

## The Impacts of Microsocial Relationships on School Mobility in the Roma Population

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**ABSTRACT:** In my paper I analyse action strategies observed among the successful Roma with the aid of the narrative interview technique developed primarily by Gabriele Rosenthal, based on Oevermann's objective hermeneutics approach. The goal of the analysis was to integrate the typical coping strategies and patterns of adaptation obtained from hermeneutical case reconstruction in studying successful mobility at school. The research underlying this particular study constitutes analyses of the life stories Roma individuals holding or about to obtain university degrees, who have been particularly successful – by the standards of the Roma community – in the mobility channel of the education system. Social factors enabling as well as those impeding the progress of the individual, preselecting the high contingency process of social action, are highlighted in this paper. My research aims at revealing – by grasping the dynamic relationship between structure and individual – how structure as an operating mechanism affects the individual's life, how wide manoeuvring room it leaves for upwardly mobile individual life paths and choices. Bourdieu's social theory conclusions were tested in this research through a new approach and besides the economic and cultural dimensions of the social inequalities across social groups; the roles of social capital were also empirically studied. Particular attention was paid in the analysis to the microsocial relationships affecting the school performance of Roma students as well as to the question of secondary socialisation. Successful school mobility occurred where the family environment showed a higher degree of homophilia with the majority norms while social relationships were characterised by a higher level of heterophilia.

**KEYWORDS:** Roma community, school mobility, primary and secondary socialisation, microsocial network, narrative life story

### Introduction

It is widely known that one of the key obstacles to the social integration of the Roma minority in Hungary is the low levels of schooling attainment in the Roma population. The significant differences and discrepancies between the majority society and the Roma community dating back to centuries have been persevered regardless of different political and sociological eras (Kemény – Janky – Lengyel 2004), despite the increase in the overall schooling attainment of the Roma minority (Kemény – Havas 1996). Since the Hungarian Roma minority has been one

of the biggest losers of the system change,<sup>1</sup> the gap between the schooling attainment of Roma children and the non-Roma children has grown wider. Today this inequality appears most saliently in continued studies in secondary schools. A very small proportion of Roma students have been able and are managing to gain admission to secondary schools and the ratio of drop-outs is very high among Roma youngsters (Liskó 2003), as a consequence of which even fewer young Roma people, hardly more than one per cent of them, participate in tertiary education. As the prerequisites for the success of Roma people in life have changed since the political system change, scientists regard the raising of the schooling levels as the primary prerequisite for success (Kemény – Havas 1996; Liskó 2003; Székelyi et al. 2005). Accordingly, studies of the factors affecting the possibility and capabilities of some groups of the Roma minority for taking this non-majority opportunity of mobility in the schooling system have become particularly important. In this paper I will try to analyse and highlight the socio-cultural environment and strategies of action of those of the Roma minority who have managed to obtain degrees or who are on the way towards obtaining one. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which the micro-economic relationships can enable actors, not predestined to school mobility, to become successful.

## Theoretical Implications

In the course of my analyses I discuss the importance of Bourdieu's capital types (Bourdieu 1997) emphasising, in particular, the individual's relationship to cultural capital (Bourdieu 1978a). This is not a novel approach in the mobility research programmes scrutinising inequalities in schools in Hungary (Róbert 2001; Bukodi 2000), that highlight the fact that in the relationship between the individual's origins and schooling attainment cultural capital is a more dominant intermediating variable than economic capital is (Somlai 1997).

According to Bourdieu's capital theory the different types of capital are unevenly distributed in society and the amounts one has of such types of capital pre-determines one's position on the social ladder, along with one's chances of mobility. Bourdieu's structuralist analysis argues that the schooling system effectively legitimates the reproduction of cultural capital and thereby it helps the passing down of the social positions developing on the basis of one's share of the different types of capital (Bourdieu 1978a). Moreover, the amount of cultural capital determines even one's strategies governing his investment in his studies and education, thereby creating a special *habitus* comprising the relation of the given social class to school-gained knowledge as well as its inclination to actually use school ser-

<sup>1</sup> Since industry has become less and less able to employ unskilled labour since the system change those who have not been able to finish primary school and those who have finished it but have not pursued further studies, are bound to live in poverty. Unemployment among the Roma has been growing more to become a permanent and definitive state and the widening of the social gap is pushing the Roma population into an increasingly deprived status. For more details on this subject see: Székelyi et al 2005.

vices. Bourdieu's theory regards cognitive factors also as hard structuring factors, considering them as manifestations of reconversion strategies (Bourdieu 1978b). Consequently, the relation of disadvantaged minorities to knowledge is a key to school mobility.

The findings of my research draw attention to the fact that, besides cultural capital, social capital plays a particularly important role from the aspect of social mobility. Both international and Hungarian analyses of networks of relationships are increasingly drawing attention to the fact that people live embedded in networks of relationships (e.g. family, schoolmates, colleagues at work, neighbours, people one spends one's spare time with, etc.) which turn into social facts in the course of daily life (Angelusz – Tardos 1991). According to the conclusion of the international studies in the world of individual-focused networks the pattern and quality of relationships affect the individual's position, behaviour (Coleman 1988), social mobility (Lin 1990; Lin 2001) and school performance (Hoffer et al. 1985; Stanton et al. 1995; Carbonaro 1998).

Among domestic research projects it was a series of quantitative analyses performed by Gabriella Pusztai among students of secondary schools run by religious denominations that highlighted the relationships between social capital and success at school as well as the intent to pursue further studies (Fényes – Pusztai 2004; Pusztai – Verdes 2002; Pusztai 2009). The findings of her research underlined the importance of social capital – in addition to cultural capital – along with the role of strong and weak ties between success at school and the intent to go on studying, and they point to the fact that the resources inherent in this do support the intent of disadvantaged students to go on to tertiary education. Among qualitative research undertakings it was the three Roma portraits worked out by Margit Feischmidt (2008) in micro-villages in southwest Hungary that show most saliently the identity struggles of successful individuals along with how it is possible to elevate the social position of disadvantaged people by suitable re-conversion of the different types of capital.

My research is therefore also aimed at working out an interpretation of the impacts of social capital through encouraging and discouraging social mobility. The mobility perspectives of the different courses of life increasingly highlighted the role of Granovetter's weak and strong ties as well as their perspectives determining courses of lives (Granovetter 1982). According to Granovetter the strength of relationships is determined by the time, emotions and intimacy invested in them. Weak ties can bridge large social distances and they are crucial from the aspect of mobility. Close friendly or close family relationships – strong ties – are not suitable for the channelling of external information. Therefore individuals with few weak ties are at a disadvantage, because they remain excluded from flows of information as they are isolated by a cocoon of strong ties. In this way, isolation can keep them in a disadvantaged situation when they wish to change their social position.

The identity perspectives of the narratives on the other hand, drew my attention to the importance of the phenomenological approach which I would mention only in relation to primary and secondary socialisation (Berger – Luckmann 1998). It is widely known that secondary socialisation introduced the already socialised individual into another, new segment of the objective world of society (Berger – Luckmann 1998). The process of secondary socialisation is entirely based on primary socialisation, relying on its personal and social identity, as it cannot build up a subjective reality out of nothing (Berger – Luckmann 1998: 183). At this point therefore, there is theoretically little chance of any major change occurring in primary socialisation that can be observed in Roma communities, which can be only superficially linked to the majority society. Such a change is made even less likely because primary socialisation takes place through deeply emotional communication, through communication with the parents, predominantly with the mother, the ‘significant other’ (Mead 1934). Since primary socialisation entails a strong emotional identification, a process by the end of which the individual’s perspective, value system, semantics and ideology, and primary socialisation cannot, in the majority of cases, be altered by secondary socialisation.

In its institutionalised form secondary socialisation takes place in the education system while in a non-institutionalised form it may be linked to the peer group and/or the mass media (Bognár 2010). Accordingly, there is a chance of altering the socio-cultural patterns of primary socialisation and of encouraging successful Roma mobility where the features and perspective of the developing personality is shaped by an emotional content similar to that of primary socialisation. This is why those teachers tend to produce results that can develop emotional relationships with their pupils whereby they turn into ‘significant others’ and can influence the social and personal identity of primary socialisation. If the relationship between the teacher and the student is formalised and anonymous, it is a lot easier to brush aside and eliminate the reality weight of secondary socialisation when, for instance, the student leaves school (Berger – Luckmann 1998:198). The reality of secondary socialisation – in this case the school – is an ‘artificial’ reality which, even if only on account of its secondary nature, is less deeply rooted in awareness, i.e. it is easily uprooted. The ‘confidential’ atmosphere created by the teacher may, however, change this when it evokes the ‘confidential’ world of primary socialisation, alluring the child to turn his ‘attention from the natural objects’ to these ‘artificial’ ones (Berger – Luckmann 1998: 200).

The novel feature of my research is that it is carrying out complex analyses of the societal relationships of successful school mobility among the Roma by analysing narrated life stories and by scrutinising the various capital types and the effects of the social environment.

## The Method Of The Research

The conclusions drawn in this study are based on fieldwork and on in-depth interviews and narrative interviews carried out in the course of the fieldwork. Research based on narrative interviews helps exploring the society in its complexity through studying diverse life careers that are characteristic of modern societies. Research comprising narrative interviews is based on the viewpoint that we can shape our identity from our actual life stories and that is how we can make ourselves understandable. The mode of the narratives, the sequence and the contents of the stories depict the way we live ourselves, the forces and motives promoting our actions that is, eventually, the forces and motives by which we can impact society. The qualitative method applied in the research, the course-of-life interviews show how the individuals express their relation to their own respective groups, what elements of the events they integrate, how they do it and how the characteristics of group identity develop from this (László 2005). Consequently, the life stories of Roma degree-holders bear the impression of the society simultaneously with the world of life experiences of the individuals concerned (Kovács – Vajda 2002).

The narrative analysis of the research is based on hermeneutic case reconstruction which makes it possible to grasp highly complex social and mental structures. By uncovering the causal relationships and the circle of mutual impacts of these social and psychic structures one can highlight sociological factors, making it possible to grasp highly complex constellations if the analysis is carried out successfully. The validity of the method is ensured by the hermeneutical fundamentals and the strict rules governing the reconstruction of cases (for its features see: Rosenthal 1995)<sup>2</sup>. The narrative life story interviews applied as a method and technique for understanding are based on the Oevermannian objective hermeneutics method developed by Fritz Schütze (Schütze 1976), and later by Gabriele Rosenthal (Rosenthal 1995) into a sociological research method. The technique based on narrative life story interviews, applying the approach of hermeneutical case reconstruction of the text derived from them, is an attempt at grasping the dual structure of individual and society. The method sees biography as a social formula constituted by the individual's experience and by social reality alike. By contrast, hermeneutical case reconstruction aims at mapping the life story process of the internalisation of the social world in the self-description of the biography on the one hand, while on the other hand we make an attempt at revealing how the structure of one's finding his or her way around in the present and future

2 In this sense, if one carries out the analysis of the whole of a narrative interview in full, as prescribed by the rules of hermeneutical case reconstruction, it will be no less valid than any other technique (e.g. a qualitative technique used on a large number of elements). Since however, the analysis takes place through the interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer, a different interpretation may result from an interview conducted by another interviewer (with the same interviewee thus, as a matter of course, in a different life situation), which, however, does not – if the rules of hermeneutical case reconstruction are fully observed – affect the validity of the analysis. The reliability of the case reconstruction technique is ensured by the extremely meticulous and strictly regulated nature of the analysis.

social world evolves in the individual by arranging the biographical experiences in 'experience patterns' (Rosenthal 1995: 13).

In strict observance of the rules of hermeneutical case reconstruction (the rules on the analysis of biographic data, thematic field analyses, fine analyses, etc.) various segments of the system of relationships between individual and society can be reconstructed in an analysis that provides a detailed view of the varied relationship between individual and his or her social environment (e.g. Kovács – Vajda 1994). We carried out an analysis of the interviewees involved in our research in this regard (Elekes 2009). In this study we undertook to work out an interpretation of the identity constructions derived from such hermeneutical case reconstructions.<sup>3</sup> The sociological analysis is aimed at highlighting the segments of school mobility from the aspect of the interacting relationship between individual and society.

This paper is a summary of our qualitative research of the action strategies relating to the school mobility of Roma students with the aid of the narrative interview technique carried out in the course of the fieldwork in different regions of Hungary. I analysed the life stories of young Roma individuals holding or on the way to holding degrees from tertiary education, who have been successful, by the standards of the Roma society, in the mobility channel of education. The underlying motive of the analysis was a search for the typical patterns that can be identified in the road to success in the various narratives while also laying emphasis on the way the individual experienced the events of his or her life. What was found from the hermeneutical case reconstructions was that each of the interviewees had to accept the difficulties of social mobility, in other words, they were characterised by similar strategies in facing challenges and similar life situations in addition to their individual differences. Thus the identification of what is typical is based in this sense not on the individual him- or herself, but on their similar experiences shaping – without determining – the possible action strategies of the individual.

In the course of my research I conducted narrative interviews covering the whole life stories of interviewees who openly expressed their belonging to the Roma community, coming from exclusively Roma families. In selecting<sup>4</sup> my interviewees I took care to ensure that they come from different regions of Hungary (the Great Plain, South Transdanubia, East and North Hungary, the industrial belt of Budapest, the city of Budapest)<sup>5</sup> as well as to ensure that they represent different age groups, genders, regions, lifeworld and social milieu; in order to make the conclusions that can be drawn from the interviews to be as generally applicable as possible. This study focuses on six out of ten narrative interviews prepared in

3 Owing to volume constraints therefore we cannot present the hermeneutical case reconstruction here for the various interviews, because that would fill a whole book (see: Kovács – Vajda 2002).

4 Let me express my thanks here to Gábor Havas for his help in selecting the interviewees.

5 In dividing the Roma population into six regions I followed the results of the research of István Kemény and Gábor Havas (Kemény – Havas 1996).

the course of the research project, the ones that may be most suitable for showing the action strategies of young Roma people wishing to break out of their disadvantaged position and that can show the successful social integration of such young people through education. The narrative interviews were conducted in private, I met each interviewee two or three times, choosing locations where they felt at ease. The interviewees were between 23 and 49 years of age, they grew up in villages, towns or cities in different regions of Hungary, most of them in segregated environments.<sup>6</sup>

In the course of the hermeneutical analysis of successful Roma mobility life careers I focused on the action strategies predestined by the individual's socio-cultural environment. I aimed at highlighting the social factors which help and those which impede the individual's success in life and which, on the one hand, pre-select the high contingency process of social action without, on the other hand, fully restricting the manoeuvring room of the actors, and allow actions that depart from the majority behaviour (Bognár 2009).

## The Role Of Weak Ties In Socialisation And Mobility

### *1. Weak ties to the adult society*

It was clearly demonstrated in relation to the mobility channels of the interviewees that the school was the most important mobility factor among the mobility channels, accompanied by marital or non-marital relationship. School as a mobility channel is particularly dominant for Roma interviewees, as the majority of the families have hardly any economic or relationship capital that they could draw on to facilitate upward progress on the social ladder. This is why encounter with school without frustration, i.e. successful school career, is so particularly important for the Roma youth. The narratives revealed that the majority of the successful Roma individuals involved in my research had not faced negative discrimination at school; indeed, they had been specifically assisted by teachers who had done their best to help them catch up and who continued to help their later school careers. Accordingly, the development of the relationship between teacher and student highlights the role of the Granovetterian weak ties in the process of socialisation.

Negative discrimination at school was involved in only one of the narratives together with the ensuing 'Pygmalion-effect'. In this particular case the young male interviewee had lost his self-confidence as a consequence of the negative discrimination he had faced, which restricted the effectiveness of his mobility in addition to the self-appreciation problems. (This case was related not to the regular primary

<sup>6</sup> The individuals who came from the six regions covered by my research are partly linked to Romaversitas in terms of organisational affiliation.

school system; instead, it happened in an educational institution raising children in state care.) Apart from this case there was at least one teacher in the narrative of each of the interviewees who encouraged, assisted and helped with advice the interviewees in their studies in both primary school and in secondary school.

“... Right from the first grade on, up to the eighth my average grade was between 4.5 and 5.0 all along. Er... it was himself, my class master himself suggested that I should go on to study in a secondary school providing GCSE, well, that was something indeed, back in those days. A ... primarily among gipsies as it was back in 1979. In 1979... (Interviewee 2)”

“... On top, on top, on top of the fact that the school I liked very much. I went to a small village school, there were ten of us to a class, when the flu came there were only four of us, so this was a little “funny” (giggling), it was pretty funny at times but it was good. So to me the school was, I came to realise, the family. So ... I fled into it, by the way, so for me, well, that was the very reason why I could study ... (Interviewee 1)”

In several narratives in the research civil experts, civil society organisations appear in the Roma programmes that opened new perspectives and helped at the time of going on to secondary school with advice and positive confirmation and also later on during the university studies. Romaversitas was often mentioned – from among other civil society organisations – in the narratives as an organisation assisting the successful higher education of young Roma individuals, not only by way of its scholarship system but also by providing ‘human support’.

“It is like god’s blessing to me that I can be here in Romaversitas and that I can enjoy their support. I say this because this type of support, the support they can provide for me, could not be provided by my mum ... (Interviewee 3)”

As in the life story in which the interviewee lost confidence as a consequence of failures at school and he developed severe self-valuation problems it was the assistance provided by an expert of a civil society organisation that affected the continuation of his school career, i.e. that the interviewee dared submit his application for admission to university.

“Now then, he was the one who made me aware. So eventually ... one can say that I could have more sincere conversations with him. And he said that it was not really good, that this sort of ... did not lead anywhere and then, whatever, that one is telling lies. So that was how I submitted it. (Interviewee 5)”

These examples underpin the importance of Granovetter’s weak ties that are so



crucial to mobility that can bridge greater social distances. Also, this is where we should emphasise the importance of secondary socialisation as well.

The system of social networks (Granovetter 1982) that affects the members of the majority society just as well, fundamentally determines the action strategies of minority existence. Since the individual lives embedded in a network of relationships the family, relatives, neighbours and relations with friends, i.e. the pattern and quality of the relationships affect the individual's position and behaviour and thus his social mobility and relation to knowledge and, eventually even his performance in school. Strong, closed relationships what ties the interviewees of the minority of disadvantaged situation thus do not contribute to the individual's mobility. The interviewees in the research talked about these things as follows:

“...And they keep criticising and taunting one even because of her studying. Why, I say, why did you not study too, when you should have? You are old and all ... (Interviewee 4)”

“And then sometimes it is one's own family that is like a burden, in that they criticise me the most. And the problem is that, in fact, they never have anything good to say, others do but not my family. I do not know what more I could say about this. ...It is often so bad. Difficult childhood. It was very, very difficult ... (Interviewee 4)”

“...My foster parents did not like it, by the way. And when they did not like that I was studying, they never sat down besides me to hold my hand. Me, never! So I am dead serious when I tell you that they never asked me questions to check what I had learned ... Never, ever! Understand? They never, ever asked me about my grades or anything else. And yet, I was still a good student. Indeed. And I was thus happy about it. And it was as though I felt envy. And I did feel envy too. I am sure I trained well ... (Interviewee 1)”

“... So they were working folks. And so though they did not impede my studying but when I told them, shortly before the secondary final examinations, that I would like to go on studying, then they did ask me how much more I would want to keep on studying. But without any ill feeling. But then the main thing was that after the final exams I worked in my trade...“(Interviewee 2)”

Some of the interviewees had grown up in a segregated environment, in streets or neighbourhoods with practically exclusively Roma residents and dwellers and it had not been until they got to kindergarten or primary school that they came into contact with members of the majority society for the first time. This is where they had the first opportunity to get out of the traditionally strong and close family relationship network and to develop heterogeneous types of relations with their peers and the society of adults.

One of my interviewees also grew up on the edge of town, in a shed next to the graveyard, without running water or power. This is where he started from to get to the local town's primary school, something that determined his whole life and set his upward mobility course. The fact affecting the whole of his life, as he said the '*dominant factor*' was that he did not get to an 'average' class when he started school but to class 'a' of an elite primary school of the town in the Great Plain as the only Roma child in that class.

"Well, at that time I did not even think about my being in class 'a'. That there was class 'a' and class 'b'. Nearly everyone I knew was in class 'b'. So I got to know those in class 'a', as time passed by. For they were not, that is, I was the only Roma child. Now then, this was then, that is, or whatever it was, on the basis of which it was decided so by the teachers, I don't know. One thing is sure, most of the kids in that class were good at their studies, they did get prepared, so it was not cool not to learn or not to get prepared. Well, I do not really have very negative memories. So what I also know, like things that used to be or that tend to take place at school like this. (Interviewee 2)"

In the previous political system it was not infrequently the case that children of privileged parents were assigned to classes 'a' in primary school. In this way, when starting to attend school, the interviewee not only had to get adjusted to the norms of the majority society overnight, but also to the higher requirements set by the norms of 'class a kids'. Starting school is a difficult time even for a child of average social standing, let alone for a disadvantaged kid who had not even been to pre-school whose mother tongue is not the Hungarian language, so that he was even facing language difficulties. To tackle the task he needed massive assistance from the teachers, as his parents could not help him – they could not even read and write – so it was up to the teachers to help him catch up. Success at school and the positive experience in learning became dominant factors in the later life of the interviewee. He learned how to learn, how to tolerate the monotony of the learning process and found that work invested in learning led to success. It was the consequence of successful secondary socialisation enabled by his teachers that he was accepted in class 'a' by his classmates as the only Roma child and he was also tied to the peer group by multiple heterogeneous weak ties. School was followed directly in this life career as well by secondary school and the secondary school final examination but, for lack of family back-up, it was not until a few decades later that he got to university as a result of an '*event of fate*' (Tengelyi 1998).

According to the narrative of the female interviewee in the research, who had faced multiple disadvantages, it had been the teachers of the small village primary school who had developed the positive attitude in her towards knowledge, which later on, in her course of life helped her to get back into the school bench and pass the secondary school final examinations. Her school career was cut short

in secondary grammar school from which she dropped out owing to the family's deprived situation in life – alcoholism, poverty, no place of dwelling of her own – and had her first child at the tender age of 16. Nonetheless, once her affairs got straightened out, she got back to school, obtained the GCSE and now she is a graduate student in a teacher's training college.

“... And then, perhaps it was then, that the evening course in secondary grammar school was started in (name of town), I think it was in that year, and then I took the opportunity right away and asked about how things would be but then ... The problem was that, you see, classes were from half past four up to nine in the evening, three times a week, and that was just the time for me to bathe the children, that takes time, bathing and then feeding them, so then I said I would wait a year and then I started the next year, if I remember correctly. Yes, in 2004, was it? It was because he was four years old and in 2008 I took the final exams. 2004–2008... Hm... Well, this is a great gift to me from life, this school, it was a very, very big thing, I can tell you only good things about it. About the teachers, the students, everything ... (Interviewee 4)”

## 2. *Weak ties to the peer group*

The narratives prove that our successful interviewees had heterogeneous types of weak ties which helped them on in their continued studies. Most of those ties linked them to teachers and other adults, along with some linking to members of their own age group. On the other hand, however, where the Roma youngster managed to develop heterogeneous weak ties with members of his own age group in the primary school or in the secondary school as well, the narratives reflected more successful courses of life and less tension stemming from mobility.

The mobility of one of my interviewees was determined not by heterogeneous weak ties to the adult society but by a heterogeneous weak tie to one member of the peer group. His friendship with a non-Roma boy in the class provided him with some important advantage that helped his mobility. With the aid of his friend's parents who, as the interviewee put it '*were good at asserting their interests*' he made it to the town's elite technical secondary school which proved to be a key momentum in the course of his later life. Since the head of his class recommended only the vocational school in the way of continued education, without the help of his friend's parents his school career would have broken or got prolonged. As the only Roma in the secondary vocational school he developed additional weak ties with his non-Roma classmates. This is where he first encountered and started to internalise the middle class lifeworld, primarily thanks to his regular participation in the town's theatrical group and in the school choir. Later on, during his university years he further internalised the middle class intellectual lifestyle and its norms.

It is noted at several points in the narrative that the interviewee could not really get along with Roma children in the neighbourhood of his home. He found it difficult to get along with them as he did not have sufficient physical strength to achieve a leading position and become a dominant member of the group and this then further strengthened his ties with his non-Roma friend.

“Err ... there were many Roma kids there. But they were only such, well, no such strong ties developed even like with T. So there I was,,I was no longer the chief there, so I surely did not like that anymore. There one had to fight and I did not want to fight. (Interviewee 6)”

In these cases the weak ties with their peers assisted the individual’s social integration, indeed, youngsters with such relationships find it easier to develop relationships even later on in the university environment; so his mobility entails less tension. The ethnic structure of the network of relationships and the existence of non-Roma friends are bound to have a positive impact on social integration. An earlier comprehensive research project involving a large number of respondents (Székelyi et al. 2005: 49) also attached great importance to this relationship and highlighted it as an ‘assimilation – integration momentum’ of successful Roma individuals which helps the individual in acquiring and internalising the value system of the majority society.

### School mobility and the socio-cultural environment of the families

It is clear from the above that the mobility channel offered by the school is particularly important in the case of Roma youngsters whose lifeworld differs most from that of the successful milieu from the aspect of school mobility; in their case therefore there is hardly any chance of the Granovetterian weak ties’ appearing in the connections of the peer group that constitute a greater social embeddedness. The teacher can thus bridge a cultural and social gap without which – for lack of other weak ties – there would be hardly any chance of social mobility. This has been true, in particular, during the recent and current period of economic changes that have been especially disadvantageous to the Roma population, when ever-increasing numbers of Roma youngsters are being raised in communities lagging more and more behind the majority society. Referring back to the current experience of the interviewees, however, it is clear that the intermediating role of teachers may stand the best chance of success if public discourse which is getting increasingly politicised in regard to the ‘Roma-issue’, does not develop negative stereotypes on the part of teachers against the Roma. This is said because it is clearly not possible to help the integration of Roma youngsters from communities facing multiple difficulties and life skills problems in the family environment.

The importance of this set of issues is that a materially different situation is created for the school mobility of Roma youngsters by a family environment that can more resolutely adapt to the norms of helping school mobility. This is said because it was found in the course of the research that young people, whose parents worked on a regular basis and did not have major life skill problems or addictions and whose narratives depicted wholesome and healthy families, had weak ties with the peer groups of the non-Roma neighbourhood as well. That is to say, the prerequisites for their successful link-up with the majority society must have included the family's socio-cultural environment as well,<sup>7</sup> for which, on the one hand, the success of the majority society showed a positive example, and which, on the other hand, did not, in terms of the system of values of its lifeworld, irreconcilably differ from that of the majority society. From another angle however, another relationship to be highlighted from the aspect of successful Roma mobility is that although it was a typical feature of the family's system of values that though in terms of its lifeworld it differed from that of the majority society, yet they regarded the values of the latter – if only on account of the model's social successfulness – to be worthy of adapting or at least acceptable.

Apart from these differences, only one of the interviewees grew up in a relatively affluent family. This particular Roma youth came from the milieu of Roma musicians in an elite social position who had a massive economic capital before the system change which has, however, been eroded by now. The cultural capital and *habitus* accumulated and incorporated in the childhood years as a result of the family's efforts nonetheless, enabled the interviewee to successfully adapt to the economic environment that has changed in a way that is not advantageous for Roma musicians, to abandon the family's musician traditions and by switching careers to become a Roma intellectual with a lawyer's degree. Since by practising on musical instruments he got used to regular activities, perseverance and the tolerance of monotony, these made it easier for him to get attached to the values preferred by the majority society and to take up another occupation.

“I think my starting to play the violin as early as at the age of four or four and a half had a profound effect on me. And it gave me some kind of sincerity, awareness of responsibility and precision. Something which later on I could draw on in my studies as well. That kind of being ‘focused’ which I had to master at that tender age when playing the violin... (Interviewee 3)”

Another interviewee is a child of manual worker parents who, despite their low schooling levels, transmitted to their child the majority norm that he should study because knowledge had a value and it enabled one for making more money thereby providing for his future welfare.

<sup>7</sup> This relation was also confirmed by the research conducted by the Székelyi, Örkény, Csepeli, Barna group of authors as well (Székelyi et al. 2005), when they established a “system of conditions in the attributes of success in the Roma population matching those of the majority society”.

“What my whole life is, what is a very important childhood memory of mine, by the way, it ... must have been the early 90s, the late 80s, and it was then that western, western cars began to be brought into Hungary. My dad and I were driving in the 1200 Lada (giggles) and this Opel Kadett, which, looking back now, was a shoddy (passionately) old shitload of a car, yet it was a Kadett, but back in those days, so whizz, it overtook us. And then I said a car like that would be wonderful for me!! (whispering) And then I thought – or so I was made to believe – that if you study, you can have one like that. (Interviewee 6)”

In the above course of life it was family motivation, contiguous encouragement of the father and a heterogeneous type weak tie with one member of the peer group (a non-Roma childhood friend and the help of his family) that got the interviewee into the best secondary vocational school of the town and thus helped his school mobility.

The above two interviewees now find their way around and are building their careers in the intellectual milieu of the majority society which necessitates a kind of an ongoing integration with the latter, a process that started with the weak ties linking them to the childhood peer group. The successful mobility of each of them would not have been possible without the family back-up which was not necessarily a financial type of assistance but rather a spiritual support, motivation and encouragement which appeared at the same time in an attitude of acceptance of the values of the middle class. Both of them grew up in an urban environment – one in Budapest the other in a rural large town – and their parents worked on a regular basis. Moreover, the successful mobility of both of them was driven on very importantly by the fact that they both made attempts at self-fulfilment in the course of their respective careers, having come into close contacts with artists.

The majority of the interviewees however, failed to develop a sufficient number of weak ties with their peer group in their school years or later on during their university studies, and in their cases the tension stemming from mobility is felt stronger during their adult years. These interviewees grew up for the most part in segregated residential areas facing multiple disadvantages but, fortunately for them, they worked with teachers who had positive impacts on their secondary socialisation, enabling thereby their successful school careers. In one of the narratives the school is referred to as the interviewee’s home, as a place where he eventually received the much-needed attention and the desired praise. In this case the village school really became home to the emotionally deprived child under state care who had been transferred there to be raised by a family, a home where he finally found attention and emotional support. The praises earned by his school performance triggered in him the process whereby he grew increasingly capable of accumulating incorporated cultural capital. He learned poems, sang songs and performed regularly in ceremonial events and, as a child in state care, he be-

came the best student of the small village school. In the life of that particular interviewee the road had led straight from primary school to secondary school and then on to college. This is an excellent example of successful secondary socialisation in which the cognitive learning process was complemented with emotional commitment through the intimate relationship between the teacher and the small school kid.

## Conclusion

A hermeneutical analysis of the narrative makes it possible to highlight the role of secondary socialisation in successful Roma mobility as well. A scrutiny of the life stories revealed, that in the successful narratives in which the completion of primary school was immediately followed by secondary school and the GCSE, there had always been a school or secondary school teacher who had managed to build up a personal emotional relationship with the student whereby the teacher could shape the secondary socialisation of the disadvantaged student, i.e. they managed to make the student – often facing multiple disadvantages – to identify with the values of the successful milieu from the aspect of school mobility, thereby helping his or her social integration. Accordingly, the development of the relationship between teacher and student highlights the role of the Granovetterian weak ties in the process of socialisation.

In the life histories of Roma youngsters whose teachers had managed to develop an atmosphere of confidence with the interviewees (e.g. English teacher, violin teacher, singing and music teacher) this socialisation pattern played an important role. In these cases the interviewees had a high level of aspiration – a strong concept of their own individual chances and the likelihood of their success – as well, as a consequence or cause of which they had been highly motivated in their studies. Of course their motivation to study may have been encouraged by the family's support as well but it was not the case for every single one of the interviewees.

In this research we studied different upward mobility paths in detail, some of which were intergeneration and the others were intrageneration mobility paths. In each of the intrageneration mobility narratives there was an *event of fate* as a result of which the interviewees reassessed their lives up to that point, their present and their future. Events took place after which their focuses shifted, what had been important before became unimportant while other things gained in importance and their identity transformed, i.e. they take a fundamentally different view of the essence of the history of their lives. This external and internal event that took place in the lives of the interviewees – disability, illness, accident or the death of a close relative – impacted their courses of life with such compelling force that made them get on with their lives, fully abandoning their earlier ways of life and developing new life strategies. Each of them opted for studying and for building

up cultural capital. This choice was not independent from secondary socialisation and from their relation to the accumulation of incorporated capital. In addition to being motivated however, there was a need for a regulatory framework for restarting their studies that made it possible for them to take up their earlier abandoned studies. These macro-factors were created in the wake of the system change but the initiatives of civil society organisations, which resulted in the development of systems assisting and supporting Roma youngsters, such as scholarships, university preparatory courses, secondary schools run by foundations, student hostels and further training courses, were also crucial. This is confirmed by the findings of our research as well, since most of the restarted studies got underway in evening school courses in secondary schools and were continued in full time university courses. Another fact that should be noted is that in the case of intrageneration mobility paths there was also a life cycle effect, i.e. the influence of the parents' background gradually weakened as the individuals were getting older.

The intrageneration mobility paths highlight the fact that at the time of the occurrence of the *fate events* these Roma youngsters *felt* that they did not really have any other choice but to accumulate cultural capital, since neither they nor their families had sufficient economic or social capital for giving an impetus to their lives and for setting it on along another course. This situation, in which a choice was to be made, could come into being only where the interviewee had already been capable of internalising a positive relation to studying which is an essential prerequisite for successful school mobility. This then draws attention even more to the fact that school as a mobility channel can be crucial for Roma youngsters from the aspect of their social integration and success in life in general.

Our research on Roma youth of successful school mobility also confirmed the conclusions of Bourdieu's social theory, in that inequalities among social strata exist not only in terms of economic and cultural capital but social capital as well. Linking up with networks rich in resources is typical of those in higher statuses because they have more network connections that are richer in resources, more extensive and more socially heterogeneous as well. Accordingly, the social capital of the higher social classes provides access to more information and it results in greater influence. Consequently, the social capital of people in lower statuses will yield less of these, which means that they can cross boundaries between social strata only in exceptional cases. At the same time, the findings of our research – similarly to earlier findings of other authors – seem to indicate that Roma youngsters' performance at school may be inseparable from their microsocial relationships. Successful school mobility was achieved if the family environment showed more homophilia towards the majority norms while the social relationships were characterised by a higher degree of heterophilia.<sup>8</sup>

8 The findings of the research can thus also be seen as being parallel to the education sociological analysis of Gabriella Pusztai (2009), who came to the conclusion in the course of her research on social capital, that there was a relationship between the system of microsocial relationships and school performance. Her research on a large population, based on contextual analysis,



The findings of our research also indicate that upward mobility processes are not a random phenomenon, indeed, the life stories reveal that they are related to a number of social facts and sociological dimensions. The mobility processes were found to have been equally affected by macro and micro factors. A look at the most important micro factors reveals that the mobility processes could not have taken place without, on the one hand, successful secondary socialisation in which the 'artificial reality' of internalised knowledge is confirmed by means of pedagogy. On the other hand, the weak ties of microsocial relationship networks also played a crucial role since by providing advice and access to flows of information they helped students decide to continue their studies. A third element is the entirety of macro factors such as institutional regulations, scholarship systems and civil society organisation, etc. that provide the external requisites for successful school mobility for the young people concerned.

At the same time, the Roma mobility courses studied in our research provide one kind of indication of the openness of society. These life stories may also set an example for the Roma community, showing that by accumulating incorporated cultural capital and then by institutionalising it all, they can take up higher positions in the economic field. Those who manage to do so can link a system of isolated social networks through their intermediary position among those networks and as a sort of a transmitter agent or intermediary, they can drive not only their own success but they can also be to the benefit of the community as well.

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revealed that boundaries between social strata were crossed for the most part by disadvantaged secondary school students who went to schools run by churches where homophilia was the characteristic of norms and heterophilia was characteristic socially.

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