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# Roma People within the Global Process of Change

Elena ZAMFIR<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Although there is temptation to judge the Roma community as having a strong cultural constancy and stability in time, as surviving at the periphery of societies, outside the process of modernization, this paper aims to make an analysis of the factors which caused important changes in the socio-economic and cultural state of this community within the context of globalization. The prejudice that the Roma are a community closed within its traditional culture had and still has adverse effects on the perception which the majority population has about the Roma community and on the support policies for the marginalised segments of the Roma population too. In some ways, the Roma population doesn't have a different pattern from all the other populations, minority or majority. All the populations are engaged in a process of social change and reconstruction, of transition from traditional to modern cultural patterns imposed by a dynamic society undergoing fast modernization. It is true though, that modernization is not only an opportunity through the unavoidable commitment of the communities within the global flow of change, but also a process of new social differentiation. The division of work has generated new pressures of internal differentiation for all populations: some people advanced socially, others remained at the margin of the process. The popular history of the Roma, with the myths of any such history, includes also the intellectuals, prestigious politicians and successful people as main patterns of exiting the 'Gypsyhood'. But in spite of this, the paper underline that the concrete social and economic conditions put, in many cases, the Roma population, as ethnic group in a special social and cultural position different from that of other minorities. These papers bring a theoretical starting point for an empirical survey focusing on the successful Roma population. The survey was an exploratory research done by IQLR at the end of 2012, being centred on the Roma elite: intellectuals, political leaders and businessmen. The research has been identified three successful categories among the Roma people, mentioned above, as well as the factors associated to their success. The survey data are yet to be

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processed completely. However, they will certainly bring another perception/image on the Roma people, different from the one associated to severe poverty, as shown by the sociological research up to now.

*Keywords:* Roma minority ethnic group; modernized patterns of life; integrated education; cultural process of changes; Roma cultural identity; multiculturalism.

### **Social positions of the minorities. Distinct social position of the Roma minority**

The economic crisis of the communist regime, stronger in the 1980 years, generated an *ebbing in the modernization of the Roma population*. At that time, the Roma were among the first to be sacked and the job offer from them crashed. The aggravation of the social-economic conditions decreased school enrolment (Surdu, 2002). A process of *reverting to Gypsyhood* occurs a return to the bare survival strategy of life and the adaptation to traditional strategies with all their consequences, particularly for the young generation. The transition, the fore-shadowed economic crisis would supposedly deepen the process of marginalization of the Roma population. From the political perspective, the school didn't become a priority for the Roma as foreseen, and that is why drawing the Roma to the educational system was a very laborious process. The difficulties of the Roma populations during the recent years *blocked*, for the bulk of the Roma population, *the process of modernization* and this was *followed by a process of regressing to the traditional life strategies*, except for a rather small segment which took advantage of the new opportunities (Zamfir & Runcan, 2011).

While a higher rate of Roma employment was noticed in the 1960-1970 years, the rate declined dramatically in the 1980 years and in the following decades. The Roma, as ethnic group, hold a special social position different from that of other minorities, both in the history of Europe and in the history of Romania (Gheorghe, 1991). In all the traditional European societies, the Roma communities have been kept at the margin of the global societies from the particular country. Although there have been periods when the Roma have been formally acknowledged as ethnic group, this was a *negative acknowledgement*. Complex mechanisms of economic and social marginalization/self-marginalization pushed the Roma communities to the economic and social periphery, not always to the geographical periphery (Zamfir, 1993). Historically, the Roma were characterized by the development of marginal *economic activities* within the general economic aggregate, which kept them in a state of chronic poverty, with no chances to share the collective prosperity.

Socially, the Roma were characterized by a *symbiotic* position in relation with the dominant populations. They integrated within the global economic activity

with economic activities which either continued the traditional profession, marginalised by the industrial evolution, or accepting poorly paid jobs, with a rather negative social status (Barany, 1998, and Zamfir, 1993). The economic symbiosis often placed the Roma communities, even the homogenous ones, at the geographical margin of the majority communities: towns or villages. Grouped at the social and economic margin of the great communities, they were true poverty pockets with a distinct social and cultural life, characterized by different levels of marginalization and isolation (Cace et. al, 2010). The “*Gypsylands*” constantly received negative connotation: areas of deeper poverty than the other communities, with a distinctive ethnic profile. They are real social traps: either a marginal survival life style characterised by severe poverty/gaps, with poorly-paid traditional economic activities having little social value, or jobs with negative labeling and humanly degrading (Zamfir, 1996).

Historically, the official acknowledgement of the Roma is characterized by intended ambiguity. The Roma, as homogenous communities, have been placed at the margin of the society and constantly kept at the periphery. As individuals, however, the Roma have been accepted as members of the global community. Individual discriminations have always existed, but they were not strong enough to halt completely their individual development. On the one hand, individually, the Roma changed their social status integrating within the mass of the dominant community, sometimes even with professional and economic success. On the other hand, there have been and still are homogenous communities characterised by severe poverty and by economic and social exclusion (Ladányi & Szelényi, 2006). There also is a situation in which the Roma, diffusely spread within the mass of the majority population became integrated having access to the general social-economic opportunities. By doing this, they adopted a life style similar to the one of the community which they joined.

In the Romanian society, maybe in other societies too, many Roma acquired prestigious social-economic positions and gained social acknowledgement. The fact that they have identified formally or informally with their ethnic origin has always been considered more like a personal right with little significance for their position within the society. This explains why in the Roma folklore there are a lot of great cultural personalities from the Romanian history who supposedly were *Gypsies*. The intellectuals and artists too who created values with an ethnic-national character and who contributed with their social-ethnic experience to the cultural production hold a special position. Some examples of such personalities are Anton Pann, Budai Deleanu and others. This ambiguous individual social position of the Roma may also explain their present behaviour. Many Roma avoid acknowledging in public their ethnic origin. Actually, in the Romanian tradition, the acknowledgement of the ethnic origin of the community members has always been considered a personal right, a characteristic which is not relevant for the social interaction or within the interpersonal relations. In other words, an

*ambiguity* of the ethnic origin of the members of the Romanian community has been accepted. The Romanian Constitution grants the Romanian citizens the right to declare freely and protected from any political-administrative interference their affiliation to any ethnic group. For the Romanian state, the ethnic origin is a personal problem, and the law bans any attempt to impose on or investigate the ethnic origin of any citizen.

Briefly/ synthetically, this social position can be formulated as follows: *The Roma represented for the entire Europe an ethnic population historically maintained at the margin of the dominant populations.*

Ethnic minorities exist in all regions and countries across Europe. As minorities, within the societies with majority population, they held highly varying positions: (1) *as homogenous minority populations with rather autonomous social-economic organisation*. They may represent islands within the majority population, developing a distinct social-cultural life, usually using their own language. This is the case of the Saxons or Magyar villages or of the Turks, Lipovans or Bulgarians villages; (2) *as homogenous minority populations within communities with a different ethnic profile*. They can be distinct, yet minority or even majority, in larger communities: towns or communes. They share the same economic position (for instance they are agriculturalists or craftsmen), have a common social life and usually use their own language; (3) *as minority diffused within the bulk of the dominant community*. The members of these minorities live integrated within the global society holding positions according to their individual capacities. These minorities may “melt” within the dominant population by the gradual loss of their initial cultural distinctiveness or ethnic identity – language, culture; they may also maintain distinctly, holding to the conscience of their ethnic affiliation while sharing some cultural elements (possibly religion, language or ethnic cultural agglutinations) with social manifestation in marriages within their own ethnic group. The particular situations may be different. For instance, the Magyars maintain much of their distinctiveness in Bucharest, while the Greek tend to melt within the dominant mass.

The ethnic groups hold distinct social positions in the process of modernization. Only in the societies from the periods dominated by the extremist/fascist policy, the Hebrews have been isolated until marginalization, exclusion, social-economic and political discrimination up to extermination. The gypsies from that period experienced pretty the same situation. The historic trauma of the forced relocation ‘at Bug’ still persists in the collective memory of the old people, taking the shape of a diffuse historic fear (Burtea, 2006).

### Cultural position of the ethnic groups

Some minority ethnic populations became integrated within the flow of the cultural values of the majority population, using its language and becoming active factors in promoting its culture. In Romania there have been waves of incoming Greeks, Macedonians etc. The Hebrews from Romania brought important cultural contributions to the development of the Romanian culture. Few, however, had activities within their own culture: they wrote in Yiddish, expressing their ethnic experience. Other people preserved their ethnic distinctiveness, using their own language and adhering to the developed culture in the countries where their ethnic groups were dominant (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993a). This is the case of the Germans and of the Magyars. They used the German/Magyar language, they had cultural productions according to own customs. Their productions have afterwards been affiliated to the dominant cultures from those countries, either preserving their cultural specificity, or contributing to the development of the culture they are sharing. The global societies develop cultural-ethnic pluralism: cultural productions of the majority population complemented with cultural productions of the minority population, often supported by the state. The Roma too had a similar cultural position, but with a specific particularity, however. They assumed the characteristics of all ethnic minorities to which they added a distinct peculiarity due to their marginal economic, social and cultural position. The negative label attached to the behaviour extended over the Roma culture is supplemented by an important cultural factor: the fact that the Romany language has been until now an oral language, internationally. Consequently, there have been no cultural productions in Romany language.

The forms of own cultural manifestation which don't require a written language – the song, dance, clothing – crystallized and were transmitted from generation to generation. However, there also are behaviours which are more fragile historically, particularly those regarding the way of life and social organisation: structure/functioning of the family, authority within the Roma communities life strategies, some adapted to conditions of severe marginalisation and poverty. The Roma population also displays internal differentiations, which showed an amazing historic persistence: the *families* (Zamfir, 2009). It seems that the families crystallized within the Roma communities not on territorial bases, caused by active geographical movements, but according to the different types of economic activities: boiler makers, bear leaders, florists, silversmith etc.

### **Citizenship and ethnic identity: Bi- or multiculturalism?**

The dynamics of cultures cannot be perceived only in the paradigm of the biculturalism: majority culture – minority cultures. The language, as main instrument for the cultural expression, imposes biculturalism: you express yourself in Romanian, Magyar, German, Yiddish etc. But the sources of the cultural development are much more complex. They are increasingly *trans-ethnic*. The culture also expresses the basic structures of the universal process of the change/modernization under all forms: knowledge, economy, technology, administration, legislation, political system etc. The cultures, the European ones particularly, have common features and a strong quasi-universal element. The universal cultural contributions are expressed in distinct languages, may have impressions of the majority culture, of the common life, but also a strong universal thematic essence. The cultural personalities have not just a local value, but a universal value too. Circulation of the values and intercultural relations are increasing.

Once the national states crystallized, a new cultural system coagulated: the national culture, which is the product of the national community, which usually is multi-ethnic. Of course, it has a strong impression of the cultural tradition of the majority ethnic population, given by a language used as common means of communication. The social support of the national culture is the national citizenship and the national social-economic organisation and functioning. The cultures are extremely varied in terms of their composition. There are areas with a strong ethnic profile – folk music, folk dancing, folk clothing – and there are universalized areas – science, cult art, modern clothing, administration, technology, economy. The relation between the individuals and culture also differs according to the cultural areas in which it specializes. There is an increasingly active process of cultural convergence and of complementarity of the national majority-minority components and of the European-universal components, with strong intercultural influences. The dominant cultures too undergo a process of change, including the contributions of the minority cultures too (Cojocaru, 2005). There is no pre-existing culture; a modern culture is continuously created in common by all the ethnic groups, with unavoidably different contributions to its development. The Roma culture has not just a local, minority character, but also a world-wide character. The Roma people developed a common transnational language and common cultural expressions. Hence, particularly in music, Roma cultural personalities appear in different parts of the world.



## Attitude of the majority populations towards the Roma

The Roma who interiorized the marginal economic position and the traditional ethnic marginal life pattern, are pushed, through various mechanisms, towards the periphery of the society where they form homogenous groups. On the other hand, the Roma people who integrated within the global flow of modernization are accepted and get integrated naturally within the norms of the community established by the majority population. Of course, individual discriminations may block the individual access within the mass of the community, or they may even push the individuals outside the community, enclosing them in marginal islands, without complete exclusion, however. Marginalisation manifested mainly at the community level. The acceptance of the Roma people may vary at this level too, displaying different degrees. Hence, the process of inclusion and acceptance of the Roma within the community of the majority population is important and not easy to accomplish.

We think that, historically, we can even speak in some periods of an *ethnic-cultural repression* of the Roma. So, for instance: the cultural manifestations of the Roma, with specific ethnic profile, have also been marginalised. The Romany language was accepted as oral language, but nowhere as state-administrative means of communication. It was not encouraged to develop like all the other languages were: to become a written language, to develop specialized linguistic areas – science, policy, administration. It is true though, that there has never been a formal, explicit repression, rather an informal one. Unfortunately, there has been a mass repression by *failing to acknowledge* and *failing to support* the Romany language and the cultural traditions. Here is an example: during the communist period, in Romania all the ethnic minorities, with the least significance, have been acknowledged with a formal statute. The only minority which was not formally acknowledged by the Romanian state was the Roma minority. However, the Roma people were not repressed. They had the administrative and political liberty of considering themselves Roma or not to do this. However, the Roma ethnic group and its culture, as distinct entity, were not acknowledged formally, institutionally, during the communist regime. Cultural manifestation with Roma labels were not encouraged or institutionally accepted.

The case of the folk music is paradigmatic. Traditionally, the Gypsies displayed a special talent for music. They were very much present in the folk music. Particularly during the communist period, they dressed in Romanian folk costumes and sang Romanian folk music. Highly talented Roma became personalities of the Romanian folk music. The cultural manifestation and development of the Roma community, under its own traditional forms, was not stimulated. One might even say that it was deterred, blocked.



## **The Roma population within the global process of change**

Sometimes there is a temptation to consider the Roma population as having constancy in time: a population closed into its own traditional culture, surviving with a strong historic stability at the margin of the global process of change. Such vision has effects on the attitude of the majority population and on the support policies. Actually, the Roma population too has been drawn gradually into the global process of change, modernization, like all ethnic populations. The Roma could not avert the economic modernization and the cultural modernization directed by the rules of globalization. Only that this mechanism of the new processes due to inter- and multiculturalism, was perceived by the Roma in a specific individually different way, with a contradictory impact on the socio-economic situation of the population. From many points of view, the Roma population doesn't display a different pattern from all the other populations, minority or majority. All the populations are engaged in a rapid process of social and cultural change and reconstruction, of transition from the traditional patterns to the patterns imposed by a society engaged into an explosive process of growth in complexity and of modernization.

The current societies show a rapid social-cultural convergence imposed by the global process of change. Of course, this global process of change also gets distinct local colours, given by the plurality of developments within the nations, by the distinct economic, social and political systems with their own institutional, cultural and linguistic profiles (Preoteasa, Cace & Duminică, 2009). The division of the social work generated new pressures of internal differentiations for all populations: some people moved upwards socially, other remained at the periphery of the process (Zamfir, 2009). Modernization is not only a chance; it also is a process of unavoidable commitment within the global flow of change, a process of new social differentiation.

In the folk history of the Roma, with myths like any other such history, the patterns of leaving the "Gypsyhood" include those related to the intellectuals and reputed politicians. We give no names, just to avoid getting caught in a dispute which is hard to settle. There is a folklore of the highly successful Roma personalities, which contains part of the truth, of course, but there also are presuppositions that were not tested, which express more like an enthusiasm of the assertion of the existing cultural potencies. But it exists. There are sure cases. It is interesting that leaving the state of poverty and marginalization through education and political involvement is substantiated by renowned cases of individual success, of high success of the Roma people, unanimously acknowledged by the Roma and immediately assumed as belonging to the Roma identity (Banks & Banks, 1995). An important component of the European Union policy is the promotion of the cultural plurality and the open acceptance of a multicultural space, with the preservation of the cultural identities, provided they do not become conflictual or

extremist. The promotion of the cultures as distinct sources of value may be used to control the trend of national and global national cultural uniformization. After 1990, in Romania there has been a process of “rehabilitation” of the Roma culture: language, folklore, traditions. The promotion of the Roma culture distinctiveness also is an instrument changing the collective image of the Roma.

Beyond the possible discussions, it is a fact that the Roma population displayed historically an internal differentiation which seems to be increasing. Important segments of this population upgrade their education, integrate within the modern economic activities, hold important positions into the cultural and public systems (Zamfir, 2007). However, which is the historic perspective of the whole Roma population within those communities where they are in minority? Same as for the other minority populations, there are three possible directions:

*a. Melting within the dominant social-cultural mass, benefiting of the existing opportunities and of a fast process of cultural change, of different weights and with different accents.* The cultural assimilation by integration within the mass of the majority is not excluded either. Usually, the cultural change doesn't mean the transfer from one ethnic group to another, but the assumption of patterns belonging to the national culture which, unavoidably, has a higher profile of the majority. Thus, an important segment of the Roma population constantly detaches from the traditional mas of Roma people and gets lost within this process of common change. Prosperity and personal development are achieved by using the top opportunities of the global society.

*b. Remaining within communities characterized by insularity, in geographic and social-cultural isolation.* Territoriality provides the space for a common social and cultural life. A particular style of life is preserved here, often supported by a religious affiliation. Some territorial communities may have a moderate economic success. It is the case, for instance, of some communities of Bulgarian gardeners. From these communities too, young people get detached and thereafter get melted within the mass of the global community. In the case of the Roma, these communities are living at the margin of the society in which they live, achieving a symbiosis with that global community, but with extremely modest, very poor economic positions. The drama of these communities is the fact that they display trends of defensive closure, the risk of becoming true traps preserving poverty and underdevelopment. We may find preserved here traditional cultural patterns which adapted to situations of marginality (Cretan & Turnock, 2008). They display more significantly trends to preserve the traditional culture at the expense of remaining in underdevelopment. Even here too, under the pressure of the global changes, continuous changes appear in the patterns of life and of tradition that halt the development. It is the case of the traditional

early marriages, particularly between children and decided by the family/parents. The odds that those homogenous communities of Roma people characterized by a chronic lack of economic and human resources (education, professional training) become economically prosperous in a short time, are extremely low. Some may succeed, with strong support from the outside, but this will rather be the case of exceptions. Their opportunity is that the Roma people develop gradually, by constant individual efforts to integrate within the norms of a modern economic society, and by this within the global community. This doesn't necessarily mean giving up their cultural tradition, particularly if it is not in opposition with the norms of the community where they live and if it doesn't has prejudices/mentalities opposing the culture of the majority.

*c. Integration within the mass of the community while preserving their ethnic profile.* The different types of manifestations can be binders of the ethnic identity, but not compulsorily: the common language, religion, institution of the church. We have the example of the Hebrews who are strongly integrated within their global community, who have a high level of modernization, while remaining a distinct ethnic community. The common culture is an important binder of the ethnic identity. The development of cultural or political organisations which promote the identitary interests, usually cultural, sometimes social, provides active factors for the ethnic coagulation.

The current position of the Roma population within this global process of change/modernization still is strongly handicapped by their own past. The Roma population must be supported in order to leave out those manifestations which lead to underdevelopment and social marginalization by a "culture of poverty". This can only be done by improving the education and the professional development of the Roma by stimulating their competencies to integrate within the labour market. This presumes thus, an active process of formation of norms and habituations for work among the Roma, process demanded by the context of a fast modernization. A culture of work and of the professional development is absolutely compulsory for the normalization of Roma population's life.

### **Perspective of the Roma**

Beyond the negative images associated to specific way of life of Roma population, there still are many prejudices that the Roma community is the prisoner of confinement to its own culture. Such image has definite adverse effects on the self-esteem and on the personal development of the Roma. Of course, some traditional cultural mentalities may be hindrances/barriers in leaving the situation of marginalization despite the efforts and the new opportunities.

Formally, the modern opportunities for social development are the same for all groups of population. The Romanian, Magyars and Roma have the same opportunities within the context of the present society, by acquiring a capacity of fast integration within a modern society. They may have proper education, training according to the requirements of the modern market, credible occupational history for the new professions, normal material conditions and goods necessary for their household, good health state etc. However, individually, the Roma have a particular “handicap” in the competition for the access to the opportunities of integration within the modern society. This disadvantage consists in a major deficit of education from the start. Furthermore, the poverty and lack of education may often generate a deviant behaviour due to the departure from the social norms of life, which may generate delinquency and aggressiveness. This situation marks the personal life of some Roma people, being elements that hinder temporarily their access to future opportunities.

Presently, in the current modern society, the opportunity which the Roma have to get rid of poverty and marginalization, largely consist in individual attempts. This is integration within the complex mass of the society not as group, but as individuals. The success is individual, not collective one. The collective success is rather the sum of the individual successes. The collective opportunity for the Roma is the discontinuation of the traditional communities, of the isolated “islands”/poverty pockets; this includes the individual departure from the community, even if not geographically, but at least as successful education and social-economic concerns. The traditional communities with their profile homogenous and poor, while they still hold on, may be true impediments to the individual success today.

### **Nature of Roma problem: How do we explain the present state of the Roma?**

The current theories on the Roma population are dominated by two paradigms that explain its social and economic position. Both are rational and deserve being mentioned and evaluated (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993). The *first one, paradigm of the explanation by two factors*: the precarious situation of the Roma population is the result of the combination between a process of self-marginalization due both to the characteristic way of life caught in the trap of traditions and a process of continuous marginalization, with different levels of intensity, coming from the majority population. The *second possibility* refers to a complex of elements whose effects build up in time. *This brings to the forefront the relation between the two categories of factors: primary factors and derived factors that may contribute to causal clarifications of the current situation of the Roma.* Of the first category, one major factor, maybe the most important for the specificity/profile of the

Roma, is the one regarding their *present social-economic situation* due to the severe, chronic poverty, to the precarious economic state reproduced along their history. A second primary factor is of individual nature and depends predominantly on the family climate, which can be stimulant or hostile to the personal development. The family environment may offer support to the individual people, as well as motivation to succeed in life or, on the contrary, may block the individual effort for access to opportunities. The start within family for the formation, education and development of child behaviour is essential for his/her subsequent evolution. Within this context, the strategies of self-marginalization and marginalization from the outside appear as *derived factors*, as secondary factors. They are *additional* factors. As derived factors, they just determine even more the state and profile of the socio-economic situation of the family. The actual changes appearing in the life style of the Roma are achieved by changes in the social and economic situation within the family, changes that can be tracked afterwards in the behaviour of the children and of the family members. Hence, acting merely on the derived factors – hitting on the self-marginalization – produced minor results under the conditions in which the Roma are confronted with a severe deficit of economic and social opportunities which exists permanently within their internal, family life environment. Furthermore, the lack of opportunities within their life context only amplifies the effects of the derived factors.

### **“Poverty pockets” with ethnic profile**

Most homogenous Roma communities seem to be the result of recent social processes. The poor Roma tend to migrate towards homogenous Roma groups. The poverty and similarity of the traditional life strategies under conditions of survival is typical to these processes. We do not have data on the separate geographical location of the Roma and on the establishment of the poverty pockets at the margin or within the non-Roma communities. Probably, the ethnic origin is a factor of homogenization. The “Gypsyhoods” seem to grow, drawing in the poor Roma dispersed within the mass of the community, and they reproduce while growing, and hold the young generation as ‘prisoner’. The Roma communities were not surveyed as such, but overall they are poor, lacking a profitable economic approach and deepen with each new generation under the conditions generated by the modern world. The patterns of adaptation to marginality and severe poverty reproduce. Most times, the Roma communities are poverty pockets crystallized within the current process of crisis.

At the opposite end, the prosperous Roma have no reason at all to group, to gather in isolated, poor areas and to adopt life strategies which are typically, traditionally *Gypsyish* in the collective image. The analysis on the basis of a large

national sample survey (Zamfir & Zamfir, 2003) regarding the economic and social situation of the Roma brought another vision on the causes of the social marginality of the Roma population. This shows that the Roma population is not homogenous culturally and socio-economically. Not all of them are prisoners of their culture; on the contrary, important segments detach and already start another modern life style pattern.

The hypothesis formulated in the mentioned book proved to be correct, education being identified as the most important factor of leaving the social underdevelopment: an important segment of the Roma population got 'lost' continuously within the mass of the modernized population. This segment was rather hard to be captured in its totality and they gradually lose their attachment to the population with ethnic profile. However, the 'intellectuals' that have been identified at that time, didn't probably represent a significant proportion. Anyway, this was a proof that the Roma population was not closed within it, but much of it is open towards a modern, normal integration, even of success within a community oriented towards change. The data of many current surveys support the hypothesis formulated at that time: the 'Rumanized' Roma have a higher educational level and have a lower risk to drop out of school before graduation.

### Trap of 'turning Gypsy'

Overall, we may consider that polarization is growing within the Roma population. A rather small segment of the Roma advance socio-economically, but the large majority deepens within poverty and marginalization. The problem is to improve the odds of the socially-marginalised Roma population to develop through education and continuous professionalization. The first large survey of the Roma population conducted after the Revolution 1989, mentioned above, done in 1991-1992 (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993) and it concluded that the nature of the Roma problems is not cultural, but social-economic one. "The Roma population is caught within a poverty trap consolidated by centuries of marginalization: little education, frail health, no professional training, no property over the economic means (land in the countryside, decent homes in towns, for instance). The inherited *social-economic state* was supplemented by two derived factors which tightened the inherited state of marginalization: the *Roma 'culture'* whose main component centred on the strategy of survival under limiting conditions of poverty and discrimination and the *negative public image* towards the Roma population. This situation with three dimensions – *constant poverty*, *culture of survival* and *negative social image* – maintains in underdevelopment and even holds prisoner a growing part of the Roma population". Back in 1993 we launched the term of "*re-gypsyization*". This term is more like a metaphor. "By «*gypsyization*» I understood the negative meaning associated to the state of adaptation to conditions of severe



poverty and marginalization assumed by Roma population. The absorption, within the state of constantly/ permanently poverty, of techniques of survival under limiting conditions reproduces in time the process of poverty culture for the new Roma generation too. The nature of this strategy was a precarious lifestyle, with no resources, with rather improvised dwellings, no importance given to education as factor for social success, economic activities at the margin of professions, poor social efficiency. All these characteristics produce a living at the limit of biological survival and leads to the crystallization of *pockets* of severe poverty which draw the poor Roma as a magnet” (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993: 172).

Two centuries have been crucial for the change of all the European populations. Modernization was an explosion of complex life situations and better opportunities for broad segments of the population. The basic feature of the modernization was equal opportunities for all. Irrespective of the starting point, depending on their capacities and on the motivation for access to opportunities, they all have the possibility to advance socially. Of course, things have been much more complicated. The equal opportunity is, most times, a combination of promises (superfluous sometimes) and aspiration/dream (low level of achievement).

The societies modernized, but made victims in the course of modernization. Definitely, however, the process of modernization involved everyone, but not everybody was a winner. Some have been pushed aside. They were the individual losers, rapidly excluded from competition. They formed the group of the poor, of the small communities still struggling in poverty and misery. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it is not accidentally that the state policy focused on the effort to generalise a minimal educational level for everybody. The broad opportunities for children education, irrespective of the living conditions, definitely advantaged the Roma people too. The special attention paid to the village schools is an example. School compulsoriness was essential. All children would presumably benefit of this opportunity which opens a way towards the individual success within a modernizing competitive society. Although the modern society provides chances and opens opportunities, the outcomes of its offers may lead to a strong social polarization with adverse effects on the stability of communities. This process points out to the losers: the poor, marginalised, socially excluded. Who are the poor? The losers are presumably those people who didn't succeed due to strictly individual reasons. However, the Roma population was a collective loser. More precisely, by their position the Roma didn't benefit to the same extent of the opportunities provided by the modern society because of a major disadvantage/handicap from the very start. Their elimination from competition was possible due to a huge gap between their personal state characterised by low educational level and the lifestyle associated to the culture of poverty. Hence, the positive discrimination for the Roma people during the early 1990 years was justified and even required. This provided a head start for the most disadvantaged social and cultural group: school education was always a chance for the personal success. The past two centuries



are full of examples where the successful Roma emerged within the process of modernization only through education. Thus, there have always been individual opportunities for success and we have a lot of examples which we accept as being normal. However, these are notable exceptions. Actually, the access of a large community running the risk of marginalization to chances and opportunities was and still is very difficult to accomplish (Crowe, 1999). However, the proportion of people leaving the state of poverty is unequal among the communities. The two derived factors pertaining to the efficiency and quality of the support through public policies for the Roma blocked the access to the use of opportunities.

The valorisation of the new opportunities boosts the breakup from the state of underdevelopment and improves the capacities of integration within a new world. This process is currently called *modernization*. The indicator for the level of modernization of the Roma people, as resulting from all our researches, relates to the: (1) educational level that shows the competitive advantage/disadvantage; (2) proportion of employees and employers that started economic activities; (3) the level of professionalization. The traditional trades are important, but just for a very small segment. They may be a source of individual success, but they may also be a hindrance, under specific conditions; (4) the level of Roma dispersion within the community. The ethnic concentration in small communities may show isolation and a limited economic and social success.

### **Instead of conclusions: elimination of the ethnic “poverty pockets”**

The 1992-1993 study produced a clear conclusion with effects in the actions aiming to change the situation of the Roma, conclusion which was subsequently supported by recent research (see the survey of the Roma elite – intellectual, businessmen and political leaders, at the initiative of the organisation Romano Kher, supported by the Ministry of Culture, 2012): “*Our estimation at that time was that most of the Roma population doesn’t have enough resources to exceed the state of difficulty without external aid*” (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993: 171). The prediction made at that time was negative: we will have “*pockets of poverty and delinquency, ever larger and ever more lacking hope*” (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993: 171) unless national strategies to improve the *socio-economic situation of the Roma families* are developed. Against a perception widely shared by some specialists and political people too, we considered that it is not right/good to have a change of paradigm which supports grouping within homogenous ethnic groups of Roma, culturally and socially closed (Arayici, 1998).

The Roma population had passed through a process of modernization along the past two centuries; however, this process has been seriously held back by the high vulnerability of the Roma to the economic and social crises, with trends of regress to the traditional strategies of survival under conditions of severe poverty,

self-marginalization and hetero-marginalization. The double hypothesis of the *waves of modernization and regress to the traditional patterns* and of the *social-economic non-homogenous development of the population* was supported by the data collected at that time and reconfirmed by our subsequent surveys conducted on national samples. However, a segment of population which breaks off and capitalises on the opportunities provided by the new context appears; the dynamics of this process was generated by the course of history and it displayed continuous fluctuations. This new face of the process of Roma people modernization *through intellectual, politic and economic successes becomes a challenge for the current sociological research*.

Beyond the possible discussions, it is certain that the Roma population historically had an internal differentiation which seems to be increasing. Important segments of this population increase their educational level, get integrated in modern economic activities, they hold important positions within the cultural and public system, while much of the Roma population lives at the boundary of survival in severe poverty and social insecurity (Zamfir, 2001). Hence, the communication took also into consideration the historical perspective of the Roma population, through the possible directions of social inclusion and normal integration of its poor groups running high risks of marginalisation. It is known that those homogenous communities of poor Roma characterized by chronic lack of economic and human resources (education, professional training) have extremely low opportunities of becoming economically prosperous in a short time. Maybe some of them will be successful, with a massive external support, but this will be rather exceptional cases. Their chance is that the members of the Roma population integrate gradually within the global community by individuals, as a constant effort to integrate them within the norms of a modern economic society.

At the same time, the present position of the Roma population within the global process of change/modernization also displays a strong “handicap” resulting from a long process of social exclusion. That is why the Roma community must be supported, through efficient-active social policies, to go past those serious social problems which even today lead to underdevelopment and its social marginalization.

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