

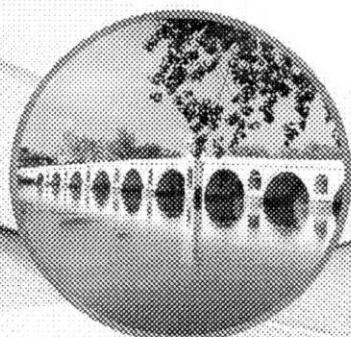
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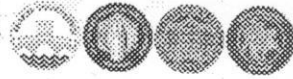
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The Romani in the Macedonian Educational System

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Abstract

Education is an individual right and necessity in modern society. Education has value in itself, independently of the economic value it brings to the individual, or the lack thereof, because it enriches all individuals and it enables meaningful orientation in the world. The analysis of the Macedonian educational structure shows that half of the population that is 15 or older doesn't possess or possesses a low level of education. It is especially concerning that we have a larger percentage of illiterates in rural municipalities and municipalities where certain minorities such as Albanians, Turks and Romani dominate. Macedonia, as a multiethnic society, has defied the rights and freedoms of the national minorities in article 48 of the Constitution from 1991, according to which, they have the right to freely express, nurture and develop their identity, as well as the right to tuition in their native language in primary and secondary school. However, the tuition in their native tongue isn't implemented equally for all minorities. Primary school education, which is compulsory in Macedonia, has tuition in Macedonia as well as Albanian, Serbian and Turkish, while the Romani population is far from realizing their right to tuition in their native language even though they are the third most numerous minority in Macedonia. From all the present minorities, only the Turkish populace has secondary school tuition in their native tongue, despite the fact that the 2007 changes to the law of secondary education implemented compulsory secondary education to all citizens, with equal opportunities. In this paper we will try to detect the reasons for the low achievements and high dropout rates of Romani children. According to the State Statistical Office a small percentage of enrolled Romani children finish primary school. There are many obstacles they face which make it difficult for them to succeed in our education system. The combination of poverty and a specific subculture keeps the Romani populace in the "magical circle of poverty". The low level of education and vocational training lower the chances of successful integration in society and leads to higher vulnerability and discrimination. Macedonia shouldn't rely on passive or repressive measures to include Romani in the educational process but should develop a strategy of positive measures that will bring education closer to the Romani people. Till now, the Romani people had to adapt to the way of life of the larger communities, where the proper help wasn't offered even though they are the poorest and most vulnerable community. Special attention needs to be paid to the tradition and values that are nurtured in Romani culture, and a way to strengthen education as a value and coveted goal in Romani culture needs to be devised.

Keywords: *educational system, educational opportunities, Romani culture*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an individual right and necessity in modern society. The strongest process of socialization i. e. the transfer of norms and values in a society is performed through the education system. This is why states not only take over the responsibility of financing and realizing the education processes, but also try to create its content through which individuals will accept the norms and values of the governing system.

After the independence of R. Macedonia in 1991, the education system faced a large number of societal challenges that caused problems in its organization and goals. In conditions of societal transition, a serious clash between acquired values and norms and the need to implement

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new norms and values which will be directly correlated to the changed societal conditions occurred.

More serious reforms in the education system were anticipated in the National program for the development of education 2005-2015¹⁷ in which the strategic areas of intervention were detected. Among the key areas were: education for all; improving the culture of living; increasing social participation; an increase in the educational, cultural and economical competency of Macedonian society; strengthening and increasing the international cooperation and managing the changes.

Education for all, as a strategic area for intervention, is of great significance for this paper so we will focus on the most important goals of this area:

The development of educational opportunities for all, as a key goal, for which the balancing of the differences between urban and rural communities as well as between the developed and underdeveloped municipalities is predicted. Also, the creation of systemic solutions for equal opportunities and access of education for special needs children as well as children with learning disabilities.

The decentralization of education as a goal anticipates a redistribution of the responsibility of the main educational questions (the betterment of education, professional improvement of teachers, financing) on all three levels of the education system – central, local and school level. State bodies need to be responsible for the external control of the quality of educational institutions, while local subjects, such as schools and local authorities, need to be responsible for securing conditions for a higher quality education in concordance with national standards.

In the sphere of financing, an abandonment of the linear way of distribution of resources is predicted and a financing system which will foster quality will be introduced. The partial financing has to be done on the basis of distribution of resources to education from the central budget of municipalities in the form of bloc donations. The basic criteria for this type of financing need to be: number of students, condition of infrastructure, quality of education determined by external control and vertical mobility of students.

Raising the educational level of all young people and adults outside of the education process, with an accent on increasing their professional/work and social competencies as well as

¹⁷National program for the development of education in Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of Education and Science, 2004



the elimination of the possibility of creating new generations of educationally handicapped individuals.

Increasing the length of compulsory education. A large number of children start their schooling with low starting knowledge and skill which in the future is reflected by low academic performance and abstinence from further education. To solve this problem, an implementation of a 9 year long compulsory education is predicted, and the year before the child goes to school he/she will enter the system of compulsory education.

The organizational structure of the education system and the model of compulsory education after Macedonian independence is inherited by the previous system. Compulsory education refers to primary education which is divided into two cycles lasting 4 years each. In 2004 a pilot change to the education model was made with a structure of 1+4+4 in which a portion of children aged six entered the so-called year zero (preschool education performed in schools)¹⁸. The 9 year long primary education was implemented in the 2007/2008 school year where primary education was divided in three cycles, where each of them lasted for three years. In April 2007, with the new changes to the Law on the organization of secondary education, secondary education became compulsory for every citizen, under equal conditions¹⁹. The length of high school education is 4 years, while vocational secondary education is three or four years.

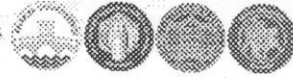
1.2. Roma and education

The high rate of students leaving formal education creates a serious problem in R. Macedonia. It is in the focus of attention of all relevant actors in the processes of planning, development, implementation and support of educational policies. Even though this phenomenon is present in all ethnic groups in our society, the rate of students leaving education is highest among the Roma community. The problem of the low enrollment of Roma children in formal education, is viewed by experts as a consequence of Roma culture and community. The most important factors are: family, low socio-economic standing, tradition and value system. However, we need to take into account the structural factors such as: long-lasting discrimination towards Roma, their economic, social, political and cultural exclusion in society, as well as the long-lasting passivity by the state to overcome this.

The inclusion of children in preschool institutions is for the greater societal good for the children as well as the community as a whole. With the inclusion of children in preschool

¹⁸Law for the change and addition for the Law for primary education, Official newspaper of Republic of Macedonia issue 63 from 20.09.2004

¹⁹Law for the change and addition for the Law for secondary education, Official newspaper of Republic of Macedonia issue 49 from 18.04.2007



institutions the probability of children leaving formal education early is lowered, with which the quality and vertical mobility of the generations in the education system are increased. The early socialization of norms and values of the dominant culture allows children to increase their cultural capital and to build a worked-out language code. Many sociological theories of education supported by relevant research show a tight connection between social origin of the child and his/her achievements in education. The theory of cultural capital by Pier Burdie indicates that the position of elite culture is a specific form of capital which can be used in different social areas for the acquisition of socially useful resources. According to Burdie, education doesn't start at the beginning of formal education, when certain existing skills and knowledge are assumed. Children of the ruling class have acquired these skills and knowledge during the preschool years. That is why they possess the key to deciphering the messages they receive in school. This is why educational achievement of social groups is strongly connected to the amount of cultural capital they possess. The sociolinguistic theory by Basil Bernstein indicates towards the existence of two systems of signs (codes): a limited and a worked-out one. The first one is connected to the working class, while the second one to the ruling class. Bernstein assumes that the roots of these linguistic differences are found in the different socialization of children with working class parents and ones from a background with higher social capital. These differences can be overcome if children enter preschool institutions from an early age.

Unlike children from other ethnic communities, Roma children spend their earliest years as beggars instead of being cared for in the many kindergartens in R. Macedonia. Poverty is the main reason for this. Living in substandard conditions, at the edge of existence, Roma parents cannot commit sufficient attention to the development of their children.

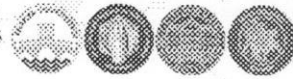
According to the State Statistical Office in 1997, among Roma older than 15 24% are illiterate, 30% haven't finished high school, 33% only finished primary school, 9,2% finished high school and only 0,3% have completed higher education²⁰. The low level of Roma education affects their employment status as well. The research of the workforce conducted by the Macedonian government in 2001²¹ show that the unemployment rate of the Roma is 71,8%.

Eleven years later, according to the data from 2008²² despite the positive changes to the Law for primary education in 2004 with which the 9 year long primary school education was

²⁰ On a University level, in 1992, the Macedonian government introduced a quota of 10% for all minorities. This system was changed in 1995, where every minority got its own quota depended on its percentage from the total population in R. Macedonia determined by the 1994 census

²¹ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. 2001. Second Report on "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Strasbourg: Council of Europe

²² Ministry of Education and Science. Manual for the prevention and reduction of discrimination in the Macedonian education system. Geneks-Kocani, 2010



implemented, whose main goal was to equalize the knowledge of all ethnic and societal groups, especially those not included in preschool institutions, 33% of the Roma populace haven't finished primary school and 7% have incomplete or complete secondary education, which shows a decrease in the participation of the Roma in the education process.

The state of higher education in 2008 is even worse, with only 0,1% of the Roma population having finished higher education, which is a reduction of two thirds. The Roma unemployment rate increases to 75% which increases the poverty rate. Social origin of students also has a bearing on the early dropout rate, as an extremely undesirable educational outcome which greatly decreases the chances of them entering the workforce and leads to other unwanted sociopsychological consequences. Lower education level is a reason as well as a consequence of poverty.

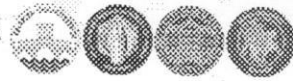
The reason for the low education level is the bad socio-economic state of many Roma families, a large percentage of children who are not enrolled in preschool as an important moment of socialization and inclusion in the education system, the lack of fluency in Macedonian because of which normal participation in class is impossible, nonexistence of normal condition for studying at home because of inappropriate housing for most of the Roma population.

The lack of value put on education in Roma communities, especially by parents, is another reason for the lack of enrollment, absence and dropping out of school after the fourth or fifth grade. The patriarchal upbringing, on the other hand, neither motivates nor encourages girls to enroll in school.

Roma are also faced with a low rate of health insurance which is another form of discrimination despite the universal rights that are guaranteed for all people.

In concordance with the requirements of international documents for compulsory primary education and law reforms from 2007 that made secondary education compulsory as well the cost of education has reduced. As a social state, working towards reducing the costs of secondary education, the government of Republic of Macedonia provided free textbooks as well as free public transportation for primary and secondary school students.

In order to overcome and effectively solve the issues with education, especially the problems faced by Roma, in the frame of "The decade of Roma inclusion 2005-2015" an educational fund for Roma was formed. The aim and mission of this fund is to maintain the sustainability of educational programs. That above all includes inclusion and integration in the educational process, in order to improve the education of Roma children. For the 2009/2010 school year the Ministry of Education and Science, with financial support from the Roma



Educational Fund from Budapest, awarded 800 scholarships for Roma students enrolled in public and private high schools.

Every year the Roma Educational Fund awards more than 100 scholarships to Roma students in R. Macedonia for the continuation of their formal education which has improved the state of Roma education. The positive trend of enrollment of Roma students in Macedonian universities started at the beginning of the decade for Roma in the 2005/2006 school year when 140 Roma students enrolled. In the 2013/2014 school year that number increased to 233 enrolled Roma students²³.

However, if we compare the number of Roma enrolled in Macedonian colleges from 2004 to 2014 and how many of them graduated, we can conclude that their number is very small. We have the highest number of Roma graduates in 2012 when 39 Roma graduated, while the lowest number of Roma graduated in 2007 when only 13 graduated college.

Table 1. Number of graduated Roma in the 2007-2014 period

Year	Roma graduates	Men	Women
2007	13	6	7
2008	30	14	16
2009	28	11	17
2010	35	15	20
2011	22	11	11
2012	39	21	18
2013	26	13	13
2014	32	17	15

However, even though the documents prescribe new norms and strategies, the real state of Roma children is concerning. Instead of spending their days in classrooms they are outside begging for money, something that most of them are compelled to do by their abusive parents. The main problems faced by the Roma population that result in lower educational achievements

²³ Research on the success of the Decade for Roma in higher education, 2004-2014. Publisher: Association of citizens – Institute of human rights, Skopje, March, 2016



are the following: bad socio-economic state, high percentage of children not enrolled in preschool education, bad home conditions for learning, unregistered children that come from parents without IDs, abuse of child labor, language barrier, inadequate application of Roma language in all levels of education (no tuition in Roma language, no subject that teaches Roma language, there isn't enough qualified people to teach Roma language and teach in Roma language, there is no department that can produce the appropriate staff), parents that are illiterate and unmotivated to enroll their children in school, underage marriages, segregation, discrimination and stereotyping of Roma people.

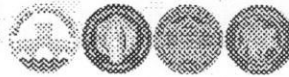
3. CONCLUSION

For a strategy for the advancement of Roma on a state level to be considered well thought out, it is necessary to keep in mind the tradition and values fostered by Roma culture. A way needs to be devised to connect the general disadvantages with a positive relation to education, i. e. to think of a way for education to become a desired value and goal for Roma culture.

Up until now, it has been imposed upon Roma people to adapt to the way of life of larger communities, whereas the poorest and most vulnerable community appropriate help isn't offered. It is expected of them to answer to the standards of formal education, to purchase all materials necessary for school and after school activities, even though it is common knowledge that a large percentage of the Roma population are financially unable to answer to these demands.

Instead of the state trying to include Roma children in education passively or with repressive measures, positive measures that can bring education closer to Roma children need to be taken. In the frame of these positive measures, children need to be taken out of the ghettos, there needs to be development of "desirable" schools, which will be desirable to the non-Roma population and will stimulate the mixing of children on different bases, including an ethnical basis.

The index of social inclusivity is very important because socio-economic status has a strong influence on educational achievement. Schools that have mostly children whose parents are from a higher socio-economic status achieve more in school. In other words, it is better to go to a school where the parents of the children attending it have a higher socio-economic status on average, than to have parents with higher socioeconomic standing. This implies that an important part of the advantage of socioeconomic status is realized through residential segregation (into better and worse neighborhoods) or the ability of parents with a higher socioeconomic standing to enroll children in schools with a more favorable social content. Social inclusivity will increase with a new administrative division of municipalities with special attention payed on the



desegregation of Roma students and consistent implementation of this new administrative division by primary schools.

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