Introduction

Policy, Inclusion, and Education Rights of Roma Children: Challenges and Successes in the EU and North America[1]

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The year 2015 concluded the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*—an unprecedented international cooperation among governments, intergovernmental organizations, and NGOs aimed at eliminating discrimination against the Roma. At the end of this decade, two crucial questions arise: First, how can we evaluate the best practices and current challenges of integrating Roma at all levels of education, in both Europe and North America? Second, how can we measure the effectiveness of the European Union's (EU) Roma Framework, the initiative intended to combat social exclusion among this minority group?

Examining the EU initiatives aiming at Roma inclusion as an issue common to most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries presents possibilities for conversation across the continents. Similar challenges face the education systems in the EU, USA, and Canada in terms of meaningful inclusion of children from minority ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds at all education levels. Thus far, Roma students in North America have not been identified as a group requiring special attention or accommodation. There are about one million Roma in North America and their number is slowly growing (Hancock, 2013); however, with the exception of concentrated efforts aimed at the anticipated influx of Roma from the Czech Republic and Hungary, the Roma who have come to Canada from other countries remain unrecognized and invisible. The *Roma Experience* program, created by the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Roma Community Centre in 2000, is an example of how Roma and non-Roma students can learn to tackle racism and prejudice, and understand what many Roma and other children of non-mainstream cultures endure. However, despite all of the efforts made by the education authorities in Ontario, Steven Harper's Conservative federal government introduced a refugee law that discriminated against Roma in Canada, and they were deported to the Eastern and Central European countries from where they had fled. The possibility of collaboration among scholars in the EU, USA, and Canada on the inclusion of Roma populations is demonstrated in this special issue.

A large number of EU-wide initiatives under the umbrella of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion Declaration* (2005-15) were focused on education, including the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* (NRIS) (European Commission, 2012). Along with indicators like employment, healthcare, and poverty reduction, quality education is a fundamental measure of social inclusion. However, as Ryder in this issue argues, not only did educational measures fail to provide a "silver bullet" to facilitate the inclusion of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller (RGT)

communities during the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*, but also he points out that schools have been overt agents of segregation through the maintenance of ghetto schools. In the *Roma Inclusion Index*, the Decade of Roman Inclusion Secretariat Foundation (2015) states: "Overrepresentation of Roma in special schools has possibly worsened. Overall segregation of Roma in education may also have increased during the Decade time frame" (p. 15).

The goal to end discrimination against Roma people was not achieved either, and in many cases the initiatives exacerbated violence and racism against Roma people. Prominent Roma scholar Kyuchukov (2013) points to the gravity of the situation in Europe: "The new-Nazi movement in Europe, and the forms of racism, discrimination and "anti-gypsyism" toward the Roma are increasing and the educational systems are partly to blame" (xii).

Since the 1990s, educational provisions for the Roma have been incorporated into human rights, which were viewed as the driving principle to action by agencies (e.g., state authorities, private entities, NGOs, and Roma elites) involved in educational projects (Trubeta, 2013). Actors like UNICEF and ENAR have emphasised the continued denial of basic human rights, at the individual and collective levels, to members of minority groups, most prominently Roma (European Network Against Racism, 2012). Most recently,

> [t]he judgements of the European Court of Human Rights have moved from a relatively cautious endorsement of integrated education to an implicit expectation that states adopt positive measures to address disparities in educational access and attainment where such disparities arise from discriminatory practices. (O'Nions, 2015, p. 103)

However, as Friedman (2015) cautions, "[t]he continued deployment of human rights discourse as used to date in relation to Roma risks deepening divisions between Roma and non-Roma" (p. 2), and by implication contributes to the image of the Roma as Europe's eternal Other.

The contributing authors of this special issue are all concerned about discrimination against the Roma and the dire consequences that result, such as segregation in schools. All agree that the role of education is paramount for overcoming many of the social and economic barriers that Roma communities face, but, for varying reasons, current policy efforts are not inadequately addressing these large-scale problems. A key theme within the papers is that, despite many good policy initiatives in place, the results are often disappointing. Well-meaning government and NGO policy can inadvertently reify discriminatory assumptions and practices; for example, some of the terminology used in policy documents reinforces difference and Otherness (Urban). Meaningful community consultation is often absent, even from grass-root NGO efforts (Ryder). At other times, international organizations can exert pressure on national governments to change norms and open space for dialogue, yet this does not always translate to effective policy action without enforcement mechanisms (Ram). Another running theme throughout the papers is that solving problems in education demands a closer look at the wider social, political, and cultural contexts of discrimination. Schools have always been a key agent of socialization, and the knowledge about teaching and schooling is historically situated. From the Enlightenment period onward, assumptions about those constructed as the uncivilized Other continue to inform education policy and practices, namely through assimilation goals (Kirova & Prochner). Neoliberalism also plays a major role in how funding is allocated and what tops the policy agenda (Ryder). At the national level, deeply entrenched public attitudes about the Roma leads to institutionalized racism that manifests in government policy (Lugosi). At the community

level, cultural factors are also an important consideration. There is often disconnection between what knowledge Roma parents value for their children and what the schools actually teach (Lambrev). Finally, the complex role of gender within the community and educational practices is crucial, yet often overlooked (Macris). Attention now shifts to the individual papers in more detail.

Kirova and Prochner's contribution in this issue question the ability of education theory and practice to address the issue of educating the Other, tracing back to the mid-1600s. They argue that, based on the publication of Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, a set of universal benchmarks for a civilized modern individual was established. As a project of Modernity, education became an instrument for "the civilizing process of modernity." Ficowski (1990) states: "The cultivation of those less civilized or even 'barbaric' could also be detected in the attempts made by the socialist postwar governments in Eastern Europe to settle and thus "civilize" the Gypsies as people who lived 'outside of history'" (cited in Fonseca, 1996, p. 8). By considering efforts to resolve difference by assimilating or "civilizing" the Other during the Enlightenment, this contribution also examines how the schools function as agencies of resocialization. The authors point that through the medium of instruction—written texts—and the selective process of including certain aspects of the past while excluding others, the schools attempted to create a universal knowledge of the world that would, in turn, create an ideal order in which the dominated populations, including the Roma, are subjugated, normalized, and assimilated. The shift from assimilating the Other through a totalizing system of knowledge that obliterates the Other into being the same, to respecting the Other signifies a new (postmodern) way of addressing the ever-persistent issues of foreignness and otherness in education. Grounded in multicultural philosophy, the primary goal of multicultural education has been to develop awareness of and respect for cultural diversity (Portera, 2011). The authors side with critics of multicultural education who argue that multicultural discourse premised on the idea of heritage results in a reductive striving for cultural "simplicity and knowability" (Walcott, 1997, p. 122). By relegating ethnic and, in particular, racialized Others to static, externally rooted identities, the boundaries between majority and minority cultures are solidified (Kirova, 2008). As a defining charactersitic of the Roma populations are their intra-group diversity, "essentialized" approaches to integration that suppress such intra-group divisions were largely unsuccessful. However, such approaches have successfully solidified the distinctions between Roma and non-Roma (*gadje* or *gadze*, the Roma words for non-Roma people) that have "reinforced stereotypes and mistrust on both sides" (Ringold, 2000, p. 7).

In this issue, Urban provides an insightful analysis of the EU policy approach grounded in what he calls a "paradox of good intentions". Using the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* as an example, he points out that—while the document is well intended, insisting that Roma are "treated like any other EU citizen"—it simultaneously (paradoxically) and inadvertently implies that Roma are different and not like us. The emphasis on difference is reflected in problematic policy terminology. Urban illuminates the consequences of using the term Roma as an umbrella term in the *2011 Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* that encompasses a number of ethnic minority groups. He asserts that the implications of such an umbrella term serve as another example of the paradox of good intentions. In his view, subsuming diverse groups under one term can contribute to fragmentation, which consequently weakens minority representation. This can also imply a hierarchy (of oppression, need, political attention) and reinforce destructive patterns of internalised oppression.

While all authors point to the fact that educational issues are always embedded in a complex matrix of historical, social, political, economic, and cultural contexts that are uniquely intertwined, they also caution against the common practice of presenting education independently from the larger social socioeconomic and cultural factors that profoundly influence learning and schooling. The negative impact of neoliberal education on equal opportunities for all children, including children from minority groups such as the Roma, should not be underestimated particularly after the 2007–08 global financial crisis that coincided with the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* initiative. Roma, Gypsies, and Travellers (RGT) represent Europe's largest and most disenfranchised ethnic minority groups (Council of Europe, 2012) and still live in poverty and social exclusion (UNESCO, 2010). For example, as Lambrev (in this issue) indicates, a recent study exploring the intergenerational Roma poverty in 11 EU Member states shows that in 2012 over 44 percent of the surveyed Roma in Bulgaria reported that at least one person in the household went to bed hungry in the previous month; 62 percent shared a sense of economic instability (World Bank, 2013). The Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation in the *Roma Inclusion Index* (2015) reports: "Summarizing data across the Decade region suggests a worsening of the situation of Roma and widening of the gap with the total population in regard to poverty, particularly the risk of poverty" (p. 19). Urban (in this issue) identifies another paradox of good intentions that manifests in the implicit self-referential conceptualisation of "poverty." He argues that in most EU policy documents the intergenerational cycle of poverty becomes an intrinsic characteristic of the poor, to which they actively contribute (moving from one generation to the next). He points that such conceptualisations deflect from understandings of poverty as an inevitable (and, for some, desirable and beneficial) condition of capitalist society and prevents shifting our attention to the cycle of unfair advantages.

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the links between poverty and educational exclusion of ethnic and cultural minority students worldwide are profound. Ryder's contribution (in this issue) not only makes a clear connection between the Roma's acute marginalization and the extreme forms of socio-economic and spatial exclusion, but also argues that these forms of marginalization and exclusion have been intensified by the economic crisis and the onward march of neoliberalism. Ryder points that in the recent neoliberal political climate marked by austerity measures, the RGT communities have been among the greatest losers of the crisis; unemployment as well as corresponding poverty and ghettoization have consigned many families to ever greater and more acute levels of poverty. Additionally, the author continues, in the age of austerity policy, many EU governments are moving away from progressive and redistributive economic policies thus perpetuating the practice of anthologizing the victims and casting the Roma as disinterested in education and lacking motivation for higher educational achievement.

The austerity measures have also limited the ability of EU grassroots organisations to effectively access EU funding. At the same time, there are discrepancies between flourishing projects funded by the EU and the World Bank, among others, and poor educational outcomes, which in turn solidifies stereotypes of the Roma as "ahistorical," resisting change and possessing an "unchangeable identity." Ryder's contribution offers insight into the issue of "NGOisation" that, in his view, limits the capacity of Roma civil society through bureaucracy and managerialism, which leads to disconnection with RGT communities. Moreover, educated Roma have become "experts" absorbed into NGO bureaucracies but no longer grounded in the communities from whence they came or for which they aspire to advocate (van Baar, 2013). The

NGOisation of the Roma issue, which often silences Roma voices, paired with severe austerity regimes (Sigona & Trehan, 2009) shapes the image of the "privileged" Roma. Both Ryder and Urban address the issue of professionalization of the "advocacy industry" and turning "representation" into a profession, a livelihood, and a profitable venue where self-interests are put before the interests of children, families and communities. To understand the transformative role education can play, it is important to examine not only the conditions in which the inequalities in educational and economic outcomes for Roma are produced and reproduced, but also the role played by racist practices and the role of counteracting grass-root forces that drive social action.

The main proposition Ryder advances is that collaborative partnerships where RGT communities are active participants in developing curricula and decision making in schools, paired with interventionist and redistributive policy frameworks at both national and European levels, can contribute to the vision of a "Social Europe" in which inclusive schools and a thriving RGT civil society are possible. Ryder brings two examples of such collaborative relationships between NGOs, the local school authorities, the communities (one from Bulgaria and one from the UK) where inclusive strategies utilised in building capacities within the Roma and GT communities have resulted in positive educational experiences for the children and their families in these communities. The project in the UK is an example of collaboration between RGT NGOs that came together to coordinate the Government sponsored RGT History month, modeled after the U.S. national Black History Month. The momentum built by the project that brought together large sections of RGT communities encouraging parents and students to work in partnerships with schools, was severed by austerity cuts.

Interestingly, Roma NGOs in Bulgaria started the project for school desegregation Ryder describes before the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*, with support from the Open Society Institute and, later, the Roma Education Fund. This project was based on ongoing dialogue and communication with parents from Roma communities who managed to overcome their fears and hesitation to be involved in the desegregation process. The project also changed the perspectives of teachers and school administrators who previously viewed Roma children and their families as deficient, thus in danger of facing peer rejection and challenges in meeting the high academic standards. Unfortunately, the Bulgarian neoliberal approach characterised by the lack of genuine political will, coupled with resistance to fundamental change on the part of the society, prevented replicating the project on a larger scale.

Lambrev in this issue explores the factors contributing to Roma students' disparate outcomes in Bulgaria during the *Decade of Roma Inclusion Initiative*, including the highest level of illiteracy and early school leaving points, and cites data showing that social stratification in Bulgarian schools is the highest among all EU countries (World Bank, 2013). Her contribution here is unique as it includes Roma parents' views on their children's lack of success in Bulgarian schools. Consistent with other studies of Roma culture (e.g., Hancock, 2002), her findings indicate that, according to Roma parents, the traditional education of their children differs considerably from the mainstream values emphasized in Bulgarian schools, including the practice of community-based, informal education, child independence, and early participation in adult life, which makes the transition from home to school problematic. Parents described children's maturity, the ability to share and be generous to members of the group, and responsibility to family and community as fundamentals of children's social and cognitive development that can provide meaningful educational experience if matched with the culture of schools. Comparing her finding with Kyuchukov's (2000; 2011), she concurs that a major

conflict between Roma and mainstream Bulgarian cultures comes from the contrasting ways in which Roma and *gadje* children are socialized.

Kirova and Prochner (in this issue) also examine the function of schools as agents of resocialization, and how minority children, including the Roma, are subject to foreign imposition aimed at their assimilation. The alternative, both Lambrev and Kirova and Prochner agree, is for the education system to implement education reform to develop intercultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy. Kirova and Prochner's contribution highlights the potential of intercultural philosophy that promotes understanding through intercultural dialogue for engaging children from diverse cultures, noting that this would require a change not only in educational practices in schools, but also in higher education and teacher education.

The intercultural perspective derives its foundations from the principles of liberalism and hermeneutics. What makes intercultural philosophy a more promising foundation for educational practice is that openness to difference and the expansion of understanding through cross-cultural dialogue does not mean blanket acceptance of all cultural perspectives and practices. Thus discriminatory and/or abusive gender-specific cultural practices can be altered through a process of dialogue. This possibility is particularly important for Roma women and girls, who are considered the most disempowered group in Europe (UN Women, 2011). Macris' contribution to this special issue concurs with previous research pointing to the triple discrimination Roma women and girls face in Greece—as females, as Roma, and as children. While Roma women are still dominated by males in their own community, they are also threatened by increasing violence from the dominant Greek society. They not only face substandard housing conditions, child labour, cultural barriers to enrolment in school, and forced early/underage marriages in their own communities but also are subjected to bullying and other forms of discrimination in the school system leading to early drop out, which in turn perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Ryder (in this issue) points out that in the face of increased societal and institutional discrimination, Roma communities may revert to traditional coping mechanisms for solutions including culturally insular strategies and narrow notions of tradition that may lead to forms of oppression, and denies the value of formal education. In this case, gender oppression provides an example of such a traditional coping mechanism, which Ryder calls "misdirected resistance."

Macris observes that the Greek education system is ill-equipped to deal with the learning particularities of its mainstream Greek student population, and even less so to deal with the complexities and adjustment struggles related to physical, cognitive, psychological, cultural, and social differences Roma, immigrant, and special needs students bring to the school context. The situation is exacerbated by teachers' lack of preparation to function in a multicultural society. She also makes a connection between the serious economic pressure on Greek society related to the global economic crisis and the increased discrimination of Roma people in general, noting that the *Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of the Roma* launched by the Greek government in 2001 is now considered unsuccessful. The fact that Greece is not one of the 12 countries participating in the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* initiative is an indication, she states, that improving the socio-economic conditions of Roma populations is not a priority for the Greek governments in power over this period of time. However, the lack of gender-disaggregated data at the EU level that is acknowledged in the *Roma Inclusion Index* (2015) suggests that gender issues are not a priority for other EU governments either:

Gender disaggregated data for the total population has not been used in the Roma Inclusion Index.

> The comparison of the situation of Romani females is done against the total population, because it makes more sense to assess vulnerability and exclusion against a group that is included than against another vulnerable and excluded group. (p. 14)

All the contributors of this special issue, in one way or another, address the question of what should be done next in order to utilise the potential that education has for improving the situation of Roma so that the general population can see economic benefits from Roma participation in the labour market, and to create a better, more just "Social Europe."

One important policy-related issue is how the involvement of supranational policymakers such as the EU, as well as other international organizations, helps or hinders the development and implementation of effective policies to combat social exclusion in education for Europe's Roma. The article by Ram in this issue asks whether the EU and other international organizations make a significant contribution to policy progress as "essential inputs" or whether they are best regarded as "centralized distractions" to national and local efforts. The EU is one of the most involved out of the international organisations working on Roma anti-social exclusion policies. This involvement has expanded dramatically with the eastward enlargement of the EU to include the member states of Central and East Europe that host large Roma populations. The European Commission, together with the World Bank and Open Society Foundations, developed the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* (2005-2015), and the EU followed this initiative with the *2011 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies*. Ram argues that the success of these programs relies crucially on the states taking up the policy recommendations of the EU and other international actors and that overall, these initiatives have resulted in only limited progress in education, as well as other areas of social inclusion.

Despite this disappointing progress, Ram argues that the European Union and other international organizations make a positive difference in educational policy outcomes of the Roma in several ways. First, they play an important role in data collection and dissemination to support evidence-based policy-making. For example, the *2012 Special Eurobarometer* on public attitudes toward the Roma highlighted the persistence of high levels of discrimination and negative attitudes toward Roma that continue to serve as barriers to inclusion in education. Legislation by the EU can function in a broader way to shape norms and to keep social inclusion and the Roma on the policy agenda. The EU strategies can also have an impact because they attempt to create structures and procedures that share best practices and facilitate communication and cooperation among stakeholders at the local regional and national level. The EU is also an important source of funding for efforts to combat social exclusion and inequality.

Limitation of the effectiveness of European Union in the policy field also stem from the policy tools and policy mode. With the exception of anti-discrimination legislation, such as the *European Convention on Human Rights* and the *Racial Equality Directive of 2000*, which makes discrimination based on race illegal, the EU lacks legally binding tools and must rely on supporting, encouraging norm transformation and policy change. This is because like most policy areas in the area of social exclusion, education is a national policy competence. Even in areas where binding "hard law" tools exist, such as anti-discrimination legislation, the EU's tools and resources for monitoring national compliance with court rulings are limited. Some actions by the EU lead to unintended consequences. Ram notes that not only can international policy efforts be bureaucratic and costly, with insufficient coordination between partners leading to inefficiency and duplication, but also critics have charged that efforts do not adequately include

Roma activists in policy development, and may actually divert resources away from grassroots Roma organizations created within the Roma community. For these reasons Ram questions whether internationally led policy initiatives might be counterproductive and a "centralized distractions," while the most effective work can be done locally.

One of the major obstacles to effective action on social inclusion in education for the Roma is the difficulty of shifting entrenched public attitudes toward the Roma. This, in turn, is affected by national politics. The contribution by Lugosi in this issue takes a closer look at the deeper roots of discriminatory attitudes that may serve as barriers to effectively addressing social exclusion in education. Drawing on the case of Hungary, home to one of the largest Roma populations in Europe, she highlights a puzzle: While the state of the Roma looks good from the perspective of legislation aimed at combating social exclusion, in practice, progress toward these goals is disappointing. Lugosi argues that policies are ineffective because social change is hampered by a more deeply rooted context of racialized discourse that perpetuates discrimination against the Roma. Lugosi applies Critical Race Theory to examine the racialized discourses of Fidesz, the conservative nationalist governing party of Hungary, and Jobbik, a Hungarian opposition party of the far right. To examine how race fits into education policy in Hungary,

Lugosi argues that discourses of the populist radical right reinforce the "otherness" of the Roma, which undermine European Union efforts to encourage desegregation in education. She argues that meaningful policy change in Hungary, and elsewhere, must start by addressing racialized discourses that are perpetuated by political parties of the right. For Lugosi, effective action may require closer monitoring of policy progress in Hungary by the EU and other international organizations.

From the education theory and practice perspective, all contributions emphasise the need for close collaborations with RGT communities. The acknowledgement that for far too long these communities have been silenced, and that no positive outcomes are possible without their full participation as equal partners, is manifest in different forms in all papers. In fact, if there is anything positive that came out of the failure of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*, it is the realization that failure to create inclusive education based on genuine dialogue among all involved leads to failure in all other aspects of social life such as employment, healthcare, and poverty reduction. Schools, as educational institutions, have the potential to become a hub for different communities to come together and work towards a better educational outcomes and potential upward social mobility for their children. In regards to approaches to education that could lead to these desired outcomes, those suggested by the contributors include intercultural education (Kirova & Prochner), critical pedagogy (Ryder), culturally relevant pedagogy (Lambrev), and a new conceptualization of competent systems in early childhood education that highlights the relationship between actors (Urban). What these approaches have in common is the recognition that superficial or tokenistic approaches to diversity lead to essentialization of cultural difference that only solidifies the boundaries between the majority (European) group and the minority (non-European) groups, including the Roma, and promotes stereotypes, thus contributing to further social exclusion of "non-Europeans." The authors of the papers in this issue call for radical reconstruction and democratization of education at all levels, including teacher education. Education can only become empowering and liberating when spaces are open for genuine dialogue among all groups in which issues regarding the impact of social, historical, economic, political and cultural factors on constriction of present categories of difference are explored, contested and renegotiated.

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