

PUZZLES OF EMPOWERMENT

The significance of capacity building in empowering young Roma

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Ramona-Maria Cara, 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 proper acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material that 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 Roma embody the largest and youngest Europe's minority with an estimated 10 to 12 million people, out of which nearly half are children and youth. In today's Europe, they experience multiple realities of exclusion from political and public life. Various Roma policies and the European Roma movement in general label educated Roma youth as 'role models', 'future leaders', 'elites' and engines for social change at the community level.

This thesis investigates the significance of a capacity building in empowering young Roma and Roma in general. More closely, this thesis conducts an inquiry into the experiences of a capacity building a program for Roma in a widely known international graduate university. The reason that leads me to carry out this investigation is that while being an RAP student, I often heard that the empowerment of the Roma communities depends on the capacity of the educated Roma youth to mobilize their communities in order to produce social changes and foster social inclusion.

Today this thesis contribute to the literature and to challenge the above-mentioned narratives by taking the Roma Access Programs as a case study and by bringing the voice of the Roma students into light vis-a-vis the policy discourses and approaches directly affecting them. I am to demonstrate that empowerment should not have a pivotal role mainly in community capacity building, but rather in human capacities building.

This is a micro-level analysis focusing specifically on the discourses of Roma Initiative Office of the Open Society Foundations (RIO) and Roma students at CEU. The qualitative data is generated by three methods: document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups cross-examined different perceptions of the RIO, CEU and Roma experts related to the roles of the Roma youth within the European Roma movement.

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DEDICATED TO

THOSE WHO HAVE MADE MAJOR SACRIFICES TO HELP THEIR KIDS TO CHASE
THEIR DREAMS AND STUDY OVERSEAS.

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For my Roma ancestors who have died in the name of freedom and justice. This is also
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ABBREVIATIONS

CEU	Central European University
CA	Capability Approach
CEE	Central and Eastern European Countries
EU	European Union
EC	European Comision
ERM	European Roma Movement
ERRC	European Roma Rights Centar
ERM	European Roma Movement
FRA	Agency for Fundamental Rights
REF	Roma Education Fund
RAP	Roma Access Program
REL	Roma English Preparation Program
RIO	Roma Initiative Office
OSF	Open Society Foundation
ERRC	European Roma Rights Centar
UNDP	United Nations develepement Program
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
WB	World Bank

INTRODUCTION

Dispersed across Central and Eastern Europe for centuries, the Roma remain its largest minority. They often face severe discrimination, racism, poverty, oppression and exclusion from the private and public spheres. Due to this massive exclusion of the Roma, alongside with the history of systematic oppression marked by events and traumas such as the slavery of the Roma in different CEE countries and the 'Samudaripen' /Roma Genocide (Kennrick, 1971), the Roma 'elites' have decided to put an end to the centuries of discrimination, by getting united and actively engaging in politics and by challenging power relations within the States. In 1971, at the first World Romani Congress in Orpington near London, the beginning of the nation building process took place. The 'elites' claimed for the self-determination of the Roma (Rodvin, 2013). During the Congress, 23 representatives of 9 countries reinforced the international Roma flag and established the Roma anthem.

As the European Roma Movement emerges new dilemmas are arising and thus complicating the former ones. If years ago the dilemma was how to gain recognition, respect for the Roma's human rights and EU's attention, nowadays the dilemma is how to empower the cohort of Roma youth to take meaningful positions and become leaders in their communities. I find this dilemma very relevant. I agree that investing and empowering Roma youth is a pre-requisite for today's knowledge society. The Roma people does represent not only the largest but also the youngest Europe's minority. An estimation is that there are 10 to 12 million Roma, out of which nearly half are children and youth (European Union Agency for Fundamental Right (FRA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Roma Education Fund (REF). Another possible explanation for the empowerment of Roma youth is highlighted by the European Commission, who divulges that within the public

sphere, the educated Roma youth endure the same challenges and difficulties as the wider Roma society, experiencing multiple realities of exclusion from the political and public life. In like manner, the European Commission indicates that within the private sphere, the Roma youth also ought to challenge the unchangeable social norms and mutual rules.

I ally with the institutions and organizations that claim that investing in Roma youth is a key to political participation and empowerment. Empowerment is a hard political and democratic issue. While being an RAP student, I often heard from different Roma experts, as well as from various international organizations like RIO, that the empowerment of the Roma communities depends on the capacity of the educated Roma youth to mobilize their communities in order to produce social changes and foster social inclusion. Today I aim to take into account not only the views and opinions of these relevant policy actors but also the voices and considerations of the Roma youth, who are the subject of discussion. This thesis carries out research on the topic of empowerment of Roma young people to generate the knowledge and understandings of the Roma youth vis-a-vis the policy discourses and approaches directly affecting them.

The European Roma movement and its main Roma donor, OSF, aim to bring about social change (equality of Roma in the EU and CEE countries) through collective action in the Roma communities. This thesis argues that this change driven visions and interventions are necessarily normative. They might become authoritarian if they prescribe narrow or exclusive ways to achieve the envisioned changes. More, this thesis considers empowerment should not have a pivotal role mainly in community capacity building, but rather in human capacities building. Due to this considerate, this thesis considers the “empowerment of Roma youth” a policy issue and policy priority. My understanding is that excluding Roma young people from public life and political participation is a policy agenda, especially in equality policies.

In the current policy discourse on the plight of Roma youth, it has become a trend to assign roles to Roma youth without considering their perceptions and career plans. For instance, Anna Mirga refers to Roma educated youth as to individuals that ‘often know policy-maker jargon and have the necessary know-how to walk the corridors of power’ (Mirga, ERRC, 2015). Mirga also refers to the Roma youth as a ‘human resource available for Romani ethnic mobilization’. The author acknowledges that this situation is possible just in the case of those privileged youth Roma, ‘who broke through the glass ceiling of higher education and are directly ascending to the ranks of the Romani elite’ (Mirga, ERCC, 2015). By way of illustration, there are many international organizations like OSI, REF, ternYpe - International Roma Youth Network, ODIHR and RAP, who educate, advocate, invest and try to involve the Roma youth into the decision-making processes.

Hence, due to the active involvement of the Soros Foundations in building the European Roma movement and RIO’s policy agenda on Roma youth, as well as the fact that RIO is one of the donors of RAPs, this research is to critically investigate the RIO/CEU capacity building and empowerment program for Roma youth. Specifically, the OSF actively advocate and invest in the Roma youth generation, with the aim of ‘building the capacity of an emerging generation of young men and women to take a leadership role by involving them in voter education and community mobilization campaigns, and providing trainings that give Roma activists the skills and confidence to be a force for social change’ (Roma Initiatives Office, OSF, 2016).

The question arises to what the opportunities for the Roma youth are to engage in a meaningful and articulated position within the European Roma Movement, and what the gaps that prevent the Roma young people from taking meaningful positions are. This question is addressed

through a mixed qualitative methodological approach, namely document analysis, focus groups and semi-structured interviews (see the Methodology section).

Chapter 1- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The European Roma movement and its main Roma donor, OSF, aim to bring about social change (equality of Roma in the EU and CEE countries) through collective action in the Roma communities. I argue that this change driven visions and interventions are necessarily normative. They might become authoritarian if they prescribe narrow or exclusive ways to achieve the envisioned changes.

1.1 Empowerment: Concepts and Definitions

Although there is no one single legitimate definition of empowerment, most of the literature uses the concept of self-determination, agency and self-confidence as central to the notion of empowerment. One of the first studies of empowerment was carried out by Julian Rappaport (1981) with the attempt of remedying social inequalities and unjust distribution of communitarian resources. His research into empowerment says that empowerment is ‘a process, a mechanism by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs’ (Rappaport, 1981:122).

In his classic definition, Rappaport suggested that empowerment is an enigma which can be easier defined in its absence as ‘alienation’, ‘powerless’, ‘helplessness’. In essence, the author meant that the social processes are responsible for the feelings of powerlessness of people belonging to a marginalised and oppressed group.

A broader perspective of the concept of empowerment has been adopted by Israel et al., (1994) who argues that empowerment is a process of enabling individuals and groups to take power and control over their lives. This view is supported by the World Bank, who defines empowerment as a ‘process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform

those choices into desired actions and outcomes’ (World Bank, 2016). Overall, these studies highlight that empowerment is a process that allows individuals to be autonomous and self-determinate.

While a variety of definitions of the term empowerment have been suggested, the theorem of human capability articulated by Amartya Sen provides a normative framework called ‘capability approach’ (CA). The CA approach highlights that people's empowerment and well-being heavily depends on the capabilities and freedoms available to them, or as Amartya Sen says, on their *agencies* (Sen, 1985:203).

This thesis relies on several contemporary scholars and practitioners that use the theorem of human capability as articulated by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (1993). For example, Solava Ibrahim and Sabina Alkire (2007:9) research the concept of empowerment using the work of Amartya Sen, who defines agency as ‘what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important’ (Sen, 1985:206, quoted in Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007: 9).

Solava Ibrahim and Sabina Alkire also argue that empowerment is a process of adding fuel to fire for the needy people’s political participation at local level and in political processes (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007:10). In the same vein, the authors claim that this would boost the capacity of individuals to challenge power relations with the States, who often impacts their lives. They measure the empowerment through the lens of four indicators: choice, control and communal belonging. The first indicator measures is the ‘control over personal decisions’ and seeks to determinate to which extent the agency of individuals is constrained by local powers and social hierarchies. The second indicator aims to identify to which extent individuals have the autonomy and decision-making power over their households. The third indicator is related to autonomy. It

looks to what extend a person grounds her/his actions by a fear of punishment or hope of reward, in other words, to what extent an individual is the own author of his/her actions. The fourth indicator refers to individuals changing aspects at the community level if people want too (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007:19-29).

To understand empowerment we ought to understand which opportunities youth find important for their personal development and indirectly for the Roma communities. In this regard, the Capability Approach (CA) is strongly concerned about the social justice outcomes (Nussbaum, 2000; Qizilbash, 2005; Robeyns, 2003 quoted in Loots and Walker (2015:362). Loots and Walker quote Sen, who argues that ‘CA focusses on individual capabilities or freedoms, the choice of valued beings and doings made possible by having the underlying capabilities, and the ability to convert capabilities into functions’ (Loots and Walker, 2015:362). As such equality implies not only equal opportunities, but also the conversion of opportunities through decision-making and choice.

1.2. Identity constructs and the self-perception of the Roma youth

Sanchez-Jankowski (1999) claims that individuals from less privileged backgrounds are often influenced by a collective group history of being ignored or rejected by those in power. Historically, the Roma movement shaped the history of the Roma and strengthened the Roma movement by creating the non-territorial nation, by engaging in politics, and by the anthem and flag of the Roma, which confers a sense of belonging to the Roma people (McGarry, 2010).

The ethnic mobilization mentioned by McGarry and others refers to a process on which ‘groups organize around some feature of ethnic identity’, (Olzak, 1983). One important theme emerges from the given definition of ethnical mobilization: identity. The identity construct and the

self-perception are of high relevance because as Delanty (2008) argues, ‘the identity construction can be a contingent upon the position that an individual adopts in relation to variables such as organizational structure or work’. Considering Delanty’s (2008) claim, it seems that the manifestation of identity is occurring depending on the circumstances and environments to which the individual is exposed. By drawing on the concept of identity, Homi K. Bhabha (2004) has been able to show that individuals are not always empowered to manifest their identities and roles in the society due to the different social constructs.

Bhabha proposes the ‘Third Space’ perspective which is a hybrid manifestation of culture, or identity often referred in the literature as an ‘in-between’ position’ which help individuals to articulate their identity and represents the struggle of a person to articulate her/his identity (2004:55).

This theory comes from a post-colonial perspective and defines the first space as a cultural expression that individuals perform in certain environments, i.e. home. The second space is the post-colonial structure. For example, the trivial cultural entities such as social ways to act in the society. En masse the indigenous people have to function in the second space. Hence, the second place does not allow them to articulate their identity (which is produced through interaction with people) so the second space does not allow for the articulation of the first space, so they carry out the third place. This third place allows people to create a hybrid manifestation of culture or identity often referred in the literature as an ‘in-between’ position’ which help individuals to articulate their identity. In other words, the Third Space represents the struggle of a person to articulate her/his identity.

The evidence presented in this section help us to understand that empowerment is a multi-dimensional process that can take at both individual and group level and occurs in relation to others.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative data of this thesis is generated by three methods: document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Most of the interviews - about 30-40 minutes long - were conducted with the following stakeholders: RIO, CEU and other Roma policymakers who are actively engaged in the field. The interviews and focus groups cross-examined different perceptions of the RIO, CEU and Roma experts related to the roles of the Roma youth within the European Roma movement. The four focus groups were composed of 24 RAP students and alumni from 11 countries, with an equilibrate gender balance, as well as from three different RAP generations.

This dissertation follows a case-study design, with in-depth analysis of the stance of the Roma youth in regard to the European Roma movement and other organizations targeting them, such as RIO. In this attempt, the analysis used purposive sample to take into consideration the views and approaches of the three main stakeholders.

Very little is known about the voices and stances of the RAP Roma youth in regard to the European Roma movement and its promoters. This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of all the actors involved in this puzzle. This is why this thesis partly relies on secondary sources and uses semi-structured interviews and focus groups as the most reliable sources.

Despite much knowledge in the literature and policies in the plight of the Roma that refer to Roma youth as ‘leaders’ and ‘role models’, little is known about the voices and stances of the RAP Roma young people in regard to the European Roma movement and its promoters. This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of all the actors involved in this puzzle. This

is why this thesis partly relies on secondary sources and uses semi-structured interviews and focus groups as the most reliable sources.

Also, due to the lack of publicly available sources such as RIOs strategy regarding Roma youth, this thesis conducts document analysis and semi-structured to identify RIOs policy approach in regard to Roma youth. Afterwards, the finding of the focus groups will be cross-examined with the information gained through semi-structured interviews. This qualitative research used purposive sample in order to take into consideration the views and approaches of the three main stakeholders.

This thesis is based on analyzing one case study, namely the RAP program and its two institutional stakeholders, namely RIO and CEU, and the beneficiary group, the Roma students.

The Roma Access Programs, Roma Initiative Office and Central European University are identified in this research as main stakeholders. The reasons that led me to the selection of these stakeholders are the following: (1) RIO is defined in this thesis as an international umbrella organization and Roma donor (funding inclusively CEU RAP) which actively tries to foster public and political participation of the Roma youth and to develop the grassroots organization to promote social change; (2) all stakeholders are implicitly or explicitly targeting the Roma young people from Europe, they target equal access, education, empowerment and so forth; (3) these stakeholders are among the most prestigious in Europe and are known for their power of leading about social change; (4) as a RAP alumna I have realized that there are other ways of contributing to the betterment of my community without necessarily being a role model or leader.

One of the stakeholders, the RIO is a hub of the Open Society Foundations (OSF) Budapest 'located in the Central European University complex, and its programs often share resources with the university' (see OSF website). OSF has multiple identities and institutions. For the aim of this

thesis, its hub, the Roma Initiative Office (RIO) is identified as an international umbrella organization and Roma donor which actively tries to foster the public and political participation of the Roma youth and develop the grassroots organizations within the European Roma movement to promote social change. RIO implements a range of initiatives at the transnational level, one of which is the funding of RAPs, which targets the Roma youth with the aim of fostering social change.

Another stakeholder, the RAP program aims to ‘increase’ the higher education among Roma youth across Europe by providing them with the necessary tools for competing on an equal basis with others at master's level.

As mentioned, these stakeholders are well-known across Europe and try to challenge the status of Roma by focusing on Roma youth. It should be noticed that the two stakeholders target the Roma youth across Europe with the aim of enabling the Roma youth to become future leaders in their communities.

The aim of this analysis is not to underestimate, nor to blame the work of these stakeholders, but rather to positively encourage them to re-think their own strategies and their ways of labelling the Roma youth within the European Roma movement.

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, the number of students participating in the focus group is not representative of the entire RAP cohort students and alumni. Notwithstanding these limitations, the 24 participants of the 4 focus groups came from 11 countries, with an equilibrate gender balance, as well as from 3 different RAP generations.

Chapter 2- The Roma movement and Roma leaders

This chapter aims to discuss the sources of ideas that propose the young educated Roma to become leaders and contribute to the Roma movement. What follows is a critical account of the ideologies of the Roma movement, in particular the ‘flawless’ aim to empower the Roma youth and to produce a social change at the community level.

2.1. The emergence of the Roma movement

The book called ‘*Roma in the twenty-first century: a policy paper*’, written by Andrei Mirga and Nicolae Gheorghe (1997), highly recognized Roma leaders, claims that the stakeholders of the European Roma movement are a bunch of nongovernmental organizations in ‘*post-communist countries*’ which aim to achieve the self-determination of the Roma, ‘a redefinition and construction of its own minority identity’, and emancipation of the Roma. This is exemplified in the work undertaken by McGarry (2010) who argues that the ethnic mobilization that took place due to the formation of the Roma movement shaped the history of the Roma and strengthened the Roma movement by creating the non-territorial nation, by engaging in politics and by the anthem and flag of the Roma, which confers a sense of belonging to the Roma people. Still, it has become common practice to distinguish the Roma scholars from the non-Roma, and this is reflected on the fact that the predominant scholarly literature on the Roma movement arguments reminds predominated by the arguments and ideology of Gheorghe and Mirga.

Mirga and Gheorghe (1997) also notice that that deliberative democracy requires participation and activism from the Roma individuals and communities. Further, Roma elites can gain political representation and recognition by collective actions which are key to bringing about

change and defending human rights. Herewith, one can grasp that the authors implicitly acknowledge that the Roma movement is formed not only on grassroots level, and that the elites' collective action is needed in order to articulate political claims. Based on Mirga's & Nicolae's and McGarry's arguments, nowadays RIO can be considered as an international organization and donor interested in the creation of a Roma political elite as well as of institutions that can serve political participation.

2.2. Who is the Roma '*intelligentsia*'?

In everyday talks as well as in scholarly discussions, the elite is often linked to the notion of the intelligentsia. Mirga and Gheorge (1997) claim that the Roma '*intelligentsia*' is the product of the educational measures undertaken since 1960s in former communist states. It is interesting to observe that the Roma '*intelligentsia*' is a construct that was not even created by the Roma.

This thesis argue that although at first sight this Roma '*intelligentsia*' is 'well-intended' towards the Roma communities, in reality, such differentiation between the educated Roma and the 'less or non-educated Roma' puts the '*intelligentsia*' into a superior position regardless the majority of Roma people, who do not come from 'privileged' positions.

Furthermore, this construct is a disguised insult for the Roma because different standard is required for a Roma and a non Roma with respect to the designation of who is a scholar. A Roma with a bachelor's or master's degree is called an '*intelligent*' whereas his/her non-Roma counterpart cannot be called that. This immediately shows that lower standards are required to be a Roma scholar or intelligentsia. This kind of designation given to people with all the responsibilities which they may not be willing to shoulder or have the requisite expertise to accomplish, is inappropriate and somewhat deceptive when viewed from a truly holistic approach.

2.3. Who are the Roma leaders?

Mirga and Gheorge (1997) state that the leaders of the Roma come from different generations. On one hand, are the traditional community leaders without former education but with legitimacy given by the community members. On the other hand, are those leaders that are youth Roma activists who possess education, 'but also retain their Roma identity' (Mirga&Gheorge, 1997). The authors say that the community leaders have acceptance from the community members who are very close to them and share core traditions and norms with them. The educated Roma is more likely to think like a 'white European' who no longer follows the same practices as his/her counterparts, and this will bring conflicts of culture and social norms. The educated Roma might be likely be preaching to the community members to 'ingest' particular views and cultures that are strange to them. They might also not have the approval of the community as 'true' leaders. They also may not have all that are required prerequisites to be given the status of a leader by some of the Roma communities – a certain status in the Roma community such as *pachiuvalo* (decent, respectful), or *ceacho Rrom* (real Roma), and so forth. which are a prerequisite in many Roma communities.

In the light of the normative visions suggested by Mirga, Gheorghe and many other regarding the Roma identity, the question that arises is whether the current generation of youth Roma perceive themselves as leaders, and if so, whether they wish and can act as leaders in their local communities. The overreaching goal of RIO is to strengthen the participation of Roma youth, and to enable them to take leadership positions within their communities. RIO acknowledges the importance of education in producing social changes and as such, they educate and develop knowledge of the Roma students in order to enable them to take be the engines of social change in

their belonging communities. In the trial, RIO's objectives are somewhat confused and hardly to be implemented – because on the one hand, it wants educated Roma youth to go to communities and cause change (top-down approach). RIO in doing this seems not to know that this would hardly work, would cause conflicts, and that the few educated Roma do not have all it takes to stir around views and culture that have lasted for several centuries. A cultural clash and conflicts might arise for a variety of reasons. If we think of the Roma culture as a manifestation of shared values, then conflicts might occur. If Roma youth ought to take leadership roles due to the inner and predefined social norms (for example listening to the elderly members of the community, or being obedient and respectful that persist in many societies, inclusively in the Roma communities. On top of this, the Roma do not live in a vacuum. In order to produce a social change it takes more than a community capacity building approach.

A true change must involve all the actors and individuals of society regardless of their ethnicity or positions. Moreover, a true change must come from a gradual process of reform through quality education, and this borders exclusively on having robust educational policies and implementing them for the benefits of Roma communities. An example of this could be the educational policies supported by national level accessible to each, inclusively to those youth Roma, who are not privileged by being surrounded by Roma activists.

On the other hand, leadership qualities do not come to someone merely because he/she has educational qualifications. It takes more than that to lead – passion, understanding, compassion, love, so forth, and these qualities may be absent in a person even though he/she has university degrees. Just like we cannot say that all educated non-Roma are leaders...so why would all educated Roma be considered as leaders with all the difficult responsibilities of leadership, which

makes it easy for them to fail in it and be considered as failures by these sponsors, or be considered selfish if they choose to pursue their interests?

On top of this, should educated Roma not be allowed to perceive themselves as they want, just like other people in the society? Moreover, if there is a conflict between a social construct and individual self-perception, should not the latter prevail?

San argues that the effective freedom of individuals is pivotal. The author stresses that ‘*functionings*’ of people should be distinguished from the ‘*commodities*’ which are meant to contribute to them. This can be illustrated briefly (Fig.1) by a person’s capability of choosing his/her own role and mean of contribution in today’s society. The education or a scholarship represents a resource, hence the individual ought to have the capability of choosing his/her functioning of that resource in accordance with his/her own believes, values, social norms and so forth.

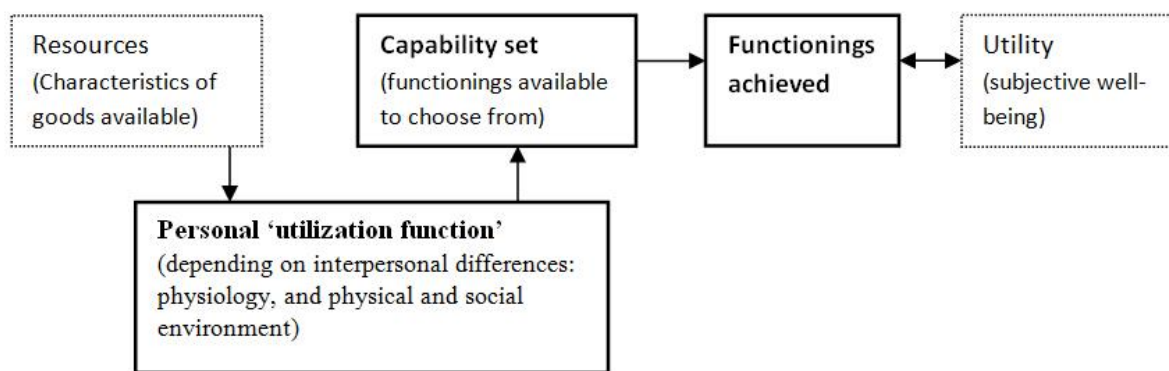


Figure 1. Outline of the core relationships in the Capability Approach

In context of the current study, the Roma’s students capacity set might include access to different functioning’s such as being a leader, a scholar, carrying or not carrying for the Roma communities. Depending on the desired output, the Roma youth ought to choose which utility they

wish to maximize. It is believed that the current policies are designed for the empowerment of the Roma youth, should not the individual self-perception of the Roma youth be a 'utilization function'?

Chapter 3- REDEFYING STUDENTS' IDENTITY

In order to capture how RIO tries to translate its empowerment vision so that the Roma youth take meaningful positions within the European Roma movement, this thesis examines more closely the RAP unit at the CEU. This study draws on a mixture of methods, including an analysis of documents, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The goal of this analysis is threefold; first, this thesis aims to understand the RIO's contribution to the empowerment of the Roma youth, second, to learn about the RIO's and CEU's perceptions as stakeholders involved in the creation of young Roma role models. Finally, it aims to bring the voice of the beneficiaries of the RAP, Roma students into light by learning their self-perception on their roles within the European Roma movement.

Through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, the first set of analyses examined the impact of the identity construction and the self-perception of the Roma youth. As Delantly et.al, (2008) argues, "The identity construction can be a contingent upon the position that an individual adopts in relation to variables such as organizational structure or work" (Delantly, 2008). In addition, Sánchez-Jankowski (2002) says that youth have a history of exclusion in a society that reflects their civic engagement. The focus group discussion generated a wide array of reactions about the roles of Roma youth in academia and Roma communities, as well as about the assigned roles and perceptions of different stakeholders in regard to the Roma youth.

3.1. Stakeholder's view of the roles of Roma youth

Stuard Hall (1996) points out that in order to understand the identity construction, one should first understand the processes that created particular subject positions (LeCourt, 2004:38). The cohort of Roma youth can easily be associated with Stuart Hall's (1996:6) claim on 'social subjects of particular discourses'. The website of OSF specifies that:

'The Roma Initiatives Office invests in building the capacity of an emerging generation of young men and women to take a leadership role by involving them in voter education and community mobilization campaigns, and providing training that gives Roma activists the skills and confidence to be a force for social change. In partnership with the Roma Education Fund and other donors, it provides opportunities for postgraduate study in the Roma Access Programs run by Central European University'.

(OSF website)

However, it should be initially noted that an assumption that RIO relies on and that eventually informs its activities is that Roma youth desire to take on leadership roles, and second, that the Roma youth shall become leaders in their communities. When RIO and RAP-CEU representatives as well as Roma experts were asked about the main role of the educated Roma youth, just some of them referred to the notions of role models, leaders, elites and selfishness in public and political arenas. Interestingly, the RIO representative said the following:

'We assume that for several decades Roma have hoped that the more opportunities Roma have the highest degree of education, the stronger the Roma voice on behalf of all Roma will be. We believe that individuals gaining the opportunities through quotas, preparation programs, scholarships, internships, fellowships, conferences, trainings and other affirmative action measures should make sure that they give back to the Roma communities on whose behalf they have got these opportunities. It is a matter of moral choice whether we think selfishly and opportunistically or we think about the others and future generations. Of course, giving back can take many different forms, but shared commitment to do our best for our communities whatever position we hold in the society is the best and perhaps only hope our people can have. Without that, those underprivileged and humiliated among us, the Roma, are doomed for continuation of the suffering.'

(RIO representative, 17.06.2016)

A contrast has been found between the two interviewees; On the one hand, the RIO representative argues that RIO does not portray the Roma youth as role models and community leaders, on the other, an interviewee from the ranks of Roma expert and former OSI employee reported that “OSI created its strategy to create a Roma elite and to guide through funding the activities of functionaries, and one of these activities was the creation of a Roma elite”. A high level CEU leader explained to author of this thesis the following:

‘(...) But still not everybody will end up working with EU, or in university, or be a journalist, or some public person, so it is possible that someone will choose to work at grassroots level but that is not our objective. Still I believe that we are able to achieve this objective of keeping them in contact with the Roma communities, with NGOs that would help them support others and mobilize others to work at grassroots level, I am not saying that we are doing that already but this is something that we are aiming at (...)’.

(CEU representative, 14/06/2016)

It should be noted that both stakeholders seem to be influenced by belief that Roma youth ought to keep in touch and help their belonging communities, hence one could distinguish the two stakeholders by observing that whereas the RIO representative appeal to the moral obligation and commitment, the CEU representative highlights the fact that it is unrealistic that all Roma youth would work in international settings. As such, in this account to work with the community is desirable, but not the only opportunity.

In the same vein, another study participant stated, “We do not want to send them [Roma students] back at the grassroots level, but we do not want to see them as ‘free electrons’”. Also, another interviewee added. “From my point of view; it would be good RAP to settle the Roma issue and identity because this would help the students with their identity and self-esteem.” This third response is not significantly different from the previous normative approaches as it asserts that Roma identity shall be taught otherwise it would be lost. One could argue that the responses of the interviewees indicate that the Roma youth do not have a strong Roma identity.

The commonality identified between the stakeholders is the fact that three of them stressed the importance of keeping in touch with the community in order to give back to the region from where the RAP student and alumni community has its roots, and to produce social change. The single most striking and very rare answer was given by a Roma expert who said that:

“The main aim should not be to invest in Roma youth to study at big universities and afterwards to go in their communities because there are many things to be done in regard to Roma at different levels (...). To gadje (non-Roma) no one tells... you will become a doctor and afterwards you should go in your little village... I do not consider that Roma youth should go back in their communities because there are other ways of producing social change.”

(Roma expert, 07/06/2016)

What is interesting in the stakeholders' perceptions related to the roles of Roma youth is the fact that these answers do not only represent the position of the current institutions but also enact an accepted 'reality' among the European Roma movement. This preoccupation with the future and roles of the Roma youth appears as a noble intention of empowering Roma youth.

3.2. Roma students' perceptions of their societal roles

As in the conversation with the Roma students, in the analysis I wish first to dwell on questions of identity. Regarding further study respondents' answers on their sense belonging *to a Roma community*, the overall responses were very positive. This signifies that the majority of the participants are conscious of that they have roots, ties, or feelings of belonging to Roma communities. When the participants were asked why they applied to any stream of the RAP program, the majority commented that:

'I am a communicative person. I wanted to learn English so that I can speak with people. I had to study and follow my dream because English is an important skill. If you know English, you can find a good job around the world, and you can travel'.

'I came to RELP to study English. My teachers (in the country of origins) were not sufficient, and my family cannot afford to pay me additional classes so I came to learn English'.

(RAP students/alumni, 04/06/2016)

These two answers are illustrative for several Roma students who claimed that the main reason of applying to the RAP was based on their personal aspirations. Whilst a minority of respondents mentioned that they see themselves working in the Roma NGOs and improve the situation of Roma people, all agreed that the reason for applying to the RAP is the academic skill acquisition, and the lack of financial resources to afford to obtain English knowledge elsewhere. Connecting these responses to the previous discussion, one could claim that the Roma youth do not meet the stakeholder's expectations or hopes of taking leadership roles and solely being committed to the cause of the Roma, but 'simply' fulfill their personal needs and dreams.

In the subsequent sections, this thesis argues that there are some tensions between the stakeholder's perception and youth roles self-identification. The participants of the focus groups

discussions emphasized that they do not perceive themselves as ‘leaders’, ‘role models’, ‘intellectuals’.

Roma social norms and values

‘In the community people are saying if I have a good education they say you are gadjo’.
‘Elite are powerful and educated people. I cannot say that I am elite, but I have an education. How can I call myself an elite? If a person has education does, it means that that person is elite?’
‘(...) at the community level it does not matter if we are educated because the poor Roma care about feeding their children, not about how smart I am’.
(RAP student/alumni, 06/06/2016)

In the majority of cases, the interviewees reported that they do not perceive themselves as being ‘role models’ or ‘leaders’ as it would generate discrepancies between them as ‘educated’ Roma youth and between the less educated Roma youth. Overall, the Roma youth prefer not to be labeled in any way in order to prevent the creation of differences between them and their belonging communities. Moreover, the young Roma respondents also mentioned that it is unrealistic to expect of them to produce social changes at the community level because there are social norms such as *‘listening to the elders members of the community’* which prevents them from assuming and playing such roles as being leaders. Hence, this does not signify that the Roma students do not contribute to the cause of Roma by other means, e.g. being active in unconventional forms of political participation at international level such as petitions, open letters, protests, and so forth.

Another interviewee alluded to the notion of ‘role models’ and ‘elites’, and said that ‘Roma communities do not need role models because this concept is a construct connected more with the perceptions of non-Roma about the Roma (...)’. This answer with which many people related, reveals that there are conditions that create the image of individualism and selfishness. Having

discussed the self-identification of the Roma youth, the next section of this analysis explores the Roma youths conditions that create the image of individualism and selfishness in the eyes of Rio and European Roma movement.

The socioeconomic status

The socio-economic status and ethnicity play an important role in students' self-perception in relation to their peers and personal aspiration. Some interviewees confessed that they encounter financial difficulties and responsibility of care towards their families. In addition to these family roles and responsibilities, the Roma youth also ought to face the expectations not only from the older generations of the European Roma movement but also from, the larger spectrum of the society. Consequently, there seems to be a high pressure towards youth on deciding their career plans and roles. This pressure varies from individual uncertainty and personal aspirations to communal and societal expectations, i.e. giving back to the community', or being a 'role model'.

Gaps in privileges and status

‘There is a difference between them (Roma at the community level) and us. If you take, my country people are poor and cannot finish even elementary school. I am living in the Roma community. I am not differing from the majority in my community but still they are less privileged than us. The trust between us and community is low.’

(RAP student/alumni, 02/06/2016)

This answer shows that the Roma students are aware that there is a gap between them and their Roma communities, and this creates a lack of trust from the community side. According to the participants, this lack of trust is another impediment that prevents them, despite their commitment to improve the living conditions of the Roma communities. The overall responses indicated that there are gaps and difficulties between the Roma youth and their communities.

Nevertheless, conceptually and practically these gaps could be and should be bridged for the following reasons: not all Roma communities are the same in terms of lack of trust, Roma students could go back to their communities when they would be indeed empowered by practical knowledge and professional experience. In addition, Roma students could form smaller groups for the difficult task of going back to communities.

In this section, it has been showed the self-perceptions of the Roma youth related to their given roles and attributions. Taken together, these results suggest that the Roma students (due to their situation) chose the ‘Third Space’ as a self-identification within the European Roma movement.

In view of all that has been mentioned so far regardless the ‘Third Space’ theory, the Roma youth create a hybrid manifestation of their identity by trying to balance, and to play an ‘in-between’ roles. The Roma youth remain dedicated to the cause of the Roma while following their personal aspirations and needs. Returning (briefly) to the stakeholders’ perception about Roma

youth, we find similarities and some correlation between the two entities, as both entities are dedicated to the cause of Roma by certain means.

3.3. Engagement of the stakeholders and beneficiaries

Taking into consideration that staying in touch with the community can be an important element for producing a social change, this study now investigates how RIO is involved and engaged with the RAP students during their academic year to ensure that students are given the necessary skills to take leadership positions. This question is addressed in order to understand how RIO communicates its vision of empowerment to their main target, the Roma youth. In this regard, the RIO representative noted the following:

‘We do not consider leadership as a matter of positions. We see it as a matter of courage in the face of uncertainty, strategic thinking about the future, taking responsibility right now and helping others to do that. We hope the analytical skills and exposure to an academic environment on the broad range of topics at the CEU will enable the students to infused fresh ideas in the Roma movement. We have been inviting students for discussion and encouraging their proactive approach to our program in proposing initiatives they would undertake the studies.’

(RIO representative, 17.06.2016)

Together these answers provide valuable insights about RIO's views regardless leadership and youth's roles. One can observe from this statement that RIO puts emphasis once more on ‘taking responsibilities’ and ‘helping others’ that can easily be traced back to the earlier remarks about the moral duties/or selfishness that one might choose to adopt. More important for us in this statement is the expectation for pro-active initiative from the students. One unanticipated finding was that when the focus group participants were asked what do they know about RIO and how do they collaborate, the majority of the participants from the RELP stream were not able to provide any information about RIO except the mere fact that is a donor of RAP. With respect to RIO, its representative expressed the following:

‘(...) we also encourage the established Roma organizations and international organizations to provide opportunities for skills building and leadership initiatives for the

graduates. We also provide grants for fellowships or start-up organizations after the studies. Our doors in RIO have always been and will always be open for support. However, the initiative, clarity and conviction must come from the students'.

(RIO representative, 17.06.2016)

It is difficult to explain why the RAP students know so little about RIO, and this is not the aim of this research. But one of the issues that emerge from these findings is related to the leadership transformation mentioned by all stakeholders. The existing accounts fail to create an interaction and build a trustful relationship between the students and RIO. As such, one may argue how the leadership transformation is to be practically realized considering if there is no interaction and future potential for leadership through the eyes of the Roma students.

Chapter 4. Clashing expectations

The preceding sections have cross-examined different perceptions of the RIO, CEU, and Roma experts related to the roles of the Roma youth within the European Roma movement.

4.1. The old rule of thumb as a moral concern: The 'role' of giving back.'

Although the stakeholder community has good intentions and objectives, it seems that the technique of 'shaming and naming' plays a major role in shaping youth's roles and commitments. The empowerment of Roma youth appears to be the main preoccupation of RIO and CEU. Hence, what is problematic is the hybrid manifestation of their students' identity and roles with which the students have to confront and balance in order to meet the expectations of the stakeholders, and of the wider spectrum of the society.

From the different answers of the stakeholders we understand that they might not necessarily impose any 'etiquette' on youth, hence their policy approaches (or someone could say, their empowering discourses) could be considerate as normative in many instances, e.g. "It is a matter of moral choice whether we think selfishly and opportunistically or we think about the others and future generations" (RIO representative).

However, in reviewing the literature of empowerment, this does not appear to be the case. Robeyns (2008:90) describes ethical individualism as "A claim about who or what should ultimately count in our evaluative exercise and decisions". This means that individual well-being should be the 'ultimate unit of moral concern' of "What a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important." (Sen, 1985:206, quoted in Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007:9). In general, making therefore the best of one's professional capacities is

not selfishness, and not against solidarity. Overall, the active contribution to empowerment is possible through various ways. There is no single evident route from individual capacity building to community service, but within RAP there could be by additional capacity building and jointly developed culture of community service. The latter could be through physical presence as well as through other means.

To illustrate this, one could imagine the following example of a 19-year-old boy/girl from a deprived socio-economic background. Despite his/her limited resources, the Roma individual aspires to overcome the socio-economic conditions and to study. Due to the affirmative action measures, the young Roma is provided with a scholarship, but in most of cases, that is not enough, as such the student and his or her wider family have to make sacrifices in order the young Roma is be able to study. After graduating, the fresh graduate searches for a job in a view to compensate for the study expenses. After all of these sacrifices and efforts to overcome the student's socio-economic condition, the student's ethnic peers or any other individual would consider her or him opportunistic, or even selfish. To sum up, this scenario tries to illustrate that there are legitimate challenges that prevent the Roma youth from taking leadership roles within the European Roma movement. As such it would be unfair to have an authoritative approach of 'willing to help' or 'being an opportunistic' Roma student.

Moreover, the situation of young Romani individuals being awarded various scholarships does not have to automatically lead to success as well as the education of the Roma youth does not tell us about the struggles faced by Roma youth while studying. As such, one could find these assigned roles and expectations assigned Roma students as offensive and naive because looking for a job, and having personal aspirations is neither equal with being selfish, nor does it imply that

those individuals would not contribute to the betterment of their Roma communities by other means, i.e. assuming their Roma identity.

Sanchez-Jankowski (2002) claims that individuals from less privileged backgrounds are often influenced by a collective group history of being ignored or rejected by those in power. Taking the example of Sanchez one can understand that Roma youth are already rejected by those in power, and blaming them for not willing to give back to the community is not a solution. In addition, the individual agency, i.e. that youth themselves have a right to make choices, and should be involved in decisions that make sense for their and their families (Kubeer, 1999).

As such, going back to one of the conceptual consensuses of empowerment, this work argues that it is a moral duty to empower individuals to have control over their resources (i.e. intellectual) and ideological (like values and beliefs) rather than disempowering them with our expectations towards them. This thesis also posits that provided financial aid that enabled one to pursue master's studies should not come at the expense of certain constraining normative approaches. In this regard, Freire (1970) for instance explains how education helps people to widen their entire human potential and be free. Intrinsically, this suggests that individuals should be provided education in order to lift their life, not as means of inducing and dictating the student's paths. Other add the following, "Empowerment is strongly related to social justice and the democratic ideal of citizens making decisions about their own lives" (Chenoweth and McAuliffe, 2005:37). To conclude, the following findings can be drawn from the analysis examined above, more specifically an ideology of thumb, such as the ideology of the Roma movement, makes no attempt empower the Roma youth in taking meaningful positions.

4.2. 'The Third Space' as a shuttle for Roma youth

The empirical evidence obtained for the purpose of this study suggests that the Roma youth experience multiple and overlapping identities which generate discrepancies between the students and stakeholders views and expectations in regard to the European Roma movement. In the introduction it was pointed out that the Roma movement is based on ethnic mobilization and collective action. In this regard, Jennings et al. (2006:43) say that “contributing to the larger community through authentic engagement can help adolescents combat rootlessness; in turn, meaningful roles can provide youth with opportunities to develop positive self-identity, increased sense of self-worth and enhanced self-efficacy” (Jennings et al., 2006:43). By incorporating youth into efforts that affect their lives, youth also gain an important and unique understanding of power structures in their communities (Christens & Dolan, 2011). Although Roma youth might choose to be ‘opportunistic’ and ‘selfish’ by not engaging into the Roma movement and giving back to their communities, this would not be an isolated phenomenon related exclusively to Roma youth.

Overall, the results from the focus groups demonstrate that the underlying cause for their lack of assuming the given roles within the European Roma movement is not pure ‘selfishness’, but rather worries about creating discrepancies between them as ‘educated’ Roma youth and between the less educated Roma youth. Thus, although the Roma youth do not identify themselves with the social constructs widespread within the Roma movement, the Roma youth remain active actors by different means within the Roma movement.

To put it simply, these results suggest that the Roma students chose the ‘Third Space’ as a shuttle for meeting the expectations of a large spectrum of the society as well as of their families. Based on the data obtained through interviews with the Roma students at CEU, there seems to be a high pressure towards youth on deciding their career plans and roles.

In order to achieve a social change and to be part of the knowledge society, we Roma ought to rethink our movements' ideology and approaches in regard to Roma youth. If we continue impliedly or expressly to pass negative judgments on students passing through the RAP programs as failing to assume leadership roles and to give back to their communities this would blindly constitute an impediment from achieving real change. The different stances regardless the perceptions of RIO, CEU and RAP students should not be seen as shortcomings or cleavage points, but rather as a call for re-thinking the current approach which not only disempowers the Roma youth but also stagnates the Roma communities from gradual processing.

In today's knowledge society, youth must be empowered to acquire academic excellence without imposing any judgements or expectations. Advancement in knowledge and education represents a pre-requisite for empowerment and the globalization of today's 21st century. Stagnating to an ideology that appeared centuries ago, prevents us from negotiating and challenging power relations with the States, and from progression and innovation by not recognizing the diversity of skills and innovative contributions of the Roma youth, as well as the difficulties and overlapping identities that they ought to take.

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