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***The Situation of the Roma Community in the
Context of Multiculturalism and Minority Rights***

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

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1. Keywords

ethnicity, identity, ethnic identity, minority identity, dual identity, nation, national identity, minority, double minority, assimilation, integration, segregation, culture, multiculturalism, minority protection, Roma, Gypsy, Roma nation, Roma identity, Roma minority, Romani studies, Roma minority protection, Roma education, Partium, Valea Ierului, Săcueni, Roma community, development strategy, Roma projects, church, work, school

2. Introduction

The issue of the social integration of Roma communities has been a relevant topic in Europe for decades. In multicultural societies, where different ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups live together, the examination of the situation of minorities is particularly significant. The aim of my doctoral thesis is to explore the social embedding of the Roma, with particular attention to access to education, opportunities for maintaining identity, as well as the legal and institutional environment that influences these factors.

The focus of the research is on the concept of multiculturalism and minority rights. In the political dimension, multiculturalism is most closely associated with the emancipation of groups defined on ethnic and racial grounds, as well as the struggle for their recognition and equality of opportunity. One of the key areas of international law is minority protection, which is based on the universal principles of human rights, yet it carries numerous legal and political challenges. The protection of minority rights, the promotion of equal opportunities, and the fight against discrimination and prejudice are

crucial for maintaining the stability of states and ensuring the respect for democratic values and principles.

Romania is a particularly interesting field for examining these two issues, as the country is home to a significant Roma population. There are considerable discrepancies between official statistics and actual data, as many Roma do not declare their ethnic identity due to prejudice, stereotypes, or fear of legal consequences.

Based on my personal experiences – both as a teacher and as a member of a community with a significant Roma population – I set out to not only discuss the situation of the Roma minority theoretically but also provide a real picture through research conducted in my hometown. The primary focus of the dissertation is Săcueni, a town in the Valea Ierului region, which hosts a culturally and ethnically diverse community.

The introduction highlights that although the Roma community is numerically significant, their political, economic, and cultural representation falls short of the desired level. The key factor influencing this is the level of education – low educational attainment presents a substantial disadvantage in the labor market, social mobility, and the formation of advocacy.

The aim of the dissertation is to contribute both scientifically and socially to a better understanding of the situation of Roma communities and to the search for solutions that support their integration. According to the hypothesis of the dissertation, the quality and accessibility of education are the key to the social advancement and active participation of Roma communities.

3. Theoretical Framework

An essential part of interpreting the situation of the Roma community is the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework that defines the concepts and sociological categories that form the foundation of the research. This section of my dissertation provides detailed concept definitions, with particular attention given to the concepts of ethnicity, identity, minority, nation, multiculturalism, assimilation, integration, and segregation.

3.1. Identity and Ethnic Belonging

Identity is a complex sociological, psychological, and cultural construct that defines how an individual perceives themselves and how others perceive them. Ethnic identity encompasses the awareness of belonging to an ethnic community and the emotional

attachment to it. Ethnic identity plays an important role in the case of Roma communities, who often possess multiple identities simultaneously (for example, Roma with Hungarian as their native language), giving rise to the concept of “dual minority”, which presents them with heightened social challenges.

Following the work of Anthony D. Smith and Max Weber, I define ethnic communities as communities characterized by a shared awareness of descent, cultural elements, and historical memory. In the case of the Roma, these elements often manifest in diverse ways, as the internal diversity of the community (Romungros, Boyash, Vlach Gypsies, etc.) results in significant cultural differences.

3.2. Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity

The concept of multiculturalism became central in the 1970s, when Western societies increasingly faced the impacts of immigration, globalization, and ethnic diversity. The political and social aim of multiculturalism is for different cultural groups to live side by side, receiving equal recognition and rights, while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness.

Philosopher Charles Taylor referred to the process as the “politics of recognition”, in which differences receive not only tolerance but active recognition. In the case of ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, this means that the state not only ensures cultural rights but also develops policies that effectively support the social integration of these groups.

3.3. Social Strategies: Assimilation, Integration, Segregation

In multicultural societies, the relationship with minorities is often interpreted through three strategies:

- 1) assimilation: minority groups must abandon their own cultural identity in order to integrate into the majority society;
- 2) integration: minority groups actively participate in social life while maintaining their cultural differences;
- 3) segregation: minority groups live in isolation, often voluntarily or under coercion.

In my dissertation, I argue in favor of integration as the ideal model, where the social participation of Roma communities goes hand in hand with the preservation of their cultural distinctiveness.

4. The System of Minority Rights

4.1. The Legal Foundations of Minority Protection

The legal protection of Roma communities is ensured by numerous international and regional documents. These legal frameworks aim to recognize the rights of minorities and ensure equality for them through practical measures.

In my dissertation, I analyze the following documents from various organizations:

United Nations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic Minorities (1992),

Council of Europe: European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1994),

OSCE: Helsinki Final Act (1975), Activities of the High Commissioner on National Minorities,

European Union: Amsterdam Treaty (1997), Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000).

4.2. Romania's Minority Protection Practice

The Romanian state officially recognizes minorities, including the Roma, and provides them with various rights, such as mother-tongue education, cultural expression, and parliamentary representation.

However, discrimination, limited access to education and healthcare services, and the segregated living conditions of Roma communities continue to hinder the realization of legal equality. In my dissertation, I also address the fact that Roma representation in Romania is often symbolic and unable to establish real advocacy.

5. The Historical and Social Situation of the Roma Community

The European history of Roma communities is largely characterized by experiences of marginalization, exclusion, and assimilation policies and efforts. The Roma first appeared in the Carpathian Basin in the 14th century, and throughout their history, they have almost always been present in society as outsiders. They did not possess independent statehood, lived sporadically across Europe without a historical homeland, and this situation remains unchanged to this day.

5.1. The Roma in Romania

The history of the Roma population in Romania is closely intertwined with the era of serfdom, slavery, and nomadism. Even after the emancipation of slaves in 1856, real emancipation did not occur: the majority of Roma continued to live in marginalized conditions, vulnerable to the majority society. During World War II, many were deported and persecuted, and then the communist regime attempted to “integrate” them through assimilationist policies.

In the 1960s, state-level integration policies were initiated: nomadic communities were settled, but this step often overlooked the community’s own needs, culture, and traditions. After the 1989 regime change, the democratic institutional framework was established to facilitate the exercise of minority rights, but in reality, the Roma community continued to face severe social and economic disadvantages.

5.2. Social and Economic Challenges

The situation of the Roma is characterized by poverty, low levels of education, unemployment, poor housing conditions, and social exclusion. In my dissertation, I specifically highlight that these problems are often interrelated: school dropout leads to low labor market participation, which further exacerbates poverty and vulnerability.

Roma people often live in segregated neighborhoods, in low-comfort housing without basic utilities. They also face barriers in accessing social support systems: either a lack of proper information or institutional discrimination hinders their access.

5.3. The Problem of Dual Minority Identity

Particular attention should be given to Hungarian-speaking Roma, who experience both ethnic and linguistic minority status. These communities, described as “double minorities”, are often more exposed to social exclusion, and their identity is more complex and uncertain. The Valea Ierului region – where the research was conducted – is an important area for this examination in this regard.

6. Education, Schooling, and Equal Opportunities

The role of education is crucial to the upliftment of Roma communities – this is one of the central themes of the doctoral thesis. Educational indicators for Roma have been low for decades, hindering social mobility and economic independence. My dissertation

analyzes in detail educational inequalities, school segregation, and the effectiveness of educational policy initiatives.

6.1. Roma Education Policy and Its Deficiencies

Although several strategies have been developed in Romania – particularly after joining the European Union – they were often not accompanied by effective practical measures. Roma children frequently attended segregated schools, studied under poorer infrastructural conditions, and were taught by fewer qualified teachers. Teachers often held prejudiced attitudes toward them or were unprepared for intercultural education.

6.2. The Problem of Early School Leaving and Further Education

The dropout rate among Roma students is exceptionally high, particularly at the high school and higher education levels. The dissertation demonstrates how economic difficulties, family background, low parental education, and the exclusionary functioning of the education system all contribute to the fact that few Roma youths acquire marketable knowledge or vocational skills.

6.3. Education as a Tool for Social Mobility

One of the main conclusions of the dissertation is that quality education can bring breakthrough not only at an individual level but also at a community level. Through the education of Roma youth, a new Roma intellectual layer can be formed, which can represent the community's interests, promote social integration, and preserve cultural heritage. However, this requires an educational system that takes into account the specific needs of Roma children, supports their linguistic and cultural identity, and provides them with a real opportunity for social advancement.

7. The Role of Institutions and Organizations

The success of the social integration of Roma communities depends not only on legislation and strategies but also on the active involvement of institutions, civil organizations, and religious actors in the process. In my doctoral dissertation, I dedicated a separate chapter to the question of how these actors contribute to the upliftment of Roma communities and what challenges they face in their work.

7.1. The Role of School

Educational institutions play a key role in social mobility. The school performance of Roma children, their experiences in school, and the attitudes of their teachers significantly influence their future social position. The dissertation highlights that school is not only a place for knowledge transfer but also a primary arena for socialization. Teachers not only educate but also nurture and shape attitudes.

For the successful academic advancement of Roma children, trust, support, and an intercultural approach are crucial. Unfortunately, the research shows that many Roma students receive negative feedback early on, which reinforces social prejudices and leads to a lack of self-confidence. Therefore, school integration programs, mentoring, and the employment of community social workers are essential.

7.2. The Role of Civil Organizations and NGOs

Civil organizations often fill the gap left by the state's lack of action. The dissertation highlights that these organizations contribute significantly to the upliftment of the Roma community, but their operations are hindered by a lack of resources, territorial inequalities, and the underdeveloped community trust.

One of the greatest strengths of the civil sector lies in its ability to respond more flexibly to the needs of Roma communities compared to the state institutions. However, their presence is often limited to specific towns, which means they are unable to provide nationwide coverage.

7.3. The Role of the Church

The church plays a significant role in the lives of Roma communities, both spiritually and socially. In my dissertation, I dedicate particular attention to religious communities that take an active role in organizing Roma congregations, providing social support, and offering spiritual care. Churches are able to bridge social divides and can become a community resource.

In Săcueni, there are several examples where the church has been able to involve Roma families in educational and social programs, thus contributing to the strengthening of the community.

8. Research: The Roma Community of Săcueni

One of the most valuable contributions of the dissertation is the empirical research conducted in Săcueni, a town in the Partium region. The town has an ethnically mixed population: alongside the Hungarian majority, there is a significant Roma community, whose internal structures and social situation reflect the general issues faced by Roma in Romania.

8.1. Demographic Background and Social Status

A significant portion of Săcueni's population is of Roma descent, although official statistics often underestimate this. Most of the Roma living in the town are Hungarian-speaking, which creates a unique "dual minority" situation. The Roma community in Săcueni primarily resides in the outskirts of the town, in low-comfort areas where utility services are limited, and unemployment rates are high.

8.2. Education, Further Studies, and Future Outlook

The educational situation of the Roma in Săcueni illustrates the problems that are also present at the national level: early school dropout, low higher education enrollment, lack of motivation, and language disadvantages. The dissertation supports the fact that very few Roma students reach high school, and even fewer make it to higher education.

Nevertheless, there are also positive examples: in my dissertation, I have sought to map out those local initiatives and measures that aim to support the successful educational advancement of Roma students through scholarship programs, after-school learning opportunities, mentoring, or parental cooperation.

8.3. Roma Projects and Urban Strategy

In recent years, the municipality of Săcueni has launched several projects aimed at the integration of the Roma community, funded through both EU and national sources. These initiatives included housing programs, projects to improve educational and healthcare services, as well as local strategies implemented with the involvement of social workers.

A key finding of the research is that these programs tend to be successful when the Roma community is actively involved in both the planning and implementation phases – when the target group is treated as a partner rather than merely as a beneficiary.

9. Conclusion

The aim of my doctoral dissertation was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the situation of the Roma community in the context of multiculturalism and minority rights, with a special focus on access to education, the preservation of identity, and the possibilities of institutional support. My research was conducted in Săcueni, where empirical evidence confirmed that education is the most crucial tool in reducing the social disadvantages faced by the Roma community.

The main hypothesis of my dissertation – that the weak advocacy capacity of the Roma community is primarily rooted in low educational attainment – was confirmed. Roma youth who receive quality education have a significantly higher chance of breaking out of the cycle of poverty and are more likely to represent their interests, succeed professionally, and participate in public life.

The dissertation also highlighted that legal frameworks and international documents alone are insufficient if they are not supported by effective institutional structures and the political will necessary for their implementation. Multiculturalism is not merely an idea or ideology, but a practical socio-political strategy that requires continuous attention and concrete action for its realization.

Civil society organizations, churches, and educational institutions share a collective responsibility in supporting Roma communities. It is particularly important that these institutions treat Roma individuals not merely as passive beneficiaries, but as active partners – capable of participating in economic and cultural life while preserving their own cultural identity.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that the key to integration lies in quality education and the dismantling of stereotypes. This is not only in the interest of the Roma community but of society as a whole. An inclusive, multicultural society can only come into being if all its members are afforded equitable access to social goods, rights, and recognition.

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