

RROMA CHILDREN IN ROMANIA

RESEARCH REPORT

Motto:

'every child is a Prince for his mother'

(Mr. Covaci-leader of Rroma Association in Coltau)

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RROMA CHILDREN EDUCATION

The relevance of case studies on school education of Roma children has, in our opinion, a double significance. First, by their qualitative nature, case studies can render evident processes and causalities difficult to grasp through a quantitative research. (On the basis of questionnaires, for example) Secondly, their heuristic value is doubled by a pragmatic one oriented to social action. In this respect, any case study is a potential support for sketching guide marks of solving the problems facing the communities investigated.

The general picture of Roma population school education gives us a general view but do not highlight the causes having led to this situation. For example, we know that:

- School left-outs are about 25% of the school age population
- The majority of children fail going further than primary classes
- Graduating higher schools is almost impossible
- More than 50% of the Roma population is illiterate

However, this negative picture holds true not only for Romania but also for other, mainly European countries where Roma live.

The European answer to these problems was promoting an educational policy meant to encourage multiculturalism and antiracism. Action has been taken at both the level of the educational system structure, and that of the teaching methods. Making schooling forms for Roma population flexible prevailed. Itinerant schools, maternal schools, teaching at a distance, school desegregation, education of pre-school age children, constituted options adapted to the variety of situations. Promoting certain elements of Roma culture and life style in the school curriculum, training the teachers in predominantly Roma schools, editing materials in the Rromani language, qualifying Roma speaking teachers, represented experiences of changing the teaching methods.

In Romania, decades of policy of assimilation were felt also in the field of education. Due to the coercion exercised presence at school increased in a certain degree but school performance remained, generally, at a low level (the few exceptions constitute the present political and militant Roma elite). Actually, reduced school performance was Roma answer to the policy of assimilation and wiping off the ethnically identity.

Instead of improving the school education of the Roma population, the political change after 1989 marked its deterioration. The foreseen tendency is aggravating. The absence of educational measures for the Roma minority is a constant of the governments succeeding after 1989. The few steps taken in this field were largely promoted by ungovernmental organisations.

The main objective of the present study is to evaluate *the availability of change*

- *At the level of the teachers in* schools with a high proportion of Roma pupils and).
- *At the level of local communities* (both majority and Roma populations)

We also set our task to identify the NGOs having carried out activities in favour of multicultural and/or antiracist educational policies, to evaluate the efficiency of these measures, their impact and legitimacy on local communities.

In this respect, we try to answer questions of the type:

-To what degree is the school system in Romania prepared to put into practice measures of multicultural and antiracist educational policy>

-Who is the social actors who preserve the status quo>

-What is the support offered by local communities to the introduction of such measures>

-What is the efficiency and impact of the measures promoted by various NGOs both on Roma population and majority population>

The case studies in this chapter submit a large variety of situations or formulas of sending Roma children to school a variety that surpassed our initial expectations. In fact, each studied community has its own school formula crystallised under the influence of many factors but we found many common elements within this diversity.

The social history of the Roma communities, the administrative pressures, the degree of tolerance/intolerance of the majority populations, implication of certain NGOs, attitudes of Roma populations towards school are only some of the factors that determined one or another form of sending children to school.

Each community studied constitutes, by its specific formula of sending children to school, an ideal type of school where Roma children live their experiences. We have no pretension that the described typology thoroughly presents all existing formulas.

We found the following school formulas:

-**Segregated school** (Coltau, Balta Arsa, Glina)

-**School with special classes for deficient children** (Pata-Rat)

-**Mixed school** (Calvini, Vaslui)

Presenting these ideal types of schools does not mean that specific characteristics of a school cannot be found in another school, but only that the labelling characteristic is prominent in the respective school.

We consider that presenting these case studies will permit us to have an insight of the causes having led to the negative situation of Roma population schooling. The emphasis is laid on local context too, because we think the desirability and efficiency of changes should have in view certain local solutions. It is desirable that educational policies at central level should mark government commitment to the changing of the

present situation, should establish general principles, and should provide correspondingly prepared teachers. They should also financially support changing efforts, and that the solutions should be established together with the local authorities, having in view the large variety of conditions Rroma children school education takes place. Therefore, we shall try to evaluate school education of Rroma children as resulting from the attitudes of the majority population, Rroma population, teachers in local schools, and NGOs.

Segregated school –Coltau community

In this section we shall insist on Coltau because segregation is here the direct result of the local policy, residential segregation not being in fact a cause of school segregation, due to the proximity of the two ethnic communities in the same village. Unlike Coltau, segregation of schools in Balta Arsa and Glina is a result of residential segregation. The cases of these two communities will be summarised in the conclusion section.

The main problems related to the education of children in Coltau are mainly due to the low quality of the institutional education (in school), because of a long process of segregation having led to the separation of the Magyar school from the Rroma school. It is a serious form of school discrimination having in view the fact that both schools belong to or are under the authority of the Ministry of National Education. However, material conditions, the number of teachers and their qualification differ radically. Before presenting the actual situation of the Rroma school and the deficiencies of the institutional education of children in Coltau, it is important that we should understand the process of separation of the two schools.

Until the a80s, in the communist period, but probably even before the establishment of the communist regime, education of children in primary school (grades 1 to 4) was separated for Magyar children and for Rroma children. Magyar primary school children learned in the present buildings of the Magyar school, a mansion having belonged to Hungarian count Teleki. They include two buildings surrounded by a small natural park, situated in the central Coltau area, opposite the Magyar reformed church. Besides the fact that *the big school* (the Magyar school) is located in the Magyar area of Coltau, the building of the school has a special symbolic value for the Magyar inhabitants because it is the place where the Magyar poet Petofi Sandor spent his honeymoon. Speaking about the present Magyar school building, the Mayor says, *'this is not a school it is a historical monument. The building is almost 400 years old and it should be a museum'*.

On the other side, Rroma children in grades 1 to 4 learned in the father's house of the present leader of Rroma in Coltau. He was a kind of supervisor or bailiff of the Rroma because of the relations of colonial kind between Rroma and Magyars. The description made by the Mayor is telling, *'He did the first four grades there in a house, Iojias, his father's house. He was responsible for the order. The old man. With the whip. And there they used to do four grades. And in the fifth grade he came among us other'*.

Whether Magyar and Rroma primary schools (grades 1 to 4) were, before the 80s, completely separated both in terms of buildings and of qualified personnel, grades 5 to 8 were common, school education of both Rroma and Magyar children was carried out in the Magyar school in mixed classes. We find in this institutional arrangement of separate schools for grades 1 to 4 and common school (the Magyar one) and mixed classes for grades 5 to 8 an ambivalent attitude of the Magyar majority population to the Rroma community in Coltau. The residential segregation (Rroma live on two lanes at the end of the village) and the Magyars attitude towards the Rroma, resulting from colonial type relations, favors school separation, a fact in the case of grades 1 to 4. In the case of grades 5 to 8, the fact the Rroma knew, at that time the Magyar language, contributed to their being accepted in the Magyar school, in mixed classes, the teaching language Magyar. Thus, a process of Rroma cultural assimilation develops whereas Romanians do not live in the village, and any interethnic dialogue presumes the sine-qua-non condition of a common language. Anyway, Rroma knowing the Magyar language and the common school experience in the case of grades 5 to 8 strongly reflects on the identity plan; many Rroma considering themselves and being considered, in the mentioned period, as *Magyar gypsies*.

In the plan of **interethnic relations**, common school experience is beneficent because it promotes an open attitude of both sides.

In the plan of **institutional education**, it is the most efficient period for the Rroma population. The common school in the Magyar language promotes interethnic school competition and offers the Rroma school models to be followed. Although it is the period with the highest school performance for the Rroma children (graduating eight grades, and, by a significant percentage, ten grades, high school or vocational school), this performance is way under that of the Magyar children. An important factor accounting for the differences in school performance is the separation of primary schools, grades 1 to 4. The headmaster of the Magyar school recalls, '*Children were much better integrated, they were more tidy they were doing their best to reach the level of the others*' (I.D.pag.3) To the same effect, a Rroma having graduated in that period tells us, '*I had Magyar friends. We got along well. They took better care (at school). The teachers were different... They cared... They did not segregate between children.*'

School performance of Rroma children until the 80s should not be upheld as absolute. It was better compared to the present but not so when compared to school performance of Magyar children, the differences being considerable. The Mayor says: '*When I was at school we were together. I had seven or eight of them as colleagues. Not all of them reached grade 8 because all remained for the second year in the same class. Together with me, two or three graduated the eighth form*'. (I.P.pag.19).

The year 1980 brought about an important change in the institutional school arrangement in Coltau; a change deepening the Rroma children school discrimination which had serious consequences on their instruction. Concretely, grades 1 to 4 continue to have classes in separate school with different teachers. Moreover, by a decision of the District Inspectorate of Education of that period, a Romanian section was created (in a village where no Romanians lived) where Rroma children in grades 5 to 8 studied. Pupils in grades 5 to 8 no longer study in mixed classes, but in separate classes, the Rroma being

taught in Romanian by different teachers (the physical education teacher taught in both sections), most of them being Romanian.

Before analysing the situation of Rroma children in the new institutional arrangement, we shall insist upon the decision of establishing a Romanian section for the Rroma children in Coltau.

The decision is aberrant not only logically but also from the point of view of the efficiency of Rroma children education. At present, Rroma children are in the situation of not being able to speak the Magyar language and some of them do not know the Romanian or the Rroma languages well. We shall return to the subject but now we must underline that the fact that Rroma children cannot speak Magyar (The majority ethnic group in Coltau) blocks the communication between Rroma and Magyar children which deepens the isolation of Rroma children who no longer have friends among the Magyars. The native's points of view concerning education situation in Coltau are divergent.

The Rroma think that, *'The separation came from the headmaster in Sacalasi. They said they no longer had room there and especially for Rroma they did not have'* (I.B.pag.1) or, *'The teachers separated them. The Magyars, they separated them. Hungarians.'* (I.F.pag.1)

Headmaster's opinion is not of a nature to make things clearer. It only passes over the responsibility for the decision, *'The sections have been separated for about fifteen years. It was a decision of the Ministry of Education. A Romanian section and a Magyar section'*. (I.D.pag.4)

In the opinion of the Magyar Mayor the making of this decision has another angle: *'It was not the fault of the population, it was nobody's fault for the separation. Because they rather tried to make the area Romanian, because these two villages are purely Magyar. The authorities! Therefore, they created the Romanian section. There was no school here, Romanian section because there were Magyars and gypsies only. And they studied Magyar as the others. Then, let's make a Romanian section. Whom should they make it with? With them, of course. They called them to the Townhall, wherever they called them and persuaded them, common, you must ask for a Romanian section for your children to learn there.'*

If it is less clear in what conditions the decision was made, it is obvious, on another hand, that, at the respective time, Rroma received the decision with restraint and hostility even. *'At the beginning of the a80s, the Romanian section was created. Ioji knows that. He was a deputy of the People's Council then and he was fired for this matter because he did not want to accept it.'* (I.P.pag19)

However, the fact is certain that in the present institutional order, Rroma children school situation for both primary and secondary schools deteriorated rapidly. First, we shall analyse the situation for grades 1 to4 and then the situation for grades 5 to 8.

In the case of the 1 to 4 grades, school performance of Rroma children is much below the accepted standards. They arrive in the situation that at the end of the primary school the majority of Rroma children are illiterate or almost illiterate. They cannot

write, they cannot read well (some of them cannot read at all) and some of them cannot even speak Romanian well. Their majority does not know the basic arithmetical operations when they leave primary school. Rroma discontent reflects the situation, *'I have a niece. If you ask her what is five and eight...and she finished eight grades! No doubt! She graduated the eighth form. Eighty percent of today's pupils are in her situations.* Alternatively, another person, *'My brother is in the seventh form and he can only spell'. (I.B.pag.14; 15)* The headmaster admits the situation, *'You must know that few of those having graduated the eighth form can write and read'. (I.D.pag.10)* but unjustifiably transfers the responsibility explaining that, *'They do not have qualified teachers for grades 1 to 4'. (I.D.p11)*

It is true that the lack of qualification of the two schoolmistresses in the *Aroma school (the small school)*, in fact the Romanian section with 1 to 4 grades, is an important cause of functional illiteracy but the responsibility for the situation bears on the board of directors having at their orders both the Magyar section (*the big school*) and the Romanian section (*Aroma school or the little school*). Actually, the main cause of the functional illiteracy is the non-involvement of the directors in Rroma school education, authority derogation of the leadership of the Romanian section where Rroma children study at present. The schoolmistress justification is probably well-grounded but it does not solve the problem, *'When (there are) two minorities in the same community, I have already had disputes and there is gossip in the village that I am against the Magyar school because I keep on trying to solve gypsies problem, I would make it a **gypsy's school, a Romanian school.** It is a knotty matter and...I am in the middle. In addition, when I try to do something for one side the other hits me in the head. I do not know if you have understood. Got what I mean>a*

Although the attitude of the Magyar population which constitutes the majority and that of the school directors is that *the big school* is a Magyar school actually *the school is a state school under the authority of the Ministry of National Education.*

In the context, the fact that the Rroma children in grades 1 to 4 learn in an inadequate building, with less than enough teachers and those existing not having the proper qualification represents a serious form of discrimination from the part of civil servants of the Romanian state, with negative consequences on the school situation and social and professional prospects of these children. In fact, these children have no other chance than, at reaching adult age, to be, just as their parents, day-labourers in the Magyar households in the locality, or in the vicinity.

As the schoolmistress admits, the building where the Romanian section, grades 1 to 4 (*Rroma school*) presently functions is improper for even a minimal education of the Rroma children. It is a small private house with two 5m/4m rooms used as both kindergarten and primary school (grades 1 to 4) by more than one hundred children. *'There are 104 registered children in two small rooms. There are not enough desks. When children's presence is a hundred percent they sit by threes and fours in a desk'.* Although the building is the Romanian section –grades 1 to 4- of the local school, it does not have any inscription attesting it is a school belonging to the Ministry of National Education. The legal status of the building is somewhat uncertain, it being rented from a Magyar priest who does not want to prolong the contract.

In practice, the only educational objective in Roma school is teaching children the basics of reading and writing. In four years, in the given conditions not even this aim can be fulfilled. One of the frustrated mothers tells us, *'They keep on learning letter A and letter B from the first until the fourth forms'*. It would be impossible to obtain more since, although learning in two shifts, pupils in the first, second, third and fourth grades are in the same classroom. In the given conditions, it is surprising that some of the children finish by being able to read and write after four years. Teaching pupils in all grades in the same classroom is a major hindrance for a higher school performance not to say that it makes difficult the process itself of learning to read and write. Roma complaints, whose expectations are higher as regards school education of their children, are justified, *'If, for example, my daughter wants to divide several digits numbers, the teacher cannot tell her because the other children are illiterate, they do not know'*. (I.B.pag.22)

Another cause that hampers the good education of the children in the given conditions is the non-involvement of the schoolmistresses in the educational process, their lack of competence and professionalism in dealing with education.

Roma children's parents, both women and men underline the fact, *'They go to drink coffee and smoke. From the gypsies school'* (I.F.pag.1) or, *'When they have the break at ten to ten they leave the children even for an hour...My child is in the second grade, they send him to the grocer's to buy coffee, food'*. (I.B.pag.1; 2) The schoolmistresses's behaviour comes, as rightly notice the interviewed Roma, from a mentality still existing among state employees, less frightened by an imminent evaluation of their competence. Moreover, hierarchical control from the school directorship is practically non-existent, the headmistress being only interested in official statistics where Roma's results (Romanian section) abase the results of the Magyar section, a fact determining the headmistress to say, *'We carry the Roma on our shoulders'*.

The teaching language – Romanian – in the case of the Roma in Coltau makes even harder the difficulties of learning to read and write. There are many children not speaking Romanian well, in their families they use a Rromani dialect with strong Magyar influences. The particular situation of the Roma in Coltau makes it imperative for the Roma children to know three languages, the local Rromani dialect for their family and community life, the Magyar language for interethnic relations with the Magyar majority, and the Romanian language for their future social integration. Moreover, in the community there is functioning a project of Coltau Roma Association for learning to read and write in Rromani; after classes children go to learn how to read and write in Rromani. As we were told, the Rromani language taught at these courses *'it is the normal, universal dialect of Roma they would use in case they ever met together from all over the world'*, so it is different from the local dialect. The fact that children aged seven to twelve have to learn simultaneously four languages in a short time represents an overburdening effort amplifying intellectual confusion and delaying significantly the process of learning to read and write. The majority of the interviewed subjects, both men and women, consider the project regarding the Rromani language as being useless. They support their opinions with arguments such as, *'What is the use for a gypsy child to learn the gypsy language a second time>'* (I.B.pag.3)

All subjects consider that knowing the Romanian language is essential for their children's social integration. However, there appears the idea of using the Magyar language as a complementary teaching language, although the opinions are divided in this respect. The arguments in favour of learning the language refer to the possibility of good functioning of interethnic relations, *'I thought that instead of having them learn Rromani I'd rather have them learn Magyar as they already know Romanian'*. (I.F.pag.40). *'Why shouldn't they learn Magyar in a Magyar village> He knows the Gypsy's language from the cradle, why teach him Rromani>'* (I.B.pag.3). The arguments against learning Magyar are promoted mainly by the secretary of Coltau Rromaa Association, *'Why should you learn the Magyar's language> Why not teach him your language> You should request that it (Rromani) be introduced in schools, in high schools!'* (I.B.pag.3) The present situation shows that the Romanian language is relatively known by the children (*although there are many who do not even know Romanian*). - I.F.pag.3) the Magyar being almost unknown to them. Except the words taken over in the local Rromani dialect and used mainly in family and in Rroma's community, communicating with the Magyar children is almost completely absent for the majority of Rroma children.

The school situation of Rroma children in grades 5 to 8 in the Magyar school is no better. Most of these children are functionally illiterate on leaving school after eight years. They cannot write or read as the headmaster admits. Moreover, their performance is way below that of their school mates (not class mates) and is even worse than that of their parents, no Rroma child having been able to take the entrance examination at any high school in Baia Mare for two years. The low school performance is the more serious as the headmaster considers that due to the Ordinance 10 that sets the presence at school as a condition for allowances being paid school attendance is much higher.

Rroma children's relations with their Magyar colleagues are reduced to common cultural activities in Romanian (Eminescu's birthday, Day of the Child, etc.) and very rarely to football matches played by boys in ethnically separated teams. Parent's requests that their children be moved to the Magyar section were refused, even in cases of mixed marriages when father is Magyar and mother is Rroma.

An exception is Covaci's daughter, the Rroma's leader in Collate, who has a mixed marriage and, besides, is respected by the Magyars in the village, is tolerated by them. However, even in this case *'the girl was much blamed'*, her relation with Magyar class mates being tensed.

Mixed school –Calvini and Vaslui communities

The functioning of mixed classes in the schools in Calvini and Vaslui appears to be more the result of school directorship and teachers inertia than the result of

an explicit wish of the teachers or local authorities for offering an answer to the needs of the local Rroma communities.

The principle of assimilation constitutes the foundation of these mixed schools and it represents more an administrative reflex of the teachers still functioning within the old milestones of the assimilation policy promoted in the communist period. The

educational policies at central level, such as making school attendance a condition for receiving allowances, are of a nature to perpetuate teacher's attitudes as regards the role that school should play in the assimilation-integration process related to Roma community. The continuity of the assimilation policy reveals itself in teachers discourse, *'We were telling you, we have a very difficult school with many problems and not so many years have passed for us not to remember when my colleagues went to the gypsy area and brought children to school by hand. Until the allowance cheques appeared'*.

The aim of school education in this assimilation perspective is to wipe off ethnic differences, to impose majority's cultural model considered superior, *'In practice they adapted but wee not assimilated. They did not allow themselves to be assimilated by our philosophy, that of the common Romanian. I know the saying work and you will have, don't work and you will have. This life philosophy they do not have.'*

Teacher's attitude is important in defining the problems and seeking proper solutions. From the perspective of assimilation, the problems related to Roma children education are set at the family level. This is considered responsible for their children's school failure because of the inadequate education they receive in family. Teachers think those Roma pupils *'come from families where they have nothing to learn and that is the problem, the essential problem'*.

Prejudices and stereotypes legitimate this assimilation ideology and justify measures to impose majority's cultural model. Actually, teacher's opinion here is that Roma constitute a community which if is not deviant is at least disorganised and, as such must be educated. Hence, Roma *'do not want to work', 'play craps and drink alcohol from morning until dusk', 'they are lazy', 'they have a philosophy of their own, they cannot stop making children, I myself cannot afford to have more than two children'*.

Not only, the family is responsible for their children's school failure but the children themselves. They are considered difficult to educate. The racist discourse accompanies this ideology of assimilation, *'I work for this school and I have no child with maximum marks, nines or tens. Why is it so? Because they are lazy! I do not know why they are so. It is a gene, probably and I do not feel any satisfaction in saying that because our successes and failures depend on them'*.

This way of defining the problems makes legitimate the existence of a mixed school the purpose of which is not to reduce the social distance between ethnic communities but to change Roma life style and their values. Pressures exerted by the mixed school formula would have in view maintaining the control of the Roma's community by the majority population.

Searching for proper solutions is useless as long as school is not preoccupied by children's school performance but only by bringing them to school and changing their reference system.

Participation of Roma community in solving the problems related to school attendance seems to be undesirable since they are considered the main cause of their children's school failure. Communication between school and Roma parents does not really exist and no steps have been taken in this direction, although Roma parents

complained about the absence of school meetings with parents implicitly of communication.

School, in its present form, responds in little degree to Rroma families real needs, to their style of life. A characteristic of the local community in Calvinii, for example, is season migration (in spring and in autumn) to work in agriculture in districts where there is labour demand. While they are away for work, children discontinue their going to school, neither school nor local community offer any solution to the problem.

'For the children, we have children at school, it is now time for us to leave home, where shall we put our little children, to what school shall they go> Because they, since we leave home, we have to leave in order to be able to feed them, where shall I let my daughter go to school> If I leave her at home what can you live on> Who comes to give her> If I take her with me to the farm, they will not give me the allowance and the school cheque. Last autumn they cut the allowances for four months #your daughter did not come to school, your children did not come to school^, what courage did I have to reply>a

Families are thus forced to interrupt their children's going to school for long periods or to make considerable efforts to make possible their going to school. Ciprian's grandmother, a Rroma pupil in Calvinii who won the second prize, told us, *'I said, I would rather die of hunger but stay here until the end of school. All gypsies went to work, the teamsters took them and I stayed to finish the grade'*.

Due to the absence of measures meant to promote multicultural opening and elimination of racism, the schools in Calvinii and Vaslui, although mixed, do not succeed in making the members of the two ethnic communities get closer to each other. The majority of Romanian children know too little about Rroma children's culture, values, and lifestyle. Although they are classmates, communication between Rroma and Romanian children is purely formal when it exists at all. Most of the children in the two communities do not make friends with each other, do not visit each other, and do not communicate outside school.

They do not have common experiences such as trips and mixed camps to make them come closer to one another.

Because of teachers' attitude towards Rroma children and because of their inner stereotypes inherited from family Romanian children cannot accept the differences. To speak another language or to dress differently are strong reasons of rejection in the situation when their teachers do not consider legitimate the cultural differences and do not explain them, moreover, they have racist attitudes and behaviour. Romanian children opinions reveal this fact, *'I cannot stand having gypsy friends because they are dirty and talk too much in the other language'*, or *'Only yesterday a gypsy girl came to school wearing slippers, which is not normal'*.

Because of their teachers' attitude and of Romanian children's restraint in accepting them, school experience of Rroma children is often painful; school environment is perceived as hostile, alienating. In many cases, this fact leads to an attitude of rejecting school so long as their potential is not capitalised. All Rroma children point out to this attitude of ignoring and even rejecting them by their mates and

teachers. Children's opinions in Calvini underline this fact, *'The teachers do not pay much attention to us, the gypsies. They accept more the Romanians',* or *'In the school desks we sit gypsy with gypsy. If I sit with one of my gypsies I get along with him, but with a Romanian, he says, #Gypsy, go away, you have lice! ^, We do not get along.'*

Thus, the emotional motivation of learning is strongly eroded, which partly explains Roma children's poor school results. These results explain, in turn, some Roma parents attitudes of reserve as regards school, who, with good reason, do not see the utility of school since their children, once in the secondary learning cycle, cannot read or do simple arithmetical operations.

The school with special classes in Pata-Rât

Roma children's school experience in Pata-Rat is recent; the first children started going to school in 1996 at the initiative of the French non-governmental organization a Médecins sans Frontièresa (M.S.F.). The effort of this organization to send these children to school is the more praiseworthy as putting their initiative into practice faced resistance from all sides: authorities, school, local community, Roma parents. Putting Roma children in special classes is the result of long negotiations. Placing Roma children in special classes for the deficient is explained by both these children's special living conditions and the degree of tolerance of the majority population.

Roma children in Pata-Rat live and work on the garbage pit in Cluj. They do this at night too in order to avoid daylight competition. The daily work in difficult conditions makes these children unable for a normal education. Moreover, the fact that they live in shanty lodgings, without electricity and running water, makes it impossible for them to study at home. In the given conditions, placing Roma children in special classes does not seem to be discriminatory to us. Actually, it is children's only possibility to be educated during the four hours. Placing Roma children in special classes is also due to the fact many of them were much older than school age at the time they were registered. Therefore, the school in Someseni district has four classes with 43 children from the community.

Still more important is school mobility, that is, children's possibility of joining the usual educational forms, because otherwise, their reason for being might turn from support into exclusion.

At present the work of M.S.F. is continued by a Roma's foundation, a Wassdas', which Roma parents trust and which facilitates the dialogue with the school. Anyway, parent's attitude towards school has considerably changed from rejecting the idea of their children's going to school, to increasing exigencies towards school.

The initial attitude of rejecting school is accountable for having in view that their situation emerged from a process of exclusion.

A large part of the parents is high school graduates who became unemployed immediately after the Revolution and lost the right to live in their employers' tenements or did no longer have the means to pay rent. This exclusion process brought them on Cluj garbage pit, strongly marked their identity, and destroyed their trust in people and

institutions. One of the parents tells us, *'There are others passing by us. We are not alike, do you understand me, because we do not have the same heart, the same construction. What would be their reasons to laugh? What reason? Because these are the conditions, where we live, on the garbage pit, we are backward compared to the people in the town, much backward.'*

It is not because of wisdom, it is not because of character, we too are able to think like anyone, to write to work, and it's our present living conditions and our retreat in this place where we are living now. Everybody has heard or recalls that there are rats here; that this is the garbage pit; that we live here from garbage; and the word garbage is the most degrading. We feed and live on this place, hands on bottles, on boxes, on everything...And it is another word to work in a factory, to have a job'.

The distrust of school was great because, in their case, school was not an obstacle in the way to marginalization and exclusion, and they fear that their history may be repeated by their children.

At present, collaboration between school, Foundation for an Open Society and Townhall is being put in a concrete answer to Rroma children school needs, in the form of a semi-boarding school. After school classes children will receive a hot meal and then they will do their homework under teachers' guidance. Thus, they could pass to the normal curriculum, privation in the family being overcome in this way. The strongest opposition to the project comes from mayoralty that does not meet its engagement to build the roof of a nearly finished two storeys building.

We can only talk about partially adequate community answer, despite the efforts made by certain NGOs, as long as the present school formula preserves the social distance between Rroma and Romanian or Magyar children.

Actually, Romanian children do not know their Rroma colleagues, they are suspicious of them, and they have never entered their classrooms. There is no real communication because there are no common activities. Romanian parents' initial opposition to accepting Rroma children in the school, motivated by Rroma' want of hygiene, is uncritically taken over by the children. In the absence of direct communication, they have a negative representation of Rroma children, Rroma children *'swear', 'are handicapped', 'are aggressive all the time'*. Violence is, more often than not, present in school, and it must be considered an effect of the lack of communication between children. Obviously, both Rroma and Romanian children accuse each other of starting fights, actually the accusations are the only form of interaction between children.

Conclusions

Local answers to Rroma population school needs are absent in most cases. In many occasions, the social actors strongly opposing the finding of local solutions are the schools themselves. Their passivity justification is sometimes covered by school regulations or by educational policies at central level.

Segregated schools seem to be the institutional formulae where change is the least probable to happen. A special case is represented by Coltau, where segregation is the result of the local policy where opposition to another institutional formula comes

equally from the majority, local authorities, and teachers. Moreover, Roma community itself, although it is dissatisfied with the present institutional formula, is not united in supporting a new formula. Attempts at change in Coltau come from Roma NGOs, Rromani CRISS organization, and Coltau Roma Federation, but the project of a multicultural school is equally blocked school's directorship and the District Inspectorate for Education. The attitude of the majority population (Magyars) represents a strong source of resistance to change.

In the case of Balta Arsa school desegregation does not seem to be the solution (feasible or not) at any level, authorities, teachers, local community. The fact that school segregation does not appear in the public conscience as a problem that must be solved has several explanations. First, it is Roma community lost of ethnic identity following a process of assimilation. Not speaking Rromani, the community here does no longer identify themselves through the language although it is identified as a Roma community by majority population, authorities, and teachers. Secondly, good school results and children's relative mobility (about 20% of them go to vocational schools) make the status quo desirable. Both parents and teachers are satisfied with their children's results and consider that graduating vocational school is a satisfactory result for part of the children. The purpose of graduating vocational school is not learning a trade since labour demand is absent for those trades Roma children specialize at present. The aim of graduating vocational school is obtaining unemployment pay. Changing school profile to include professions requested on labour market is not a local community option. Guiding Roma children to high schools does not exist as an option at teachers' level, although this wish exists at Roma families' level. The fact that there is no access road (it is an isolated village) and means of transport to the nearby towns where there are high schools represents an objective constraint for Roma children's mobility in Balta Arsa. Eliminating these constraints is not the objective of local authorities. We cannot speak about resistance to change at the community level in Balta Arsa because there are no agents of change, Preserving the status quo is the objective of teachers and local authorities in the conditions of Roma community passivity and lost of ethnic identity.

In the case of Glina school, schools segregation appears to Roma parents as a problem with individual solutions. Because of their children unfavourable results parents resort to private lessons to give their children the necessary education that school fails to provide. Part of the parents intend to take their children from this school to the mixed school in Bobesti where they consider Roma children's results are better.

The only solution experimented by the school is employing some Roma teachers, who on the other hand do not have the necessary qualification (ten grades) to provide children with adequate education. Roma parents consider unsatisfactory the solution. Communication between school and parents lacks in what regards seeking solutions to the problems. Romanian teachers' want in understanding Roma culture and lifestyle contributes to placing children's school failure on the families, which stops the search for solutions at school level.

Racist discourse and attitudes are frequently met in the mixed schools in Calvini and Vaslui. Spatial nearness between children of different ethnic extractions does not bring them closer to each other as long as teachers' attitudes promote racism, not interethnic opening. Moreover, Romanian children take over prejudices and stereotypes from their families which prevents them from having a positive attitude towards their Rroma colleagues. Violence in school, between Rroma and Romanian children is often present, its causes are more often than not banal. There are no friendships (only as exceptions) between Romanian and Rroma children to go beyond school. Rroma children have keen feelings of isolation and marginalization, and school is perceived as a hostile environment. Teachers' resistance to change (exclusively Romanian ethnic) is high as long as they see Rroma family as responsible for children's failure and they think school has no contribution to this failure. In tougher variants of the racist discourse, children themselves are guilty because they are intellectually weak and can barely be educated.

The school with special classes in Pata-Rat appears to be the only case where the local community actively participates in solving problems related to sending Rroma children to school. Agents of change were the NGOs, Médecins sans Frontières and the Foundation for an Open Society. As stop-gap measures, special classes represented a compromise solution with the mission of breaking the resistance of local authorities (that do not want to grant this community legal status), of school, and of majority population. Afterwards school took over the initiative, at present there a partnership project between school, the Foundation for an Open Society and local authorities to open a semi-boarding school.

The intention exists that once the school is opened the normal curriculum will be used. If for six years, from 1990 until 1996, no child really attended school, now their majority does that. At people relations' level and at the level of communication between Rroma and Romanian children nothing has been done. There are no common activities and no friendships. The mark associated with the label of special class contributes to this.

The specificity of local contexts imposes local solutions. Consequently, we cannot make abstraction of these contexts when we consider the school forms adequate to sending Rroma population to school. Therefore, we cannot say that one type of school is more adequate. However, we can appreciate the openness to change, the search for proper solutions at the level of educational system. The tendency is, in the majority of investigated schools (with the exception of Pata-Rat) to avoid recognition of the fact that children's school failure is largely caused by school itself. The responsibility for the failure is attributed by most teachers to the family or Rroma child. Rroma culture and lifestyle are held responsible, they are considered inadequate to school institution. Such a definition of the situation has consequences on the action level, leads to strategies of preserving the status quo in the case of segregated schools, and of continuing the assimilation policy in the case of mixed schools. What is missing is an open attitude towards Rroma culture. Racist discourse and racist attitudes are present in the majority of cases. Pressures from Rroma population on school institutions to adapt to their children's needs are almost entirely absent, exceptions are those communities where there

are Roma associations or organizations. Roma or non-Roma NGOs represent in fact the only agents of change while the strongest resistance to change comes from within school in the conditions of little tolerance from the majority population, and of non-involvement of local authorities.