of the teacher¹²². The interaction between the children and the teachers is realized through activities which require both mental and corporal effort as well as inspiration. More concretely, art, music and athletic activity are at the forefront of the school programs permitting the children to engage creatively with one another in a way that sharpens mind and soul simultaneously. This educational model is claimed to be beneficial for the non Roma students as much as for the Roma¹²³. The reasoning is not hard to find. The concrete educational model shifts the attention from the "must do" methods to those ones

¹²⁰Ang, Sielicka and Kan, retrieved from <http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/213-too-cool-for-school-the-education-of-the-roma-minority-in-poland>

¹²¹Ibidem.

¹²²Ibidem.

¹²³Ibidem.

that count on children's predispositions and emotional inclinations. Additionally, it includes art centred patterns which are more likely to support Roma student's cultural background.

Interestingly, the Polish educational system, before testing the interactive-creative models, had introduced special classes for Roma children's education¹²⁴. These classes were originally destined to prepare students for their later reception in mixed classes. However, they failed to provide a quality education to Roma students while, at the same time, were considered to use discriminative policies. The segregation of Roma children in 'just Roma' schools, has been repeatedly condemned for being a de facto discrimination and exclusion of Roma students¹²⁵. Notwithstanding, we may use the "special classes" example in order to make a brief, retrospective evaluation of the special units on Roma culture which are usually seen as an appropriate handling of the Roma assimilation in schools. Several times it has been suggested that the inclusion of separate course units, relevant to Romani culture, for instance pieces of art produced by Roma people, would make the local pupils familiar with the Romani culture¹²⁶. While such an initiative is largely fair and respectful of the Roma child's identity and pride, we may keep a few doubts on it. We argue that this practice has two main weak points: its indirect discriminatory effect and its short term sustainability. The first one derives from the idea that the same way in which separated Roma classes are blamed for unequal treatment, likewise dedicating part of curricula and school materials to Roma culture in an exclusive way could entail possibilities of indirect stigmatization¹²⁷. In the framework of our research question, this is mostly emphasized because the mediums of cultural engagement that we are seeking must be evasive of any further labelling or categorization of the diverse cultures and ethnicities of the children involved. To put it differently, we wish to avoid the "us and them" patterns. The second one pertains to the assumption that the objects of alternative educational methods should be equally attractive

¹²⁴Ibidem.

¹²⁵One of the most famous cases concerning the placement of Roma children in special classes is *Sampanis and others v. Greece* available at [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng-press/pages/search.aspx?i=003-2378798-2552166#{"itemid":\["003-2378798-2552166"\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng-press/pages/search.aspx?i=003-2378798-2552166#{)

¹²⁶Reger, 1999, p. 173.

¹²⁷'Equity', The glossary of educational reform, available at <http://edglossary.org/equity/>

for both Roma and non-Roma students. Considering that a Roma child may be uninterested in classes non-related to their culture, a non-Roma child may also feel less attracted by units solely descriptive of Romani culture. Consequently, by shaping an environment interesting for both groups, we may raise the chances for equal participation and motivation.

During the last years, some State parties to the CRC, including Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, envisaged good policies in their educational systems in response to Committee's recommendations¹²⁸. A considerable number of recommendations referred to Roma children's education¹²⁹. Special emphasis were put on the importance of text books of Romani culture and history, intercultural dialogue and well trained educational staff on Roma issues. With regards to these proposals the countries initiated cycles of relevant projects. We may keep these initiatives in mind for two mutually opposite reasons. From one hand, to connect them with the precedent discourse on strategies which care specially for Roma children and pose under question their dubious role. From the other hand, to start regarding them, as an optimistic move towards more qualitative educational patterns. In the following sections of the thesis we will proceed to further observations attached to this topic.

2.6 Creativity as Positively Responsive to Cultural Interaction

We have already examined the role of cultures in education, the role of non-formal education as a medium for cultural awareness and the role of interaction in non-formal teaching methods. Participation, less academically oriented educational strategies and fairly distributed curriculum, favourable for both cultures are just some of the core concepts. Any planned educational strategy which targets children and aims at radical changes must be considered as a bottom-up undertaking. In this framework a neutral ground upon which a strategic plan will be developed is extremely significant. The active participation and interaction between Roma and non-Roma children that we assumed as core concepts are insufficient if the child is not able to understand empirically the ways how and the reasons

¹²⁸ See the observations of Committee on the Rights of the Child for all the countries at CRC/C/ALB/CO/2-4, 2012, CRC/C/SRB/CO/1, 2008, CRC/C/BGR/CO/2, 2008 and CRC/C/ROM/CO/4, 2009.

¹²⁹Ibidem.

why. Because participation, for instance, might mean participation in open dialogues concerning culture which is a big step forward but, possibly, inadequate. There is no predefined destination to personal fulfilment, but for children, creativity is certainly a determinant way to this find the destination.¹³⁰ In addition to this, cultures are developed upon the premises of creativity, inspiration and emotional expression. Therefore, how can a culture and its features better be apprehended if not through the same means by which the culture emerged? More concretely, there is a general scientific consensus that creativity reaches high levels during the early childhood¹³¹. The creations of children during the age of primary school are distinguishable for their originality and inspiration thanks to their low exposition to conventional, premeditated social concepts¹³². With regards to this, raising cultural awareness and creativity could be remarkably efficient together and should be actively present during the whole educational experience of students. Under such circumstances creativity should be understood as something universally shared where no boundaries of ethnicity, culture or skin colour exist. A cultural exchange between Roma and non Roma students, based on creativity and inspiration can promote culture both as distinctive and connective element between them. It can honour diversity without undermining the huge potentialities and powers of the individual itself¹³³. In this way different cultures can be shared as something that rather unifies than distinguishes people. Not only that but in our case, Roma and non-Roma children will be able to realize how many similarities their cultures share for their being under constant interaction.

At this point we may cite a motivating example of cultural exchange through artistry which took place between one elementary school in South Korea and another in Massachusetts, United States of America, within the framework of a project¹³⁴. As long as this project was based on writing and reading it is important to clarify that the following

¹³⁰Holden, 2014.

¹³¹Saracho, 2012, p. 109

¹³²Ibidem.

¹³³Song and Donovan, 2013, pp. 4-6.

¹³⁴Ibidem.

example of cultural interaction is not easily applicable to Roma children whose respective skills are considerably weak. With respect to this, by using this example we would rather like to illustrate the powerful combination of culture and education.

Within the context of this project, the students of the above mentioned schools were engaged in a series of poem writing with the assistance and guiding of their teachers¹³⁵. The children became the poets and each poem would start by the phrase “I am from”, thus, boosting the students to depict their diverse cultural backgrounds depending to their personal and original perceptions. In their poems children depicted their different lives with reference to their family environments as well as their daily habits and experiences. This, as a whole, represented part of their culture. Afterwards they enriched their work by adding pictures relevant to their poems, taken by them. The poems of all students were translated into English and finally expressed through short actual performances (of theatrical type) which included various forms of physical expression. After each single work was fully performed students of both schools exchanged their artistic pieces by sharing them online. The outcomes of this project were hopeful as far as both students and teachers described it as a great chance that they were given to explore cultural diversity through artistic creation and expression¹³⁶. Moreover, they understood and marked the effectiveness of an empirical experience compared to a passive teaching model. This project is just an illustrative sample of how cross cultural knowledge through art and creativity could very likely show the children the beauty of being different. Subsequently, we could assume that similar projects could contribute to a smooth integration of Roma children or any other minority group in education. It is certainly essential though to specify more clearly the circumstances under which the specific minority could respond better.

¹³⁵Ibidem., pp. 5-8.

¹³⁶Ibidem, pp. 9-10.

Final Remarks

In this chapter education was observed as a multi-dimensional medium whose dynamics can be defined either by the social demands either by the individual-subject of the educational process itself. For the reasons of our analysis we elaborated more on the responsibility of education to invest on the children as individual entities in order to provide them with the necessary means for further progress. In favour of its flexibility as far as time, space, activities and actors involved are concerned, non-formal education was presented as more appropriate to support the individualistic oriented education. This approach helped as to strengthen our argument that mainstream education should re-examine its structure and be more open to more innovative and inspiring strategies facing the situation of Roma children who live under a persistent deprivation of their right to education and to equal treatment. These alternative methods, apart from respecting minorities, care equally about each student's self-determination by empowering them. Therefore, the non-formal education can be assessed beneficial for the majority students as well. The cultural exchange within this process can be understood as a valuable investment for the present and future generations of Roma and non Roma people. Learning about cultural diversity through mediums, tools and practices able to empower a student's self-esteem and respect for their own capacities and talents, spreads the message that despite the existence of any cultural or ethnic differences we are equally important. Moreover, respect and appreciation of cultural diversity is developed little by little. In this way, we wish to pose under examination the idea that cultural knowledge in education could function both as the means and as the targeted goal¹³⁷. In line with the abovementioned the following and last chapter will examine more concretely the alternative suggested methods of cultural interaction between Roma and non Roma children taking into account various influential factors.

¹³⁷ UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, article 2- From cultural diversity to cultural pluralism, 2001.

CHAPTER 3

Investing in a Culture of Common Identity. Creating a Class Model

Introduction

In our last chapter we will observe and suggest some educational practices able to engage Roma and non-Roma students in a way that allows them to mutually learn from their cultures. The proposals will be rather general than particular and exhaustive, as we acknowledge the need to accommodate any possible solutions to any single community's specific context in terms of social composition, needs and available resources. Evidently, the hindrances of discrimination from the part of local communities and the reluctance of Roma people to assimilate are still there, as a tough reality. As a consequence, the proposed plans are not expected to act as a panacea to the problem of social exclusion, but rather as visionary experiments, likely to be tested, in communities where good willing and motivation are present. Earlier we gave quite a detailed description of Romani culture, promoting its richness. This exaggerated presentation was particularly done because we need to use it as our premise to go underneath and examine Romani culture as a dynamic element in mixed European communities where Roma are often regarded as a "parasitic", ethnicity¹³⁸. The education is selected as one of the most powerful tools of knowledge and schools as a neutral educational terrain, at least more neutral than the family environments of Roma and non-Roma children. We insist on the idea that educators, children and effective methods could form an ideal environment to bring more radical changes and this is what will help us to develop the central point of this paper. The practices, actions and activities that we selected to observe will be gathered all together as a whole in one suggested school project. The readers will be able to draw an imaginary picture of a classroom mixed with Roma and non Roma, where remarkable experiences will be shared. Music has been chosen as the subject

¹³⁸The National and Consultative Commission of Human Rights in France (CNCDDH) recently reported that more than eighty seven percent of the French population regard Roma people as such. This percentage is almost twenty percent more than that of two thousand eleven. While this information concerns exclusively France, the general view in Europe is closely similar. See 'Lack of humanity' after Roma baby refused burial in France, 2015.

of the cultural engagement regarding its profound meaning in both cultures. In the ultimate section of the chapter expectations and challenges related to the proposed project will be imprinted.

3.1 A Multi Participatory Project

A successful cultural exchange between Roma and non Roma students, one that will be remembered for its radical impact to emotions and minds, is a step by step venture, whose outcome may emerge gradually. By respecting gradualism in a process, we automatically enter into the realm of authenticity and persistency. More concretely, authenticity corresponds to an essential respect for the diverse cultures, while persistency corresponds to a positive future impact, dynamic enough to deal further with the problem of Roma marginalization. The young generation has been chosen as the protagonists of the cultural exchange because they are considered pure enough, mentally and emotionally, to obtain human rights related knowledge. Regarding the above mentioned, for a real and active engagement to be done, apart from the time, we need also various actors, each differently connected with the students.

3.1.1 The Role of Teachers

The necessity for well-trained educators is a central one and has been always underlined in plenty of guidelines concerning Roma children's education¹³⁹. It is of vital importance the existence of educators that could respond directly to practical difficulties that impede Roma pupils to integrate, language being on the top. The same can be claimed for educational materials and sources that focus on Roma culture. Nevertheless we have already shared some critical points for these ideas, such as its potential biased orientation as well as the high budgetary requirements for these issues to be tackled. In addition to this, for the purposes of our paper, the inadequacy in special trained teachers and Roma educational materials are not the major issues to be concerned about, for two main reasons: From one

¹³⁹Hegedus and Forrai, 1999, pp. 174-178.

part, a fruitful cultural exchange can be attained by using alternative means, and from the other, a cultural exchange should look for those who are in direct connection with the culture. Given that, it can be stated that local teachers' qualifications which respond to Romani culture are welcomed but not necessary. The main contribution of the teachers should be based on the simple but dynamic role of mediators-facilitators. Similarly, always in line with their neutral role, teachers must also refrain from promoting disproportionately the local culture. The educator's interest to be associated with innovative educational experiments should be considered as a prerequisite, though. Consequently what seems to miss here is the representation of Romani and non-Romani culture if we want to talk about a genuine cultural exchange.

3.1.2 Representatives of Both Cultures in Local Schools

By referring to a cultural exchange between Roma and non-Roma children we should definitely search for those who can originally and sufficiently provide children with the relevant cultural knowledge. In other words, Roma community members, particularly those involved more actively in the cultural life of the community, should enter into the game. The involvement of Roma community members and parents in their children's education has been constantly estimated of high significance because any attempt of Roma students' assimilation without their community's participation could be just a drop in the ocean¹⁴⁰. And this is because it is fruitless to seek student's progressive inclusion while their parents regenerate tactics where the willing progression is absent. Raising the awareness of children in equality issues should mean interaction with the family environments too, if convincing and powerful results are desired. This statement should apparently be addressed to both Roma and non-Roma families. In the case of cultural engagement we need members of the community who are either practitioners of a particular art or passionate with cultural related practices more generally. Expanding our reflections a bit further, we may say, without any intention to generalize, that people who have artistic inclinations could be more likely motivated to

¹⁴⁰Council of Europe, 'The innovatory practices in the field of Roma children', 2003, p.18.

participate in similar projects. The idea behind it, is that despite of the high levels of mutual distrust, if members of both communities would be asked to get involved in classes of cultural exchange they would have one major reason to accept the challenge which is their personal passion and excitement. Needless to say that, ideally, the initial motivating powers must derive from the honest interest of parents for their children, combined with respect for arts as part of one's cultural identity. If the inviting members could be concurrently the representatives of the culture and parents of the children who take part in the project, the overall quality of the outcome would be considerably higher. However, in any case, the simple role of cultural representatives is sufficient.

3.1.3 Reaching the Right People through the Right Mediators

Regarding the general image of European educational systems we may observe that classes concerning arts are included in current curricula, but without constituting a major part of them¹⁴¹. Despite of their limited time in schools we can claim that the existence of art classes is a sufficient premise for the development of our suggested plans. We can use the same statement to accept that there would be, if not absolute, a relevant convenience to reach local people affiliated with culture, first being the local art teachers. Nevertheless, we cannot follow easily the same logic when it comes to members of Roma community. The Romani culture, just like non-Romani, has been interpreted into professional piece of art, especially in the field of music¹⁴². However, few of their artistic work has been promoted to public¹⁴³. It is worth and interesting for our research to mention the Kalyi Jag Roma-Art Association, founded in 1994, in Budapest, Hungary¹⁴⁴. The idea behind this association which basically operated as a school, was to foster and teach the Romani culture¹⁴⁵. The only reason why we

¹⁴¹For further information see the study on 'Arts and Cultural Education at schools in Europe' which was conducted for the years 2007-2008 by the Educational, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency (EACEA). The study provides information on the educational policies that thirty European Member States adopted as far as the inclusion of culture and arts in their curricula is concerned, EACEA, 2009.

¹⁴²Kovalcsik, 2010, pp. 61-62.

¹⁴³Ibidem.

¹⁴⁴Ibidem.

¹⁴⁵Ibidem.

use this example is to stress out that, whilst not famous, there do exist among Roma communities those people who are motivated to promote further their culture through more organised or even professional initiatives. Therefore the next step should be the effort to bring a local class in connection with these Roma key-persons. Though easy it might sound, the right connections with the right people between a Roma and non Roma community is, if not difficult, at least challenging for many reasons that have been outlined in our first and second chapters. That being the case, among the contributors to our cultural exchange experiment we should select carefully the mediators who have to work for the communications. So, the contacts with civil society's organizations which deal with Roma issues and support their social assimilation might be the correct targeted mediators thanks to their experience in this area.

3.2 The Preferable Environment

Our suggestion's rationale, as have been already underlined, cannot be reasonably justified in every European educational system which deals with the Roma children inclusion. However what we need to be sure about, before initiating the proposed practices, is a local school of a relatively high Roma children attendance and the openness of local community to test alternatives in education. Moving our act of thinking a step forward, once this school found and the targeted project is tested, it might act as a model example for other schools or communities which seek to confront similar problems, in case it brings positive results. To outline the preferable environment with need to take into account both the special and temporal design.

3.2.1 Outlining the Spatial Design

At this point, we need to elaborate more on why a local school is considered to be the favourable environment, among other place options. Non formal methods of education are usually practiced out of the institutionalised buildings which are designed to provide formal

education¹⁴⁶. Consequently, the rising question might be why not to test the same cultural engagement project out of the schools, in these places which are concretely supposed to work on non-formal teaching practices. The respective answer seems quite clear, if we think that for the cultural interaction, we need obviously the premises for interaction, on the top being the active presence and participation of the local students. Inviting local students to attend out of school sessions accomplishes high possibilities of failure in reference to their big number and to our running the risk of being criticized for anti-conformist ideas. In accordance to the above arguments, selecting the local schools to host the cultural exchange venture seems a choice which not only respects satisfyingly both groups of students but also facilitates the gradual results of the assimilation we are pursuing for. Additionally, by creating a fruitful and motivating environment within the local schools we do not reject the aspirations of Roma children to be integrated into the formal education. Looking now the same problem through the lens of a non-Roma student, we may say that, apart from respecting their familiar environment, this non-formally oriented cultural exchange will offer them a new perception of education.

Giving a more detailed description of the special requirements, we should stress out the vital importance of creating a place of high attraction for children. One that could be as much inspiring as possible. Teaching out of the classes is not a new concept. On the contrary, a large part of the educational community seems to recognise how refreshing and motivating can be for students to acquire knowledge out of the ordinary, at times monotonous, classrooms¹⁴⁷. Besides the fact that alternative teaching spaces are evaluated as child-centred, in our case we have a further reason to double support the idea of outdoors environments. The majority of Roma children grow up either while being on a constant move, or in settlements where most of their time is spend out of their bad constructed houses. Therefore, open air environments are more hospitable for a Roma child, helping him/her to feel more like being home. Certainly this is not to say that indoor courses should be definitely

¹⁴⁶Rogers, 2007, pp. 4-6.

¹⁴⁷Clairborne, Morrell, Bandy and Bruff, 'Teaching Outside the Classrooms'.

substituted. On the contrary, we could claim that finding a balance in between is respectful of fairness and equality. An important thing that has to be clarified is that, when we refer to out of the classroom spaces we do not aim at extraordinary places with super innovative characteristics or infrastructures. School gardens or spots within the neighbourhood, adequately match, at least for the beginning, with our gradual and minimalistic approach. Changing images will be anyway appreciated by children as a breach to the monotony¹⁴⁸.

3.2.2 Outlining the Temporal Design

If we want to discuss on explicit terms, after talking about a favourable space, we need to elaborate on the temporal dimension of the proposed special unit on cultural interaction. This is necessary to be clarified so as not to undermine the predefined contextualised model of formal teaching methods. A cultural exchange model class between Roma and non Roma students could be applied in local schools as an extensive or substitute part of the already existing in the curricula art courses. By saying extensive we do not mean adding extra days in the fixed temporal structure of the educational system but rather extending the hours devoted to music classes for instance. Taking as an example the Polish educational system which encompassed in its curricula non formal teaching methods for Roma students, we might say that the class of cultural interaction and engagement would have a right place to flourish. Into this framework we could imagine a sequence of classes on cultural interaction diffused in the weekly schedule, acting as a pause to the classically structured courses. While showing respect to the fixed school timetable, we should not undermine the significance of the time needed for the recommended project. Informality, lack of intensity and restriction of competency building should be understood as a remarkable modification of the official educational model, however in any case we should not underestimate the necessity of a well organised step by step plan. The way from cultural exchange to cultural interaction and from cultural interaction to emotional engagement and

¹⁴⁸H. Flower was one of the most important proponents of the idea that students need an ongoing refreshment of their stimuli in order to be motivated to acquire knowledge. Apart from the pursuit of the right place, the same idea can be used to justify our inclination to non-formal educational practices which open room to alternative concepts and creativity, see at Fragos, 1984, pp. 237-238.

bridge building between Roma and non Roma students is other than short. Creating the foundations of the entire venture has to be defined as a hard and complex task. Therefore, according to our visionary plan three hours during the week could be a reasonable frequency of cultural interaction classes. We may argue that is preferable not to touch the already existing music classes but rather enrich them with a new musical project which will have the form of an extension to the typical music courses. We choose the precise organizational model in order to help children perceive it as an extra, but at the same time, integrated in their ordinary program activity.

With regards to the above discussed thematic, we can outline in summary the external features of our recommended project: A classroom, ideally, at times in external open air spaces, where the non Roma musician would meet three times per week with a Roma musician, preferably professional, within the frames of the school curriculum. The participation of parents of both groups is more than welcomed, nevertheless, at least for the beginning just like our audience. While parents' presence is vital, in a sense that they could raise their knowledge on topics directly linked with their own interests, a more active participation in the project may be subject to disproportionate or biased involvement. The contribution of a teacher as the facilitator of the tested operation is of determinant significance. Before moving on to our next and probably most essential section we would like to make the core meaning of our recommended project on student's cultural engagement a bit more lucid. One of our first priorities within the context of our project should be to attribute to each and every participant, from children to adults, a double role: That of the learner and that of the teacher. We may elaborate more on this in the following sub chapter.

3.3 Making Some Noise to Break the Silence: “Melodies Build Bridges” Cultural Engagement Project

After having sketched out our project's framework we may now get to the heart of the subject by providing detailed illustrations and concrete strategies concerning the procedural development of the cultural interaction in our mixed class. The title of this part

has been inspired according to the concrete context of the project. More particularly, we selected interaction through melodies as the means of the cultural exchange, acknowledging that music is a remarkable artistic expression in both Romani and non-Romani culture. Moreover, within our concept, music has to be understood as a common language above any racial or ethnic differences. Among various instruments, we distinguished the piano as the most classic representative instrument of European music culture and the guitar, from the family of strings, as representative of the traditional Romani-Gypsy sounds¹⁴⁹. Apparently, the classic piano could be replaced by a keyboard for practical facilitation. The selection of the guitar has been also based on the idea that such an instrument could be easily found at the disposition of a Roma musician. Basic communication skills between the two groups of people involved are required for the realization of this project for a better understanding of the procedure. However, as far as music is concerned “zero” level knowledge is accepted because the interaction will be reached through improvisation.

3.3.1 Responding to the ‘Building-bridges’ Demands through a Commonly Practiced Piece of Work

In reference to the ‘build bridges’ inclusion in our project’s name we need to make same clarifications connected to the terms interaction, participation and creativity that we have extensively used in a large part of our analysis. The first words that come to somebody’s mind in an attempt to translate the meaning of the ‘building-bridges’ concept, which is very often used in the field of human rights, could be difficult or huge, for instance. The Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe has published a document of great extent referring to good practices, adopted by different educational systems around the globe, for the promotion of human rights¹⁵⁰. Among them, the ‘building-bridges’ concept is importantly stressed out with relation to multi-cultural pedagogical approaches for students in a long document published by the Human Rights Academy of Norway,¹⁵¹ where

¹⁴⁹ Shapiro, ‘Michal Shapiro explores the music of the Roma, 2002.

¹⁵⁰ For further information see OSCE, ‘Human Rights Education in the School Systems of Europe, Central Asia and North America: A Compendium of Good Practice, 2009.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

recommended non-traditional educational methodologies are collected. Separately the words ‘build’ and ‘bridge’ carry a heavy burden on them. Regardless the specific field where people wish to build bridges through different actions, they all need to have identical dynamic premises. These premises correspond to grass rooted and bottom up procedures. Similarly, the core of our project seeks to build step by step a common understanding and essential communication between Roma and non-Roma children. Under these terms, students’ interaction and participation should not be regarded as a simple one. They have to be empowered by reaching the zenith of their substantial meaning. That being the case we decided to add next to them two other key terms: Creativity and practice. We argue that simple participation and interaction is not enough, because for a vital and radical change children must create and practically test the object of their knowledge¹⁵². Any kind of artistic expression, in our case the music, should be regarded as a special privilege which gives the students unique opportunity to participate productively. Accordingly, in our “Making some noise to break the silence class” we will not settle for a cultural engagement merely based on the invited musicians’ performances or transmission of cultural knowledge. Children will become musicians themselves and the class will be transformed into a workshop¹⁵³.

If we want to point at the highest possible level of effectiveness we should count on another substantial aspect which is the development of true emotional connection between the children. Here emerges the amplified form of interaction which requires us to move one step forward: Provide the necessary ground for a common creation. More explicitly, apart from an active participation, students could likely produce a common, original piece of work under the appropriate guidance of the educators involved in the project. This shared production will firstly boost their self-esteem by proving that they are all capable to create art. Secondly, it will teach equality by reinforcing mutual trust. Ultimately, it will bring the final result, which will, spontaneously, acquire the shape of the cultural “marriage”. In order

¹⁵²Miner, 2013, p. 4.

¹⁵³The educator J. Dewey (1859-195) was one of the most important supporters of the educational theory “Learning by doing”, see more at Fragos, 1984, pp. 116-118.

to simplify our logic we could use a reasonable analogy: When two individuals, each with his/her own unique personality, unify their mental and physical skills to achieve a common goal, (either to solve a problem or make an aspiration come true), once this goal is achieved they show more trust and appreciation for one another than they had at the initial interactive stages. Not only that, but the satisfying outcome automatically gives essence to the whole preceded operation. Likewise, a common piece of art, genuinely generated by the children will raise the potentialities for more radical short and long effects.

3.3.2 Getting into the Heart of the Project: The Conceptualisation of Activities

In this section we are going to get into the class and see how our project actually looks like, which are the particular activities, the procedural development, divided into separate task units, and the expected common piece of work that the children will finally create. Exceptionally for the reasons of this part's profound comprehension the term Roma will be abandoned giving its place to words which describe directly the actual role of our team's groups: students-children, musicians-instructors, and teacher-mediator¹⁵⁴. The name of the class is "Making Some Noise to Break the Silence", but from now on, for less complexity, we are going to use its abbreviated form by taking the initial letters of the three first words: "M.S.N." class. The following description will depict the operation of the project from the initial phases till the targeted aim, through a visualised scenario.

We have already suggested earlier a minimum frequency of the "M.S.N" classes that being three hours weekly. Now, let us imagine a scene in the classroom where students, musicians and the teacher share a common place. One piano/keyboard and one guitar are adequate for the realization of the project. The idea of a common creation that we presented above will be apparently linked to melodies and sounds. The bridges between the two communities will be built on melodic foundations. The whole project will be considered as

¹⁵⁴Connected with the title of this chapter, the predominant reason why we decide at this point to stop using the term "Roma" is to stress out the superiority of a shared new identity which is above any ethnic labeling. At the same time we want to show how superfluous words or stigmatizing titles might become when the real circumstances and facts obtain essential meaning.

a synthesis which is going to be subdivided into a number of class-cycles. Each class-cycle is composed of a series of courses-workshops where different activities will be done according to the project's phase. The M.S.N class will be adjusted in the fixed school curriculum but each day the place of the workshops could be alternated. If the possibilities of alternation are limited, a shifting between different classrooms or between outdoors-indoors is sufficient to attract children's attention and curiosity for something that is organized, at least, out of the ordinary. The students will be seating in circles instead of rows, preferable on the floor, in order to feel less restricted and get into the spirit of co-operation¹⁵⁵. The constant presence of all the involved groups is significant during the entire process. We will include three class-cycles which are the minimum necessary number for the completion of the project according to our personal conception. A major part of the whole concept will be based on the transmission of knowledge to children through repetition. However the repetition of the transmitted knowledge will be done in an indirect way, through different means of creative activities included in each cycle. The description of the classes will be neither exhaustive nor detailed due to this thesis' predefine, limited length.

First Class-cycle: The Introduction

The initial cycle of classes will correspond to the introductory workshops where students will be familiarised with the concept. This class-cycle will inevitably include the most theoretical part of the whole project, in the more interactive way the possible, though. The teacher shall initiate the project by presenting to the children the name of the class, as well as the musicians and the music instruments. Inspired by the name of the class, according to which sound breaks the silence, the students, guided by the teacher, will be asked, to express their reflection on what a sound could be like. Accepting the music as one among the limitless forms of sound production, our attention should be now shifted from generality to particularization. The musicians, with the support of the teacher-mediator, could start exploring with children their cultures, through a series of short narrations, which could

¹⁵⁵GLOBAL PEACE education, 'Effective Classroom Setup', 2014.

ideally have the form of tales. The narrators, instead of using vocabulary declarative of their own culture, they would rather let the children translate the content of the narrations into images that depict two diverse, equally interesting, worlds. Particular emphasis will be given in describing images which depict the relation of each culture's music with everyday life. At this point, children could also be invited to share with the audience their perception of music or sounds which surround their daily routine. During the same time the musicians would accompany their stories with their instruments, decorating the sound with their culture's traditional timbres. In this way, students' senses will unconsciously start being activated and respond to the melodies. Needless to say, children's rising questions or comments should be respected during the whole session. This cycle's workshop classes would end by fruitful conversations where all the team will be engaged. The teacher could ask the students to identify common and diverse pictures in the two narrations. Moreover, the remarkable differences between the performed sounds could be explained by the children in simple words. With respect to the disproportionate educational level of the students, the teacher, as a mediator, will capture in written form children's reflections and observations. The general image that the readers should keep in their minds as far as this cycle's core is concerned, is an indirect cultural exchange between students and educators through creative means.

Second Class-cycle: Experimenting with the Sound

The second cycle is the intercessory part of the project. It is the necessary passage from observation to practice. After the introductory phase where the children explored and observed the two cultural worlds through oral interaction now it is time to comprehend deeper what their memory impressed. The idea is the following: The first stage of this cycle may be devoted in some classes during which the children will acquire the very basic music knowledge. Most particularly, and in order for the cultural element to be constantly present in the classroom, the two performers will show the children the notes which are mainly used in their traditional sounds so as for a piece of music to be composed¹⁵⁶. Each musician will

¹⁵⁶For instance, a classic piece of work played on the piano has a notably different melody compared to a traditional Gypsy piece of work played on a string instrument. According to this statement, during the workshop

make his/her synthesis of notes and will present it in front of the classroom. Obviously, the two synthetic groups of notes together will give us the full set of seven notes. The second stage for the students is to get in direct contact with the instruments and use their fingers to play the notes themselves in order to connect the sound with practice. At this point the teacher could also consult his/her notice from the first circle of classes and help the children recall, according to what they suggested, which sounds could break the silence. Later, they could altogether detect if any of these sounds could be easily found or produced by the means or tools of any kind that are available in their classroom or closer environment (from children's voices to natural sounds or objects). Therefore, the students can explore and realize the multiple faces of the sound but also understand that creativity is everywhere and does not necessarily requires equipment or money. Clearly, the concrete activity is detached enough from the cultural engagement because it enters mostly the realm of the child's self-determination which we are also seeking for. The third and final stage is suggested to be optional depending to the children's general mood and motivation. The students may learn how to write the notes on the pentagram in order to acquire the very basic, academic let us say, knowledge. In case this venture succeeds it could be very beneficial for the project, not necessary, though. We should admit the fragility of this cycle's workshops because if we aim at a truly systematic contact of the students with music and notes a lot of patience and devotion are required.

Third/Final Class-cycle: Building our Melodic Bridge

This is the ultimate and most substantial cycle of the "Melodies build bridges" project. This is exactly the time when M.S.N classes obtain their essential meaning by reaching the pick of the principal goal. The teacher will now motivate the children to really break the silence by making some voice. Our central suggestion surrounds the idea of a common musical piece created by and for the children. The students will become the performers while the instruments and the educators, both the teacher and the musicians, will

the musicians will be asked to select the most characteristic notes, which, when put together they can give a short, but representative of their culture's sound, melody.

be transformed into the means of this creation. During these classes, which will probably be of short duration, the children will be asked to collect notes and random sounds in order to compose their team's song. Most precisely, the process will be constructed as a game of musical improvisation. Each student will experiment with both instruments trying to select, while playing, two notes of his/her preference¹⁵⁷. Two notes for the keyboard, two notes for the guitar. Each student will also propose an object or source of sound/noise from his/her surrounding, preferably one related to the sounds that have been already explored and discussed in the first two circles. After every child finishes with his/her part the educators will facilitate each student personally to write on paper his/her own small compilation of noise (the symbols of notes and the selected source of sound). Next to them the students may add a short phrase or some words to describe one image of the first cycle's narration workshops. Therefore, each child will end up having his/her own sample of music and cultural information. In this phase, the musicians enter again more dynamically in the game by helping the students record and listen to their own small creations. Ultimately, the musicians will collect children's notes and in the framework of sessions specially dedicated to this, they will put them together into a common musical. The other sounds that students gathered will also find their harmonious place into the song. The musicians will put together the notes in a way that the traditional element of their cultures could be identified in the melody, because we need a permanent connection with the cultural element. The finalization of the music piece will be completed by its registration. The acoustic result should be neither professional nor perfect. What mostly matters is that children turned their creativity into action by producing this commonly shaped piece of art. The title of the song could be inspired by the children's impressions and memories from M.S.N classes. At the end, the teacher may organize some sessions, of limited number, during which the children will have the chance to listen to their own melody and recollect images, impressions but also what they learned during the duration of the entire project.

¹⁵⁷The number two is symbolically chosen.

3.4 Expectations/Challenges

The proposed project is a multifaceted venture which engages various actors and multiple activities. By promoting this project-experiment we are aware of the fact that our subject area is broad enough and puts under question various thematic sections. Each thematic section corresponds to a small group of human rights which are separately mirrored in different parts of the project. The right to education, the right to cultural diversity and the right to equality and non-discrimination are some of the basic rights that our project pursues to highlight and foster. Whereas our aspirations and expectations are high, we acknowledge that their implementation has to face still a lot of challenges.

3.4.1 Short Term Expectations

Our short term expectations are centrally moved around the area of the specific community of people that were selected to participate in this project. Moreover they are linked to the more direct and quick results that we wish to face after the project is completed. In more concrete terms, our general expectation concerns the accomplishment of an operation that equally attracted and engaged the majority of the people who participated. We seek that the non-formal tested methods of education will fit successfully in a traditional school environment. What is more, we wish to enhance the children's knowledge by creating an environment that is familiar to both Roma and non Roma students. Connected to this is our expectation that the project included a balanced representation of Romani and non-Romani culture. By "making some noise" through creative activities of participation we expect that all children feel equal by contributing to the production of their own piece of music. This is the main reason why we avoided using the word "Roma" during the entire process, so as to move above linguistic borders and labels that, often, act as hindrances to any kind of engagement between diverse groups. We also wish that children perceive music, not only as a unique cultural element, but also as a universal way to communicate and express ourselves. In other words, musical interaction is expected to transmit to the children the message that two traditionally diverse cultural groups can come together through artistic means of

expression by detecting what their cultures finally have in common. All the above expectations may be easily evaluated through the observation of children's spontaneous, emotional reactions and feelings from the beginning till the end of the project.

3.4.2 Long Term Expectations

The long term expectations will be divided in two groups: the practical long term expectations and the macro-moral expectations. As long as the former group is concerned we firstly expect a certain level of our project's recognition in the local community. Testing the same or a similar cultural engagement operation in another school, which faces the problem of Roma children assimilation, will be a satisfying starting point. Of course we could then talk about the possibility of an optimized and more extended project with the economic support of the municipalities or governments. The other practical expectation concerns our desire to bring the local children even closer to Roma communities. Assuming that a level of the project's effectiveness is stabilized, we envisage the same activities taking place in a Roma settlement, for instance. In this case, the non Roma students would be able to explore deeper the Romani way of living while Roma people could slowly start showing trust to locals. Under the same circumstances, children will be demanded to shift roles in a sense that the majority group could become the minority and vice versa. This is of determinant importance for the emotional understanding between the children while it contributes to the development of empathetic feelings¹⁵⁸. Included in this group of aspirations is also our desire to give some food for further discussion on the issue of non-formal educational methodologies practiced within institutionalized school environments.

Moving on to the group of macro moral expectations we distinguish one and major which is connected to more radical social results. Within this expectation our "melodic building bridges" concept reveals its very essential meaning. Our project's principal inspirational motive was based on the belief that a radical social reconstruction starts by the

¹⁵⁸Interesting, though not directly relevant to our topic, is the analysis of Monique Eckmann on education against discrimination where she emphasizes how important is for the students to understand and get into the role of both victims and perpetrators, see Eckmann, 'History and human rights education', 2010, pp. 167-170.

young generation and through education. We pointed more particularly at the elementary education thinking that this is when children are in their optimum age to learn, but also put in action the acquired knowledge. By expecting a cultural interaction of positive impact between Roma and non Roma children we concurrently hope to macro moral positive effects for the next generations of Roma and non Roma populations in Europe. We wish that our project touches upon the challenging issues of the inveterate prejudices against Roma people and Roma people's reluctance and fear for assimilation, in order to convince the reader that children, education an innovation could likely show us some ways out of these problems. The inclusion of the cultural element in our project was based on the following logic: Roma and non-Romani culture, as any other culture, are rich in colours, sounds, practices. Given that, we assume that any kind of cultural engagement inclusive of learning, teaching or practicing culture, raises increasingly the possibilities of people's emotional or sensual motivation. So, by adding the cultural identity of Romani and non-Romani culture our long term goal is to familiarize children and next generations with the idea of accepting and respecting cultural diversity. The beauty of music, which was the main means of cultural interaction in our project, will boost children to get closer to the admission that cultural diversity is attractive. Our long term expectation is the sustainability of this attractiveness which is, at the same time, one of the biggest challenges.

3.5 Challenges

Most of the challenges that the recommended project has to face, derive from a reverse interpretation of the respective expectations. That being the case and so as not to be repetitive we will go through a quiet brief presentation.

The first and biggest obstacle to our operation is to motivate local and Roma community to cooperate for the realization of the project. Another challenge is found in our acceptance that before putting into action the project we need a strong preparatory strategic plan. Even if the idea of our suggestion is based on more flexible educational practices, the skeletal part of the project needs to be constructed seriously and formally, in order to decrease

the possibilities of failure. A correctly organised plan will then deal with another weakness of the project at issue: the vulnerable nature of children, especially those coming from minorities. Moreover, another difficulty that we may envisage is the lack of governmental support. The success of the project depends considerably on a minimum of official recognition. Last but not least, the question of sustainability in space and time is a huge challenge and keeps us having some reservations about the size of our project's impact.

The whole project, regardless the size of its short and long impact, wishes to promote first and foremost the right to self-determination, the right to a qualitative education, the right to equality and the right to cultural diversity. This set of rights represent thoroughly, in a generic way though, the top goal of the project.

Final remarks

In this chapter we presented a project of cultural exchange between Roma and non Roma children, named: "Melodies can build bridges". This project focuses on the indirect cultural engagement between the two groups of students through, creative means of interaction and artistic expression, on the top being music. The whole idea took the form of a visualization which permitted us to imagine the context of the project surrounded by the ideal environment, actors and activities involved in it. We tried to give a minimum but detailed, not exhaustive though, impression of the hierarchical construction of the project, of the main expectations but also of some challenges concerning its realization. The proposed experiment is attached to the question if European communities could overpass the barriers of Roma exclusion by promoting sustainable practices of cultural exchange. According to this question we considered children as a key social group from where this cultural engagement could be initiated and, consequently, be fostered to the broader society. Notwithstanding, we are pretty aware of the fact that there is no royal road to constructing the cultural bridges between Roma and non Roma communities in Europe. Our project is just one among the many beginnings that have to be started.

CONCLUSION

Rooted in the complex problem of Roma people's inclusion in modern industrialized European societies, the present research tried to touch upon the issues of cultural rights of minorities, self-determination in education and equality in cultural expression, trying to bring them all together in a common conceptual framework. The project "Melodies can build bridges" relies upon the idea that radical social reconstructions can only be based on well founded, grassroots strategies. Within this concept, we envisage the upcoming generation of Roma and non Roma people to build gradually their cultural bridges through equal and fruitful cultural expression.

Law is probably one of the most powerful guns in the hands of nations but it has been proved many times dysfunctional and insufficient. To respect and include a group of people who suffer disadvantages in a society of fulfillment and happiness, somebody has to feel their suffering, to get into their shoes¹⁵⁹. We have to show empathy to a culture, ethnic group or individual¹⁶⁰. Law can guarantee the implementation of human rights¹⁶¹, but cannot teach to people the very essence of being human. Legal documents, official guidelines and recommendations on good practices for the inclusion of Roma communities set in a clear and consistent way¹⁶² the expected goals and enforcements that have to be done. Nevertheless, the same formally constructed policy documents could be prone to criticism for usually being considerably disconnected from the actions that have to be taken before the people are asked to comply with the rules¹⁶³. Because, they tackle the solution finding through top down approaches¹⁶⁴.

In modern societies where time runs extremely fast and human rights are nowadays violated in an unequaled frequency, education and children should be keeping regarded as

¹⁵⁹Wang Et., Al, 2003, p. 221.

¹⁶⁰Ibidem,

¹⁶¹"What are human rights?" Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

¹⁶²"Top down and Bottom up Approaches within Implementation", Political Pipeline, 2013

¹⁶³Ibidem.

¹⁶⁴Ibidem.

two dynamic powers, which once brought together in one, can bring about the change. Regardless of the current conventional model of education¹⁶⁵, where the student-paradigm should follow the mainstream wave to acquire a socially accepted image¹⁶⁶, educators should insist in defending, passionately, the bottom up role of schools. Education should teach human rights without the need to include any special unit on human rights education in schools. Education has to be intrinsically inclusive of human rights.

Especially, nowadays, when the global economic crisis is striking more and more nations, governments should reassess the current effectiveness of their educational mechanisms. They have to argue what is the role of education in a globe of constantly fading values, morals, in a world of dangerously increasing disrespect of human rights. Under these circumstances, currently, the “us and them” tends to slowly disappear because misery and fear of survival literally hits the door of European majorities, as well. At the same time, heterogeneity, as one of the various possible effects of globalization, puts at potential stake the cultural diversity¹⁶⁷. With regards to this new image of social reality it is high time that educational systems examine innovative educational methods which may push forward the creative nature of children and their emotional impulses¹⁶⁸. It is now more than ever that the cultural engagement between Roma and non Roma should be perceived as a seductive idea rather than a challenging goal. Culture derived from creativity¹⁶⁹. Creativity should start finding its permanent space in education. Education has a power, incomparable to any other social mechanism, to show students the path to equality, especially through interaction between pupils¹⁷⁰. Roma and non Roma children in Europe schools deserve an engagement based on creative means and interaction.

¹⁶⁵Robinson, R SAnimate, ”Changing educational paradigms”, 2008.

¹⁶⁶Ibidem.

¹⁶⁷Ibidem.

¹⁶⁸Ibidem.

¹⁶⁹KEA, European Affairs, “THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON CREATIVITY”, 2009.

¹⁷⁰Pendry, “How co-operation can achieve equality in education, 2014.

In conclusion, the present research hoped to introduce a fresh approach to the problem of Roma populations' social marginalization in Europe. Acknowledging the challenging nature of the issue, our paper did not provide the reader with an extensive analysis neither looked for direct solutions to the problem. The "Melodies build bridges" project relies on the expectation of a gradually built, step by step process, likely to bring more radical changes in due time. We tried to attach upon this project our concerns on the currently existing pedagogical methods, with the highest possible delicacy. Accordingly, we argued that not only children of minorities, but every child deserves educational methods which care about their impulses, self-determination and personal views about life. This is why we selected a cultural interaction centrally hinged on creativity and art education. Because building bridges is an arduous mission, but if you build them on melodic foundations the hard work can become exciting. By working on this bridge, Roma and non Roma new generation will now have the chance to grow up in an environment of common understanding for each other and might put strong keystones for the generations to come.

We wish that this paper provides some food for further research on the issue of Roma social exclusion and most particularly the educational exclusion of Roma children in non Roma communities. Moreover, we expect to trigger more discussions on alternative educational methods and spark some already existing reflections on the inclusion of culture in school curricula. With exceptional regard to the good practices and initiatives that have been tested so far in the context of some national educational mechanisms, as these were presented in the paper at issue, we hope that this research reaches the hands of experts in the respective fields, whose willing to rethink education, especially education for minorities, is still vivid. Of people, who are still inspired by children and believe in their full potentials. Potentials which are driven by their unchain spirit and their nature's emotional sensibility.

Let us decorate our final conclusions by citing the words of, Margaret Mead, which fit finely to the core idea of our research: *“If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place”*¹⁷¹.

¹⁷¹Mead, Margaret, (1901-1978, Cultural Anthropologist).

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Iliadou, Athina

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