

WIDENING PARTICIPATION: ROMANIAN ROMA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersignedTorotcoi Simona..... hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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Abstract

The thesis provides an analysis on the existing social inclusion policies within the Romanian higher education (HE) system, with a focus on the Roma minority. It uses the social inclusion principles of access, participation and success in order to explain the ‘widening participation’ effect. A special focus in this paper is directed towards the factors that are influencing in a positive way Romanian Roma access in higher education, access being a prerequisite for participation. The approach used in this regard is to follow the policy implementers and policy targets and to determine their influence, impact and role. In this respect there were conducted interviews with the main policy implementers and 100 surveys with Roma. In the conclusion part I argue that besides the role and impact of policy-makers and existing social inclusion framework within the Romanian higher education system, the most crucial factors influencing Romanian Roma participation in higher education refer to the role and impact of universities, NGOs working on Roma education and of the main scholarship providers.

Key words:

Roma, access, participation, social inclusion, higher education, Romania.

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Introduction

Known as Europe's largest minority, with no historical homeland but with a long history, tradition and great diversity in Europe and Central Asia, the Roma population is among the most persecuted and disadvantaged groups on the European continent. Besides the everyday challenges Roma face in housing, health or employment, the lack of proper and quality education for Roma youth is still one of the most important issues among the Roma people and interested stakeholders. Education is considered to be one of the first steps through which marginalized minorities, such as the Roma, can get out of poverty and gain tools and means in participating in their community economic and social life. The topic of Roma children's education in preschool, primary and secondary education started to be researched in the last decade from a variety of perspectives such as access and quality education (Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Vol.1 and 2, 2007), segregation and desegregation (Fleck & Ruginis, 2008; Rostas, 2012), Roma girls participation in education (Surdu & Surdu, 2006) or educational attainment (UNDP, 2012).

As far as the topic of HE and Roma is concerned, the majority of the studies are mostly oriented towards affirmative action policies (Surdu & Szira, 2009; Horvath, 2007), access policies, including equal opportunities, equity or drop-out rates and their effects on students future career. However, more of the existing research focused on the causes of Roma low attendance in HE, nowadays the reverse phenomenon seems to be neglected, very little has been written on what stimulates Roma students to pursue further studies. What makes this research necessary is the low number of Roma representatives in public structures and institutions, people that make Roma people voice heard. The root of this problem is reflected through the low number of students in entering, participating and completing HE studies in Romania. According to UNDP (2012), "the share of Roma between 26 and 32 years of age,

with completed university education, does not exceed 1%' in any of the surveyed countries", that is Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, Albania, and Montenegro. The current research carries across some of the findings of the above mentioned research with regard to Roma in HE, and has in its center the concept of *access* since access is considered to be one of the preliminary steps in widening participation.

The current research aims at approaching the topic of Romanian Roma participation in HE from the social inclusion perspective, by identifying and analyzing those elements that contribute in convincing prospective Roma students to pursue further education at the university level. The main research question is: *What are the main positive factors influencing Romanian Roma participation in higher education?*

With regards to Roma inclusion in HE and its predicted benefits, this paper will support Angéla Kóczé statement which refers to the fact that 'education enables traditionally marginalized individuals to develop and maintain decent living standards'. Moreover, there is also the belief that Roma who attended universities will become part of the Roma elite, who will be the future Roma leaders, the ones who will prove to be socially responsible and address the Roma communities' problems.

The Romanian case has been selected for further examination from the social inclusion perspective because it has the largest Roma population among the Central Eastern European countries and, therefore, a higher number of Roma students and prospective students who present a high social exclusion risk in the system. Another reason is the fact that the Romanian Government was amongst the first to implement several policies and measures for HE Roma students after the fall of the communist regime (Horvath, 2007).

Moreover, the Romanian case presents several features that fits the objective and scope of this research, that is to identify positive aspects which will lead to Roma

participation in HE, through the existence of Roma political representation, relatively wide Roma civil society sector, an educational system that leaves spaces for Roma employees (minority representatives in school inspectorates, Roma mediators) but also through the relatively large Roma university freshmen compared with other CEE countries. According to Eurydice in 2000, Romania was among the countries with the lowest participation rate in post-compulsory education, and since 2009 it proved a significant improvement and reached an 80 % participation rate (Eurydice, 2012). As far as Roma students are concerned, according to the 2011 national census, the percentage of Roma students graduating from secondary education doubled in comparison with 2002 data of 29% (Romani CRISS, 2013), this rate influencing future Roma youth participation in higher education.

The objective of this research is to make a contribution to the Romanian system of education, especially for the HE sector with regards to Roma minority educational policies. Moreover, the current research can be considered as a background policy document for the relevant stakeholders, actors and policy-makers in order to assess to what extent the existing policy instruments are efficient, effective, sustainable and whether certain measures should or should not be continued or whether other measures should be implemented in order to achieve the social inclusion objective within the Romanian HE system. It will also contribute in giving actors an insight to the relevant stakeholders on the *landscape* of Roma in HE, based on which they can take further steps in redressing their role in the implementation stage.

1. Research Design and Methodology

1.1. Research Design

In this research I look at the social inclusion aspect of the HE policies in Romania and its relationship with the policy-making cycle, with a focus on the relevant actors as following: policy-makers, implementers and policy targets. Special attention will be given to implementers since they bear the responsibility of applying the policy. Therefore in this context both governmental and nongovernmental actors will be followed:

“Policy is what the government says and does about perceived problems. Policy making is how the government decides what will be done about perceived problems. Policy making is a process of interaction among governmental and nongovernmental actors; policy is the outcome of that interaction”.

(Ripley & Franklin, 1987)

The research merits a qualitative strategy since it aims at representing the actors roles within each of the three mentioned categories; each of the actors were asked to assess the role and impact of the other actors in the decision-making or implementation phase, and how they interact when it comes about ensuring Roma social inclusion in the Romanian HE system.

1.2. Methods

The research tracks the roles and power-sharing of each actor, mainly the policy-makers and implementers, in their way of outreaching Roma students in accessing university studies. The empirical strategy will incorporate the “process tracing” method with analysis of policy documents and previous studies on Roma, but also with interviews and student surveys.

The process tracing method will be used as a tool for carrying out “within-case analysis based on qualitative data” based on description, observations and identification of causal sequences (Collier, 2011) and will focus on the Romanian higher education inclusion policies and measures for Roma. Besides the above mentioned methods, another method used is the expert interviews which will include county inspectorates, NGOs and political constituencies from Bistrita-Nasaud and Marmures county, which are contributing with their interpretive knowledge (“know-why”) and procedural knowledge (“know-how”) (Littig, 2009). Moreover, data provided by officials working on minority educational policies and scholarship providers will be taken into consideration and analyzed.

Taking in consideration that the study has in its center the students and their access to higher education there have been conducted students’ surveys. The targets of the surveys are students who are or were enrolled in universities, indifferent whether they completed or not

their studies. The surveys methods reached out students from different counties based on advice and guidance from Roma NGOs, political leaders but also from my personal connections with Roma people.

The purpose of using data triangulation in this research (different sources of information such as interviews, surveys, government policy documents, legal frameworks, analysis of government education inclusion policies, quantitative data) is to increase the validity of the study. The surveys are conducted with students who are already enrolled or graduated university, and not freshmen university students, aspect that might represent one of the weak points of this research. However, I consider that enrolled students are the ones who already passed through all these steps, and therefore, possess the knowledge and experience of getting access to higher education.

According to King, Keohane & Verba (1996) reliability “means that applying the same procedure in the same way will always produce the same measure”. In terms of reliability, the methods used for collecting data are producing consistent answers, since the language used is Romanian, surveys are short, and questions are precise and clear. Moreover, the reliability of the students’ surveys might pose certain questions since they might not have reach important and relevant respondents but also the answer options might have different meaning for different respondents. To solve this problem, the sample of the population is made off by 100 students, fact that will help assessing the reliability of the surveys. However the data triangulation will be used as an instrument in ensuring consistency in data gathering.

2. Thesis Organization

The main argument of this thesis is that participation of Roma in higher education institutions is influenced (besides socio-economic status, parents’ education, etc.) to a certain extent, by the way in which policy-makers and implementers address the issue of Roma students’ access to this type of education through different policy instruments (scholarships, affirmative action, outreach campaigns, mentorship, tutorship, assistance).

In order to determine the extent to which one group of actors affects Roma students participation in higher education, the argument will be developed as following: The next chapter, Chapter 1, will provide the theoretical framework and will locate the Roma context within the social inclusion theory, from international to country specific HE inclusion policies, based on three components: access, participation and success. Chapter 2, 3 and 4 will focus on actors' roles (policy-makers, implementers, and targets) and their impact and instruments in their work on Roma inclusion within the HE system. Each chapter will provide a theoretical framework on the respective actor through the existent studies, the assessment made by the actors themselves through publications but also through the completed interviews and surveys and through the assessment made by the other actors involved in the study. The conclusion part will emphasize the main findings, including implementers' impact on Roma participation in higher education. Chapter 2 will focus on policy-makers, Chapter 3 on implementers and Chapter 4 on policy targets. The last chapter, Chapter 5 will leave space for main findings, data analysis and conclusions.

Chapter 1 - Theoretical framework

1. Social Inclusion in Higher Education

The literature on social inclusion is explored in relation to a variety of perspectives and ideologies. The importance of social inclusion is been given by its positive effects, that is, social cohesion, social integration, an equal society in which its members are having equal rights and also responsibilities. Social inclusion areas (such as employment, education and others) indicate that the concept can be examined through a variety of ideologies which might reflect different levels of inclusion. The theoretical framework used in this research introduces the concept of social inclusion in HE, a perspective based on which I will break down concepts such as social justice, widening participation, access, equity, admission and merit. The aim of this chapter is to locate the current situation of the Romanian Roma students within the Romanian HE system from the perspective of social inclusion, based on other minorities' experience in accessing higher education.

1.1. Participation as a key tool for Social Inclusion

The notion of *participation* is one of the key concepts in the literature of social inclusion, together with concepts such as *access* and *success*, concepts which will be explore in the following sections of this chapter. When seen from the perspective of social inclusion in HE, these three concepts reflect, to a certain extent, the level of inclusion of the existent HE system within a country or a region, including quality of education, fairness, diversity of the population, etc. Moreover, the concept of *widening participation* is just one part of the wider struggle in achieving social justice and equality, which are the main goals of social inclusion.

There is an extensive literature on social inclusion in HE, focusing on women, racial or ethnic minorities from diverse perspectives –the perspective of social justice (Basit, 2012; Furlong and Cartmel, 2009), access and/or human potential (Gidley et al., 2009), from the educational system perspective (Preece, 1999) or even from the perspective of access to

information (Archer and Hutchings, 2003). All of these studies exploring different aspects of inclusion and different topics within the HE area.

With regards to widening participation and its relationship to social inclusion, Watson's (2006) perspective is worth mentioning. It claims that widening participation is an issue of social justice and once the latter achieved it can contribute to social cohesion, which is the capacity of the society to ensure the well-being of its members, reducing existing disparities and preventing marginalization. According to Furlong and Cartmel (2009), social justice is about just societies, equal opportunities, equal distribution of rewards, characteristics that often are "undermined by structures", that is in this case universities, which have a significant role in underpinning social justice.

The European Union (EU, 2004) defines *social exclusion* as:

"a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination".

Besides the above stated definition, which brings the idea that discrimination of any sorts is the main cause of exclusion, it is claimed that as a consequence of social exclusion, individuals are detached from job or education opportunities but also from different aspects of social life. Moreover, it is noted that the effects of social exclusion influences individuals' decision-making power when it comes to everyday issues.

The concept of social inclusion is concerned is defined as:

"a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live".

In addition to this definition, the European Union assesses the added value of social inclusion, that is: greater participation in decision-making and access to fundamental rights, idea encompassed also within the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The above definitions for *social inclusion* and *social exclusion* are broad in meaning; normal standards of living within a society can be completely different from one society to another since societies can differ in size or population homogeneity or even job or other opportunities.

1.2. Access, Participation and Success

In order to understand how the member states are incorporating such policy objectives within the higher education agenda, the next section of this chapter will explore the issue of *access* examined in relation to *participation* and *success*, from the social inclusion perspective and will incorporate elements of admission policies and meritocracy.

Haug's (2010) conceptualization of *inclusive education* involves four components according to which one can identify the level of inclusion: fellowship, participation, democratization and benefit. *Fellowship* refers mostly to the membership status of a student within the educational system but also part of the social, cultural and professional life of it. *Participation* is seen as student opportunity to contribute to their membership status and making the most of it, giving and receiving to the existing academic environment. The *democratization* and *benefit* both reflect a certain degree of *empowerment*, students starting to take initiatives and make their voice heard, discussing and arguing about possible developments that will impact directly or indirectly their life or their society. For the purpose of this study, democratization and benefit will be conflated since they reflect a similar idea, the idea of *empowerment*.

A similar theory is presented by Gidley et. al. (2010), where *access*, *participation* and *success* are reflecting Haug's concepts of *fellowship*, *participation* and *empowerment*. What Gidley et. al. brings new, is the fact that these concepts are supported by several ideologies (see Fig. 1) such as neoliberalism (*access*), social justice (*participation*) and human potential (*success*).

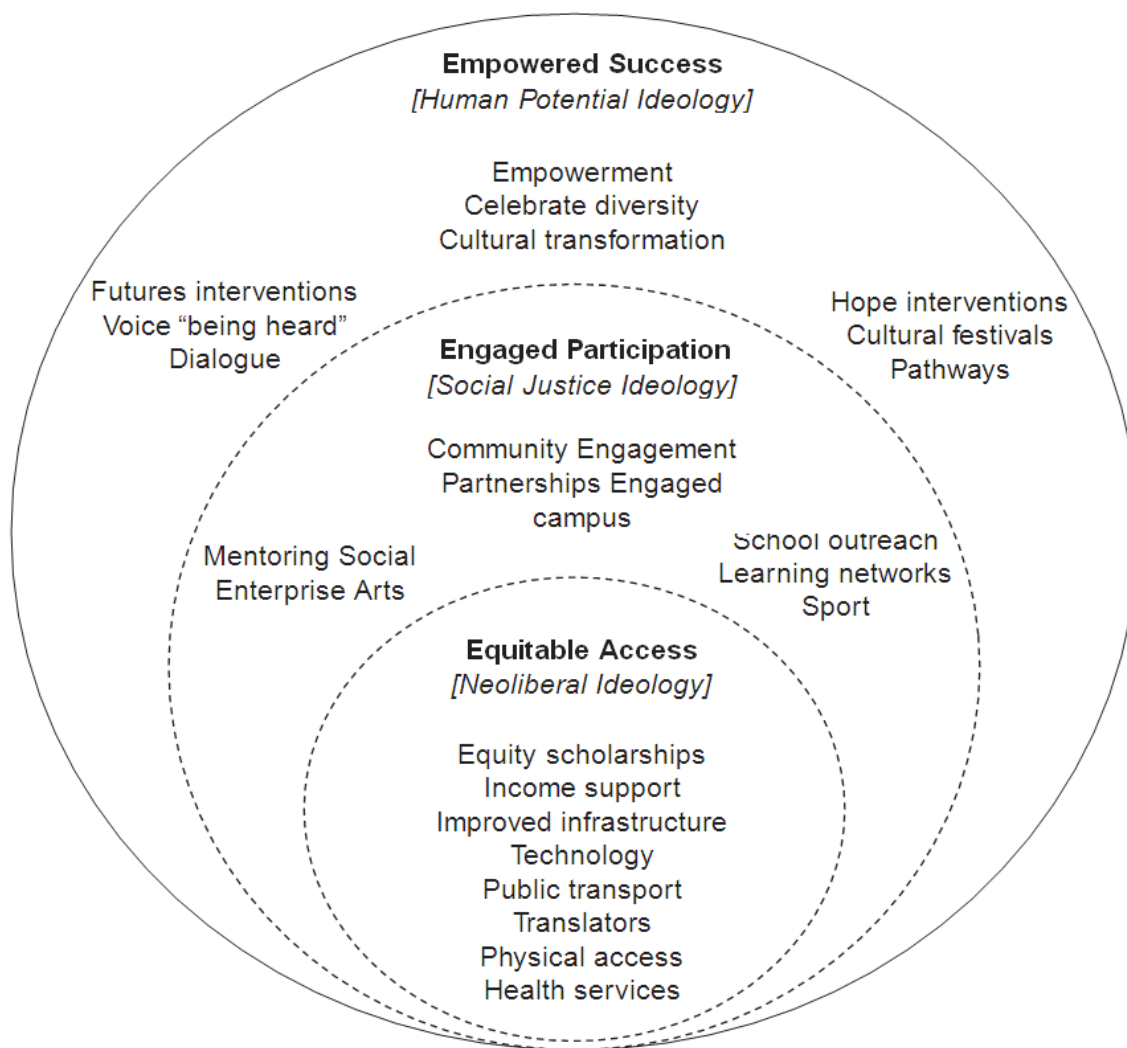


Figure 1: Access, participation and success in social inclusion interventions. *Source:* J. M. Gidley (2009), in Gidley et.al. (2010).

The Human Potential Ideology is the one that incorporates all the other ideologies, reaching it being the ultimate goal in one's life. The current research fits the above theory, not only because it aims at achieving the ultimate goal for everyone, but because it is based on widening participation, which can be achieved only through such policies and measure which are ensuring that access takes place. According to Tonks and Farr (2003), access to higher education is “merely the starting point” whereas the final goal of access policies is the successful participation in higher education.

1.3. Widening participation

The reason for approaching the subject of participation in higher education with a special focus on the “under-represented” is due to the results of the interaction of several factors. Groups such as the Roma are seen as the non-participant since they have been historically excluded, mainly due to their social origins. Moreover, other factors such as the socio-economic disadvantage, the area where they live, discrimination, educational background (including the quality of the school attended) and students’ educational or professional aspirations, are contributing to the low number of students belonging to groups such as the Roma, within the higher education institutions.

Widening participation can be regarded as a strategy for change since the social benefits of inclusion in higher education can have long term effects both for the individual and the society he/she lives in. In his article *The wider social benefits of higher education: What do we do about them?* Murray (2009) looks at both individual and social benefits, both earnings-related benefits, but also to wider benefits such as greater life satisfaction or better functioning society. The benefits mentioned include: tolerance and expanded social networks, contribution to the economy, cohesiveness in society, political participation, health and wellbeing, lower crime propensity, higher earning potential, better parenting and others.

When it comes to higher education, participation represents “the proportion of the population that takes advantage of some form of higher education” (Stafford et.al., 1984). Even though the literature agrees that access is mainly “about numbers” and that “access without success is simply no access”, it is essential to focus on access and expansion policies in order to increase participation in higher education, the “numbers” representing in this case a solid base.

As stated earlier, the aim of this thesis is to assess what are the factors that influence participation in higher education from the access perspective, which is the first step for social inclusion. The paper attempts to explain participation through several independent variables

such as the role of the inclusive HE policies, political representatives, nongovernmental organizations, society, universities policies, educational institutions, scholarship providers.

1.4. Access as Social Inclusion

As Bibbings (2006) states, the umbrella of widening participation includes a variety of practices starting from outreach, admissions, students support and other means that stimulate participation. The aim of this section is to narrow down the focus of this paper, that is access to higher education, and present some of the existent debates, measures and policies which have as a main goal the social inclusion in HE.

1.4.1. Merit

In a recent study on equity access to HE in Brazil, McCowan (2007) claims that there is a shift from the initial use of the term *equity* in educational policy, as equality of opportunity, to *equity* as a “false meritocracy”. According to McCowan (2007), besides the pre-requisite of minimum preparation, academic experience and ability, there are two criteria as a basis for equitable access. A first criterion states that “there should be sufficient places so that all the members of society who so desire and who have a minimum level of preparation, can participate in HE”. A second criterion targets “those individuals who should have a fair opportunity of obtaining a place in an institution of their choice”. As far as the first criterion is concerned, McCowan claims that an equitable system should have “an entry system that does not discriminate on unfair grounds” but of course with its own admission criteria. As far as the latter is concerned, when there is a high competition for places in HE, the system should have tighter selection policies. It can be concluded that there is a high probability that freshmen will get admitted within the HE system based on their merit, capacity and perseverance. Moreover, it is not only the university that has the power to decide on widening access but also other factors such as the affordability of education, the funding, the elitism or the meritocracy (Florea and Horvath, 2009).

1.4.2. Admission Policies

State and universities admission policies represent decisive factors when discussing about access and groups presenting a risk of social exclusion from the HE systems. While in some countries having a Matura exam or a Diploma of Completion of Secondary Education (see Bulgaria, Austria, France or Romania) is a prerequisite for entering HE, others might have softer general admission requirements according to particular programs or universities while some others might incorporate more options, depending on the tradition of that country HE system. According to the Romanian National Education Law, universities are allowed to set their own admission policies (interview, written/ oral exam, practical exam) but respecting the national legal framework. Usually the universities admission policies are design according to the institutional capacity of the university. Chapters 3 and 4 will provide a more detailed description on universities admission policies for different types of students and the specific financial packages. What should be remembered from here is that admission policies have a significant impact in ensuring social inclusion within the system.

With regards to the admission policies, it is important mentioning the affirmative action program for Roma students in Romania implemented through an annual number of tuition free places for Roma students. The topic of affirmative action for Roma as a policy answer to Roma inclusion in secondary and tertiary level has been researched also in relation with the Serbian Roma case. According to Rakovic (2010), “affirmative action is a common phrase for inclusive policies designed in order to improve the status of historically marginalized groups in the fields of politics, trade market, education or societal life in general”. According to Surdu and Szira (2009), the main reason for adopting affirmative action measures is to provide equal access and chances for those minority groups that are marginalized or discriminated. In addition, the authors are arguing that the main objectives of affirmative action are equity, equal chances and diversity, objectives which can be achieved

through specific measures in fields such as education, labor market, and others (Surdu and Szira, 2009).

As it can be concluded, the inclusion policies require commitment and responsibility both in taking the “right decisions” but also in ensuring that these decisions are transposed in real life and are implemented and that their objectives are achieved. The process of policy making is a complex one, in most of the cases the interaction between the actors is difficult to follow due to existing actors at both the vertical and horizontal level, complexity explained through the interest groups, decision-makers, implementers, target groups, partners and others. The following chapter will focus on actors’ roles (policy-makers, implementers, policy targets) and their impact and instruments in ensuring Roma inclusion within the HE system, analysis that will assess the commitment, the responsibility, but also the impact and the importance of the actors and their roles when it comes to Roma participation in HE.

Chapter 2 - The Role and the Impact of Policy-Makers

Before proceeding further into the role of policy-makers, implementers and policy targets, this chapter will start by giving an overview on the policy-cycle and will position the above mentioned actors in the policy context of HE policies for Roma in Romania. This chapter has in its center the role and impact of policy-makers and therefore, based on the existing policy documents will provide an overview of the policies and measures initiated mainly by the MERYS, its partners and interest groups with regards to Roma social inclusion policies in higher education. The chapter will continue with assessing the impact of the policy-makers on the Roma participation in higher education.

The policy cycle is considered to be the most prominent perspective in the field of policy analysis. The policy process develops gradually through phases or stages which contribute in categorizing actors and their actions. Jann & Weigrich (2007) agree that the conventional way for describing the policy process is made up by the following stages:

- *agenda setting* (a political process in which political attention is attached to a policy problem, the problem is put on the agenda for further public action)
- *policy formulation* and *decision-making* (problems, proposals and demands are transformed into government programs)
- *implementation* (the stage of execution or enforcement of a policy by the responsible institutions and organizations)
- *evaluation* and *termination* (assessment of impact and intended outcomes of the policy)

The above stages of the policy cycle show that this instrument is a tool that brings together elements which contribute in organizing governments and actors, in developing a chronological framework for policy-making but also in bringing expertise and knowledge in governments attempts in providing goods for its citizens. The above stages imply a certain level of power, a hierarchical structure which explains the effects of the decision-making powers and their continuation.

In the following chapters I will make the assumption that policy-makers, implementers and policy targets can be found in the policy-cycle stages: policy-makers in the policy formulation and decision-making stage, implementers in the implementation stage and beneficiaries, or policy targets, within the evaluation and termination stage. The *agenda-setting* phase is a complex stage which involves the interaction of all the actors involved, but their degree of involvement varies to a great extent.

Even though the current research has as main focus the tracking of the actors (Government and Ministry of Education representatives, Roma political leaders, university representatives, school inspectorates, NGOs, Roma students and parents) a clear position of them in the policy cycle is not fixed, it can leave space for changing roles, but it is assumed that based on the power share they can be grouped as following:

- policy-makers: Government and Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports (MERYYS), Roma political leaders
- implementers: MERYYS, university representatives, school inspectorates, Roma political representatives, NGOs
- policy targets: Roma students and parents, society in general

1. Policy-makers at the European level

In the last three years, there have been elaborated several strategies or frameworks aiming at the social dimension of higher education, including the social inclusion aspect:

- Europe 2020, which has as one of the main objectives promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship in education.
- Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the Social Dimension of Education and Training, which stressed the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for access to quality education, as well as equity in treatment and outcomes which are independent of socio-economic background and other factors which may lead to educational disadvantage.

- The Council conclusions from 28 November 2011 on the Modernization of Higher Education, aimed at promoting and ensuring access for under-represented groups and minimizing higher education drop-out rates.
- The Bucharest Communiqué 2012, which aimed at promoting measures to widen access and improve quality within the EHEA countries higher education systems.
- ET 2020 peer learning activity on policies and practice to reduce drop-out and increase completion rates in higher education, which was focusing on approaches for improving higher education completing rates.

In 2013, as a follow up of the Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Council meeting and of all the above mentioned frameworks a new base was set up for the Council of the European Union conclusions with regards to the social dimension of higher education. Such conclusions should be seen as guidelines for the member states and relevant stakeholders, who should consider adopting policy objectives such as:

- increasing access, participation and completion rates of under-represented or disadvantaged groups
- developing strategies that aim at providing information about educational opportunities, including counseling services
- assessing the existing funding and financial support schemes and their impact on participation

After identifying the existing policy frameworks with regards to education at the European level, it is worth questioning why Governments will pledge to such policies or measures. According to Furlong and Cartmel (2009) “from the government’s perspective, the provision of higher education is strongly linked to international competitiveness and economic prosperity”, element that makes sense in the context of the European Lisbon strategy which aimed at making the European Union “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more

and better jobs and greater social cohesion”, an unachieved objective, which is still one of the unfulfilled objectives at the EU region level.

2. Policy-makers at the National level

In terms of public policies, the Public Policy Units within the Ministries, together with designated departments, elaborate public policies send them to the Government Secretary General Public Policy Unit (within the Ministry of Internal Affairs) and ensure that the legislation is respected and the policies are implemented. In most of the cases the MERYYS is the main initiator when it comes to tertiary education legislation but also senators, deputies, representatives of different Ministries (e.g. Labor), the prefecture or county councils. Moreover, there is a range of national policy actors that might be also initiators: National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (e.g. petitions), Centrul Educatia 2000+ (CEDU), Soros Foundation Romania, National Council for Higher Education Financing, National Agency for Roma but also international actors: WB, UN, UNICEF, UNESCO, FRA.

2.1. The Romanian Government

At the Romanian Government level, in the last decade there have been developed several public policies designed for Romanian Roma, policies that aim at improving the condition of Roma, eradicating poverty or social inclusion strategies. Among the many measures within this policies there can be found specific ones targeting Roma education. According to Gabriela Gruber (2012) the main public policy documents adopted by the Romanian Government are:

- The Strategy of the Romanian Government to Improve the Condition of Roma People implemented between 2001 and 2010 and had as main objective to encourage Roma people participation in 10 areas, improving the access to primary and secondary education being among them. This strategy was implemented through the Romanian Government ministries' representatives and with the help of the existing Roma organizations. In 2004

the National Agency for Roma (ANR) was created and it had an executive role in the monitoring and implementation process of existent and future national programs and strategies.

- The National Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Plan implemented between 2002 and 2012, aimed at stimulating Roma participation and raising awareness among the Roma communities about their social situation, including the legal aspect of education.
- The Joint Social Inclusion Memorandum was implemented between 2005 and 2010, contributed in improving the dialog and cooperation among the public structures but also between the public structures and civil society and NGOs. The national coordinator is the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, ANR being responsible for implementing the measures targeting the Roma people. This document provided several priority actions among which the measure of providing extended school attendance of Roma children in kindergarten, primary or vocational education, as well as stimulating their participation at secondary and higher education;
- The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 is a political commitment at international level of twelve governments in the Central and Eastern Europe is implemented at the national level by the Romanian Government and ANR.
- The Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Inclusion of the Romanian Citizens Belonging to Roma Minority for the Period 2012-2020, is one of the most recent strategies for ensuring Roma people social inclusion in areas such as education, labor market, health, housing, culture and social infrastructure. The first objective of this strategy is to ensure equal, free and universal access to education for Roma in the public education system in order to achieve economic growth and to develop a knowledge-based society.

2.1.1. Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport

According to Gheorghe Sarau the Romanian initiatives for Roma education were not developed only after 1989, there were several programs between 1949-1951 or 1975, programs developed by the teachers themselves and not from the central policy centre. These types of initiatives prove not only that the phenomenon is not a new one but also that the Roma have a little tradition in the Romanian educational system.

After 1990, the MERYS set up the Educational Direction for National Minorities, which included the position for a Roma school inspector. At the secondary, pre-university education there were programs aiming at preparing Roma teachers to teach Romani language and literature, at appointing Roma educational Methodists for Roma children schooling, but also at creating educational materials and tools for Roma pupils.

As far as the university level is concerned, starting with the academic year 1992-1993, the Ministry of Education started the positive discrimination program at University of Bucharest, consisting of 10 special places for Roma students studying social work. Starting with the next academic year the program expanded to the other big universities from Romania (Cluj, Iasi, Timisoara). Moreover in the same year Prof. Sarau organizes the first elective course on Romani language at University of Bucharest until 2001. This idea expanded and a department of *hindi-romani* was created within the same university. According to Surdu & Szira (2009), besides the main objective of providing ‘equal chances and access to high quality services to marginalized or discriminated minorities, the goal of affirmative action in Romania was ‘to support Roma people efforts in consolidating the democratic, civic and cultural representation Roma people needed’.

In order to enhance Roma access to tertiary education the Romanian Government policies contain measures such as the annual provision of special places in high-schools (around 3000 per year) and universities (around 500 per year) for Roma. According to the

Ministry of Education orders (Order 4334/2012 and Order 3.894/2013) for 2012-2013 academic year there were 555 reserved places for the Roma students in state universities, out of 62.380 state subsidized places for mainstream students, and for the 2013-2014 academic year 594 reserved places for Roma out of 61.226 subsidized places for mainstream students. As can be noted the affirmative action program is expanding slowly, the number of places reserved for Roma increasing slightly year by year.

The above numbers provided by the Ministry of Education are allocated according to the capacity of the available programs/ departments/universities, the number of previously state subsidized places but also according to the proposals made by the universities, by National Council for Higher Education Financing (CNFIS), by the General Directorate for Education in the Language of National Minorities with the advice and counseling of the Roma organizations. The criteria based on which the Roma places are distributed depends on the advice and counseling received from rectors, the County Offices for Roma and Roma representatives (national and/or local political constituencies).

In 1998, Prof. Sarau together with other professors interested in minorities education, proposed to the Ministry of Education a strategic vision for Roma education, a vision which had as a main principle to think and apply together with the Roma the designed programs for Roma, this vision result being the 2001 *'Governmental Strategy for Improving the Roma situation'*. Another strategic program coming from the MERYS is the creation of 42 school inspectorates in each county, each of them having an inspector assigned for Roma education.

In 1998- 1999 at the university level the number of the special places increased from 40 to 149, the number of the universities hosting the Roma students increased also. Moreover, Prof. Sarau, together with the representatives of the Roma party proposes to have a Romani language and Literature section within the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bucharest, the Ministry of Education providing 10 special places for the proposed section.

From 2001 until 2006, together with the UNICEF Romania representatives, MERYYS provided scholarships for Roma students who were teaching Romani language in schools, students coming from University of Bucharest. Another joint program was UNICEF contribution to the annual summer school where around 50 Roma students are prepared to become Romani Language and History teacher in primary and secondary schools..

2.2. Roma political parties and politicians and Roma governmental agencies

The topic of Roma politics and political representation in Romania is beyond the scope of this thesis and in order to explore the topic it would require a similar research on inclusion, participation and representation of Roma within the Romanian politics. However the area of Roma political representation has gain interest recently and research started to develop in this area (see McGarry, 2010).

The participative political culture is the result of a high level of culture, management, instruction and education. Through political participation citizens have to play a major role in influencing and taking decisions. According to Burtea (2001), “only after 1990, did the Romanian Roma have a direct political participation”. Moreover, in a study published by Romani CRISS, Bleahu and Frunzaru (2005) state that Roma started to have quite strong civic and political organization during the interwar period and it lasted until the late 1930s. Even from those times Roma were asking for access to education, professional qualifications and so on. Of course, after the rise of the communist regime, these started to cease. During the communist period the Romanian Communist Party had a *Program for Gipsy Integration*, which also contained a measure of increasing the educational level of Roma.

After 1990, there was an explosion of Roma political constituencies whose main aim was to obtain rights through political actions. Between 1990 and 2004 there were around 15 political constituencies who participated through their representatives in the national elections for the Deputy Chamber, the Party of The Roma (PR) succeeding to get 0,55% of the 2004

results. In 2000, due to the high number of Roma supporters for the non-Roma Social Democrat Party (SDP), the Party of The Roma made a political alliance with it, event that lead to the recognition of Roma political representation. As a follow-up of this protocol, the SDP got engaged in implementing the Romanian Government strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma.

In the 2004 electoral campaign many of the Romanian political parties created alliances with Roma parties and bought in their electoral offer several offers targeting Roma, especially Roma education through promoting Roma identity and culture in the educational system, or financial support for students.

More recently, the PR proves to be one of the most appreciated parties among the Roma. In each county it has a representative and within the county it aims to have youth or women constituencies. Among the other still active Roma political parties it is worth mentioning Roma Democratic Union and Civic Democratic Roma Alliance. The latest being a new party with educated young Roma as leaders.

As the focus of this research is to look at policy or legislative educational initiatives coming from Roma politicians and policy makers it is worth mentioning that currently Roma have 3 representatives in the Romanian Parliament. Nicolae Paun (Party of the Roma) who has had 10 legislative proposals until now out of which only one was adopted as law, none of them being concerned with education. Madalin Voicu who has 28 legislative proposals, 4 of them has been adopted and none of them connected to education. Another Roma member of the Romanian Parliament is Damian Draghici who submitted 3 legislative proposals out of which 1 is connected with education, more exactly with students' monthly allowance.

In Romania there is a strong link between the Parliament and the National Institute for Public Policies, the latter having the role of monitoring the activities of the Parliament. In this

context parliamentarians are involved in policy-making regarding Roma issues through monitoring activities but also through positions within public policy centers, such as “Aven Amentza” Roma Center for Public Policies.

In the next section of this chapter I will focus on the activities of the party of the Roma since it is the most representative at the national level and it has a decentralized structure and county representative. The PR national and local representatives proved to show openness when it comes about Roma issues, projects, programs or partnership opportunities. Before analyzing the county representatives, first I will focus on Mr. Nicolae Paun actions and activities initiated recently, which are connected with Roma public policies and education. In 2009 the event called “Roma- A priority in national and European Public Policies” was organized in the Romanian Parliament and touched upon social policies and Roma youngsters access to education.

The national party leader showed interest in stimulating transparency, accountability and integrity with regard to the implementation of educational projects targeting Roma. In this respect the national representatives’ main target of criticism was ANR, which was responsible in 2009 for implementing 5 projects out of which 2 were on Roma youth education. ANR has been blamed for not maintaining a relationship with other central and local bodies and for not being financially accountable to the donors. In terms of secondary and tertiary education the Roma Party has run several campaigns or established partnerships. One of the partnerships is the school-community partnership, which is considered to be an influential factor in Roma access to education. The partnership implied PR involvement in the training of school mediators, who will contribute to supporting young Roma through the educational process.

The other two important campaigns run by the PR is the national campaign “Education- A priority for Roma” and had raising awareness among Roma about the importance of education as its main aim. The campaign was run during the summer period

and included around 4000 Roma from all around the country. The other campaign is called ‘We give you the recommendation’, which is run at the national level, through the county representatives. The aim of this campaign is to encourage young Roma to pursue further studies at the high-school or university level on the places reserved for Roma students (the affirmative action program). Since its inception the campaign gave more than 2000 recommendation letters for Roma freshmen, such a letter coming either from a Roma party or Roma organization being a prerequisite in accessing the tuition free places. Of course giving a recommendation does not imply that the student got enrolled in the secondary or tertiary educational system.

As a conclusion on Roma political representation and on what has been discussed until now with regards to legislative and policy initiatives at the national level, it can be claimed that Roma started to have “corridors of power” but unfortunately they do not hold decision making capacity and the decisions affecting Roma are taken by the “others” (McGarry, 2010). Moreover it is speculated that since the domestic Romanian Roma political structures do not have the proper decision-making power, this lead to the creation of Roma organized structures such as associations, NGOs or transnational organizations, structures which according to their capacity are either financing or implementing measures, policies or projects. In this regard the next chapter will look at implementers and it will examine the role of this type of organized structures.

Chapter 3 - The Role and Impact of Implementers

According to Schneider and Ingram (1990), public policy “attempts to get people to do things they otherwise would not have done, or it enables them to do things they might not have done otherwise”. This premise implies that, in order for an individual or specific group to participate or comply with a policy that policy has to provide adequate resources and strategies. For the purpose of this research implementers will be perceived as a ‘bridge’ between policy-makers and beneficiaries, in many cases the border between policy-makers and implementers being very narrow.

1. The Ministry of Education and its agencies

In the previous chapter it was stated that the main responsible body for the implementation of the existing social inclusion policies for Roma are the Romanian Government and its National Agency for Roma. Moreover the objectives of these policies and their way of touching upon the Roma education were identified. The most relevant policy in this current research is the affirmative action program through the special places for Roma (tuition free) both at the high-school and university level, the annual 3000 places allotted for Roma in high-school being a base for Roma access to higher education. However the existence of the affirmative action does not mean that Roma freshmen are limited to get access to high-school or universities only through this program but they are free and sometimes encourage to access the mainstream places available for the Romanian citizens.

When it comes to the implementation of higher education policies in Romania, MERYS provides the total number of state subsidized places allotted in state universities (which are responsible for distributing the places with their programs) annually, by a Ministerial order, based on the National Law of Education. This is done according to the universities’ capacity, advice and proposals but also according to the National Council for Higher Education Financing. This order makes reference to secondary education, BA, MA

and PhD levels, and it includes a variety of freshmen from mainstream citizens, Romanian citizens living abroad, to Moldavian citizens and Roma. It is worth mentioning that besides the state subsidized places, MERYs provides also scholarships for the beneficiaries of this policy, as stated earlier Roma students are eligible to apply for both categories.

2. School inspectorates

According to Lipsky (1980), public servants' actions "constitute the services 'delivered' by the government". This type of public servants "who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work" are called *street-level bureaucrats* (Lipsky, 1980). This category incorporates teachers, public officers and other law enforcement personnel, social workers, judges, public lawyers' and many other public servants who ensure access to programs and services provided by the government (Lipsky, 1980). For the purpose of this study, school inspectorates, political parties, and university personnel are considered to be part of the *street-level bureaucrats* category. As far as the Roma freshmen are concerned within this policy, once the Ministerial Order is published in the Official Gazette, the Ministry of Education shares it with the General Direction for Education in the Languages of National Minorities and to General Directorate for Higher Education.

The school inspectorate has in each county a Roma representative who is in charge of reaching out potential candidates. The school inspectorates are responsible mainly for the primary and secondary level and therefore they are focusing on ensuring the access of Roma candidates to the places reserved at the high-school level. According to the school inspector on Roma education (Bistrita-Nasaud County), the school inspectorate is organizing orientation and counseling sessions both with Roma parents and candidates, sessions where they decide upon their preferences. The inspector claimed that they are in partnership with the few Roma NGOs in the county (such as Ardelian Roma Association) or the county representative of the Party of the Roma when it comes to Roma primary and secondary

education but little is done on the higher education aspect, due to their weak capacity but also due to their main focus which is quality of education for Roma, education in Romani language and access to preschool, primary and secondary education. It is worth mentioning that these Roma school inspectors are usually not Roma and they are responsible for other minorities as well, such as Hungarians or Germans. When asked whether they can provide data on the existent number of Roma students in high-school, the inspector recommended to address this issue to the Roma representatives that is Roma politicians and organizations within the county (inspector on Roma education Maramures County), fact that explains how data are collected at the local level but also how policies are implemented.

3. Universities

The role of the General Directorate for Higher Education is to ensure that there is cooperation and communication between universities and the Directorate but also between universities, Roma representatives and Roma candidates, universities being the main service providers, their funding being dependent from the Directorate.

In this sense, the steps required for accessing a special place for Roma students are the following: firstly the rectors together with Roma representatives from local administration and Roma representative structures are supposed to meet and discuss Roma youth field of interest and further advice and counseling. According to the data provided by representatives of University of the North, in this stage of the process, there have never been Roma representatives available for such a meeting, even though the secretary gave several phone calls. The next step is for the Roma candidates to present themselves to the secretary of the university and request to get enrolled in a specific field of studies on the reserved places for Roma. After that the university is processing the information and then the candidate's application package is expected to be submitted; the package should contain all the mandatory documents for enrollment in a higher education institution, including a *Baccalaureate* diploma, and a recommendation letter from a Roma organization in which should be

mentioned that the candidate belongs to the Roma minority. The representatives of the University of the North claim that the maximum number of Roma students within their university is around 10 per year and only few of them graduate from the programs while the others drop-out after the first year of studies.

4. Roma Political Parties

According to McGarry (2010), Roma political parties are “the most legitimate organizing structures of Roma representation”; moreover they are recognized at the national level as being the “voice of Roma”, Roma people got trust in the Roma political parties since their inception due to their commitment to improving the situation of Roma.

The main contribution brought by the Party of the Roma with regard to access and participation in higher education is reflected firstly through the national campaigns such as ‘We give you the recommendation’ which is done with the help of Roma students who are already enrolled in HE institutions (Party of the Roma representative, Bistrita-Nasaud County). This campaign proved to have great effect and a lot of young supporters, especially students, claim that this is the way through which they show their gratitude towards those who made a change in the life of Roma youth through these opportunities (says one of the interviewed students). Besides the main goal of outreaching freshmen and giving them the necessary documents for the application package, this campaign stimulates Roma youth to pursue further studies but also to acknowledge their Roma identity and become activists, fighting for the Roma cause (Party of the Roma representative, Bistrita-Nasaud County).

5. NGOs

In the previous chapter it was stated that NGOs can take different positions: part of the interest groups through lobby and advocacy, policy-makers when their capacity allows it but also as service providers and this is the case when they are seen as complementary implementers. In UNICEF’s Review of Roma Education Initiatives in Central and South-

Eastern Europe (2010) it is proved that NGOs, local authorities and educational institutions had the greatest role in the implementation process.

Ivan et. al. (2010), state that throughout Romania, the civil society sector is involved, along with the government to provide services, its role as a ‘watchdog’ in implementing public policies in educational sector being of great importance, NGOs being more motivated to ‘solve local problems than state public bodies’. Moreover, according to Ivan et. al. (2010) when it comes to educational services, Romanian NGOs are in partnership with a range of actors starting with MERYYS, local authorities, schools, other NGOs, but also communities.

Stroschein’s (2002) in his study on “NGOs Strategies for Hungarian and Roma minorities in Central Europe” argues that NGOs are engaged in distributing information on topics such as grants, contacts, human rights, research results and so on. In this study it is claimed that when it comes to NGOs strategies for Roma, these are mainly *status-raising strategies* whivh aim to “pass the idea that disenfranchised minorities, particularly the Roma, need not accept second-hand status within their own country”. The most common fields of action are education, advocacy and other areas of community building for Roma. The indicators used for evaluating these strategies can be reflected through the number of secondary school graduates, whether the members of the ‘disenfranchised’ group attend university or they become integrated in the work force (Stroschein, 2002).

In this research a special attention will be given to one of the interviewed NGOs representatives, from Maramures County. This NGO is a Roma grassroots organization, made up of 30 young Roma (out of which 5-10 are active members) interested in the development of disadvantaged communities, especially Roma communities, and improving their living conditions through increasing Roma youth access to education. Besides this, the organization provides social services and trainings in different areas. In terms of education, one of the

priorities is to promote education among Roma communities, including work with Roma parents but also promoting promising young Roma among the non-Roma community.

When it comes to higher education, the role of the organization is to inform Roma high-school students about the studying opportunities at the university level. In this respect it uses community meetings, social media, and youth meeting to inform and advise potential candidates, “sometimes Roma youth is looking for me, since I am living in the community” says the organization’s representative. In terms of current situation of Roma students in high-school and universities, it was said that the demand for education at secondary and tertiary level went down recently due to the high poverty level among Roma; if in 2011-2012 academic year there were around 200 high-school Roma students, and around 10 university students, this academic year only 40 high-school students and 7 university students got enrolled. It was also stated that there are Roma students who choose to go and study in another county, in universities which they prefer, these students being assumed to have a better socio-economic status. The organization provides support counseling for Roma students during their studies and also volunteering opportunities within the organization.

The NGO representative claimed that it has very good collaboration with North University of Baia Mare (even an elective course on Romani language was held for one semester), with the school inspectorate but she also praised the PR from the county and their annual campaign, moreover she claimed that she thinks that at the national levels the leader of the Party of the Roma is striving to keep the affirmative action program at high-school and university level. Both the PR representative and the school inspector see the Roma organization as being one of the most important actors in Roma students access to higher education. Furthermore all the interviewed students from the county said that the Roma NGOs contributed the most in their access to higher education.

6. Scholarship providers

The topic of widening participation and social inclusion in higher education has been analyzed in relation to the social and economic factors (Stafford et al., 1884) but also in relation to the existing financial aid and its effects on the access to higher education of students from disadvantaged background (John and Noell, 1989; Hansen, 1983). Most of these studies agree that financial aid packages, of whatever type, have a positive impact on students' enrollment decisions.

Currently in Romania there is a variety of scholarships available for the enrolled students such as performance based scholarships, merit based, study, social scholarships, scholarships for students coming from rural areas and so on. Additionally universities can set-up their own scholarship schemes¹. Besides their positive impact these scholarship schemes have a weak side and that is the fact that these offers are coming only after the students receive the confirmation of enrolment within a university, and it involves a quite high competition among students for getting one.

As said in the previous chapter, the Romanian social inclusion policies and plans include also measures targeting Roma in the higher education system. As noted the National Agency for Roma is the main actor when it comes to the implementation. In order to achieve their main objectives, in 2010 ANR provided 10 scholarships per year for MA level and 30 scholarships for PhD level. Usually these scholarships are project-based and have no continuity and are not replicated at the BA level since, this would contribute to the fulfilling of Roma students' needs.

Within the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) framework Roma Education Fund (REF) emerged as one of the largest foundation working on Roma Education. One of its

¹ West University of Timisoara provides scholarships to its full-time students (BA, MA) based on students GPA, without taking in consideration whether the students are studying on state subsidized places or they are paying for the studies. More at: <http://www.uvt.ro/upload/pdf/regulament-acordarea-burselor-2011-2012-06-12-2011.pdf>

largest programs is the Scholarship Program (SP), through which REF pledged to expand access to higher education and which offers scholarships for tertiary level Roma students. According to REF Annual Report 2012, the main goal of the SP is to ‘contribute to the emergence of a critical mass of intellectual Roma with Higher education degrees who are prepared to become agents for change in their respective communities and countries’.

REF operates in 16 countries and it has a Romanian office. Even though REF has 4 main scholarship schemes (Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program- RMUSP, Law and Humanities Program- LHP, Roma International Scholarship Program- RISP and Roma Health Scholarship Program- RHSP), currently the two main important ones in the Romanian case are RMUSP and RISP. According to the data provided by REF, Romania is one of the countries with the highest demand for scholarships. The following table shows the demand for REF higher education scholarships in the last four academic years and the number of awarded scholarships in Romania:

Romania		2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
RMUSP	Number of applications	497	536	536
	Number of awarded scholarships	268	320	322

Table 1: An overview of Roma Education Fund Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program 2010-2013

In the 2012 Annual Report Digest- Closing the Gap, REF claims that its SP has ‘reached nearly a quarter of the estimated Romani university student body in Romania’ that 24.3 % out of 13.000 Roma students. When asked about the available financing opportunities for Roma students at the university level both the school inspectorates and Roma political representatives claimed that they do not know about REF’s work, only the NGO representative from Maramures County acknowledging REF importance in the Roma higher education scene. Through the NGO, the students are being informed about the application criteria, stages and deadlines.

Chapter 4 - The Role and Impact of Policy Targets

The *circularity* of the policy cycle implies that policies are made to solve individuals or groups problems and in the final stage these policies are evaluated to see whether they achieved their initial goals or not (Jann & Weigrich, 2007). The aim of this research is to assess to what extent the existent social inclusion higher education policies targeting Roma are effective and to identify what the positive factors that are influencing Romanian Roma participation in higher education are. After analyzing both the policy-makers and the implementers, this chapter focuses on students' assessment of both mentioned categories of actors and will conclude with the students' surveys main findings.

According to the 2011 census results and a recent Romani CRISS press release, in Romania the number of Roma students pursuing HE doubled in comparison with the 2002 census data, therefore there is a rise from 7% to 14% of the Roma population participating in the Romanian HE system. Romani CRISS claims that this is a sign that Roma are willing to get educated even though they live in deep poverty (75% of the Roma). As Angéla Kóczé states, we assume that those Roma “who have graduated from college or university are taking the responsibility for working on increasing Roma students level of education and therefore, they will support Roma youngsters participation in post-secondary education and tertiary education”.

The surveyed students are coming from 22 counties, most of them are females (57%) and only 37% of them graduated, the rest are still students. One of the findings is that 60% of the surveyed students are studying on the reserved places for Roma in universities. When asked how did they knew about the affirmative action program 23% responded they knew about it from NGOs, followed 21% from high-schools (including mediator, headmaster and teachers), 21% from friends, 14% from relatives and the rest through social media, Roma representatives and universities. In this context we cannot claim that the Roma

representatives' campaigns are not effective but it might be assumed that the target of these campaigns is not the adequate one or that those students simply do not enroll in universities; however at the high-school level these campaigns might be more effective.

Out of the 100 surveyed students 85% were scholarship beneficiaries. The most frequent scholarship provider is REF with 65%, followed by university social scholarship 22%, study scholarship 11%, and the rest being merit-based scholarship recipients. The existence of a financing opportunity during the studies presented a great variance in students' responses: 10% stated that for them this was the most important element in their access to university. Moreover students' personal motivation and their relatives support proved to be the most decisive factor, followed by their high-school teachers and friends. Since most of the students are studying on the reserved places for Roma, only 36% stated that their GPA and previous academic achievement was important in their admission to university.

When asked about the support of the school inspectorate in their enrollment and admission to universities, 40% of the surveyed students answered that this question did not applied in their case. As expected, there was little impact from the school inspectorate side on students' access to universities, in most of the cases. As far as the support from universities and Roma political parties is concerned, students answers varied, the level of importance and impact brought by these varying considerably and only in around 20% of the cases the question did not applied.

In conclusion, students perceive that those factors that are directly concerned with their own capacity skills, knowledge or motivation contributed to their access to higher education. Moreover they admit that there were also other "external" factors but their contribution was assessed as secondarily, since students see themselves as the ones who have the decision-making power when it comes to their own choices.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Roma is Europe's most disadvantaged group and it has aimed at addressing the issue of access to higher education through the social inclusion theory of access, participation and success. As noted, this research did not focus on a specific policy but it aimed at encompassing the few policy initiatives targeting Roma inclusion in the Romanian higher education system.

After identifying the existent social inclusion policies in the Romanian higher education system, this thesis focused on tracking the actors' role and impact in the policy making process, including the implementation stage, and their contribution to Roma students access to higher education. Based on the previous chapters' analysis, this section evaluates the effects and contribution of the three main categories of actors (policy-makers, implementers and policy targets) on Roma students' access to higher education, in terms of how each of the actors assess each other but also how each actor see itself in the Romanian Roma social inclusion policies.

When it comes to assessing the role and impact of policy-makers and Roma inclusion in the Romanian HE system first there should be a clear distinction between different levels of policy-makers. In the Romanian case the "supranational" policy-makers are at the European level and it includes policies for each European Higher Education Area. The implementers of these policies are the National Governments, which at their turn try to address more specifically the international policy through national policies and according to these policies there are specific measures assigned to be implemented. The main role of both supranational and national policy makers is of high importance, since they are establishing the legitimacy of the social inclusion policies and frameworks.

Taking into consideration that this thesis aims at answering the question: *What are the main positive factors influencing Romanian Roma participation in higher education?*, the

next section will focus on the implementers and it will use as system of evaluation a grading scale from 1 to 5, indicating the degree of influence as follows: 1 – quite influential, 2- influential, 3- significantly influential, 4- very influential, 5- most influential and NA- not applicable, no data. The table will be read horizontally (e.g. MERYs self-assessment X, MERYs school inspectorate assessment Y), in the last row being represented the average score for each actor.

Role and Impact of Implementers	MERYs	School Inspectorates	Party of the Roma	NGOs	Universities	Scholarship providers
MERYs	5	3	2	4	5	4
School Inspectorates	5	3	3	4	NA	4
Party of the Roma	5	5	3	5	3	4
NGOs	5	3	2	4	5	5
Universities	5	2	2	4	5	4
Scholarship providers	5	1	2	5	5	5
Average score	5	2.8	2.3	4.3	4.6	4.3

Table 2: The Role and Impact of Implementers

Table 2 put together the assessment and conclusion of the previous chapters' analysis. As it can be concluded MERYs proved to have the highest influence in Roma students' participation in higher education. It is believed that the annually affirmative action program ran in Romania has the greatest impact on Roma freshmen and this is mainly due to its legitimacy. Being a top-down policy, this program aims to ensure that subordinates within MERYs do comply in implementing the policy, moreover the existent 'carrots and sticks approach' (staff salary and/or financing educational institutions) or other game theory strategies induces subordinates to comply and implement the policy, besides the ethical or moral value of inclusion.

Another important factor is the role and impact of universities. According to the National Education Law 2011, in Romania universities are autonomous and therefore they can set up their own admission policies, their funding being dependent in most of the cases on the number of students enrolled. Moreover, universities have the power to decide upon the number of Roma students they can admit on the reserved places for Roma. Universities can run outreach campaigns and promote their departments, scholarship opportunities, discounts and facilities.

The role and impact of NGOs and scholarship providers prove to hold the same position, of *very influential*, since the former have the role of working with the community, with potential candidates and their families and share the available study and financing opportunities. Moreover, NGOs provide student support while compiling the application package, including recommendation letters. The added value of NGOs getting involved and working on Roma education, and higher education is that in this case NGOs do not seek for any gain, the main interest being for the Roma community in general, however, there might be cases when there is a project behind but this might be considered as an ‘externality’. As far as the scholarships providers are concerned, it is known that most of the Roma are coming from a low socio-economic status. The financial package aims to complement students’ status. What is worth noticing is that even though the scholarships awards (REF, university) are known after the academic year started Roma students are highly motivated to start the first academic year if they know there is a financing opportunity.

Even though Roma political representatives and school inspectorate received a lower score, this does not mean they are insignificant but it might be a sign that there can be improvements in their work. As far as the former is concerned, it should report Roma realities and Roma youth’s needs to the political party center and address them, pushing the decision-makers to strive for more funds for Roma students which can be used as financial packages. A

better collaboration with universities and NGOs might be a potential plus, since they have the capacity and knowledge to apply the strategy for outreaching Roma in high-schools.

Roma participation in higher education is an issue of social inclusion, moreover it s a complex area which requires the interaction, commitment and responsibility of all interested actors. As Schneider and Ingram (1990) argue “public policy attempts to get people to do things they otherwise would not have done, or it enables them to do things they might not have done otherwise”. This paper proved that Roma students have the motivation and interest in pursuing higher education studies. It is therefore actors’ responsibility to ensure that the existing tools and mechanism are implemented and the policy goals are achieved.

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