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Ohidy, A. (2016). From multiple deprivation to a university degree – Successful educational careers of ten Roma and Gypsy women in Hungary [A halmozottan hátrányos helyzetből a diplomaig. Tíz roma és cigány nő sikertörténete a magyar oktatási rendszerben]. Pécs, University of Pécs

Reviewed by Krisztina Sebestyén¹

Nowadays, we speak about the role of education compensating for disadvantages. The Roma and Gypsy people often mentioned regarding this topic, and Katalin R. Forray writes in her forewords that “[...] the main reason of low education is the distance: distance from schools, from higher education, from workplaces and so on” (p. 7.). Naturally not all people remain disadvantaged; there are some successful courses of life as well. However, to see a successful course of life, it is not enough to think about the educational system or institutions; we should consider other factors as well.

Andrea Ohidy concentrates in her book on 10 Roma and Gypsy women who discuss their own course of life, their success in the educational system, and on the labor market. The selection of the Roma and Gypsy women was not random, because they have traditionally been fewer opportunities to study in their community. The book was published in 2016, as the 37th volume of the series “Gypsy studies,” and it has two parts. At first, we can read analyses of 10 interviews with 10 Roma and Gypsy women, who finished at least one field of study in higher education. In the second part of Ohidy’s book, we can read the whole interviews with all of these women. The author tries to find some factors in these interviews, which could account for the success these women enjoyed in the educational system and in their actual life. Andrea Ohidy also searched for an answer to the following question: how could these women get over the disadvantages they faced which were mentioned the foreword? These women are also interesting because they try to help with

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their job or with their voluntary work other Roma and Gypsy women to reach their similar aims as well.

People call the Roma and Gypsy women the minority of the minorities because the Roma and Gypsy women are disadvantaged in relation to the other members of society from multiple perspectives. (a) Roma and Gypsy women play an important role in the family, especially the care of children, so it is more difficult for them to reach their aims if they would like to study or get a good job. (b) Roma and Gypsy women fight against prejudice, for example, in schools or at workplaces with regard to their social origin. (c) More Roma or Gypsy families have low socioeconomic status and they cannot afford to send all their children to study. In these situations, the boys get the chance to reach their aims. If the women have a chance to study and they are successful in the educational system or on the labor market, they often choose to give up her Roma/Gypsy identity. That means, they do not consider themselves to be a member of the Roma/Gypsy community, and inversely. This theory is formulated in one type of “*underclass theory*” from Ivan Szelenyi and Janos Ladanyi, who formulated Julius Wilson’s theory in connection with Roma and Gypsy people. Naturally, there are Roma and Gypsy people, who should not give up their identity because of their studies or workplaces. They stay members of their community, and they can help their communities’ members, for example, through their job or voluntary work.

The women who gave interviews for Andrea Ohidy can represent this social situation of disadvantaged Roma/Gypsy people well. All the 10 women are highly educated, but 8 of them are the first person in her family, who has a degree. Three of them have a BA degree, six of them have an MA degree, and one of them has a doctoral degree. The 10 women have colorful cultural-ethnical background: 6 of them are *beas*, 3 are *olah*, and 1 person is *romungro* (The *beas*, *olah*, and *romungro* are special types within the Roma/Gypsy community). The women can connect with different levels of intensity to the Roma and Gypsy culture.

The 10 women mentioned some factors of their educational success. These include, for example, their family background, their childhood, their experiences in kindergarten and schools, their lifestyle nowadays, their job, and the supporting role of their family. Andrea Ohidy analyzes these interviews compared with some specialists’ interviews, with some narrative interviews and some literature. These give a framework to interpret the 10 interviews and to interpret them in a suitable context. The author identified common factors in the 10 interviews, which supported the school carriers of these Roma/Gypsy women. The main factors are, the intrinsic learning motivation, convenient personality, a lot of help from parents or friends, some supporting programs and institutions, the positive environment of a university or a workplace, and lack of discrimination. Many women mentioned the Gandhi Secondary Grammar School as a supporting institution.

This educational institution is unique in Hungary. Its aim is to help more and more Roma and Gypsy pupils to become more intellectually inclined people. The Gandhi Secondary Grammar School supports the Roma and Gypsy pupils, for example, with a place in its boarding school. Similar to the Gandhi Secondary Grammar School, the Department of Romology at the University of Pecs has played an important role in the lives of many women who gave interviews. This department is the only one for Romology in Hungary. Its aim is to create interdisciplinary research in the field of Romology, and with them to enrich the culture of the Roma and Gypsy community. Many women mentioned the Foundation Romaversitas as well, which supports Roma and Gypsy students in higher education. The 10 women think that they could not have achieved so many things in their lives without the help of these institutions, so they are thankful for all their support.

The 10 Roma and Gypsy women talked about some factors, which negatively influenced their lives and their educational success. These factors include poverty, their parents' lack of information, and some conflicts about their education. They mentioned exclusion from the Roma/Gypsy community, some teachers or colleagues' negative attitudes, and more often their own hesitation or discrimination in schools. More women mentioned their failure to attend kindergarten as a problem, which led to some disadvantages, mainly in the first few years of school. All 10 of the women mentioned one or more negative factors in her life, but against these negative factors, they could be successful people. All of the 10 women try to help others through their job or their voluntary work to reach their similar aims.

Totally, we can find in Andrea Ohidy's book the following important message: if somebody has enough intrinsic motivation and assiduity, he or she can fight with the most disadvantaged situation as well, and he or she can be successful in school and the workplace too. This process can be made easier if there is a supporting environment (family and schools), or, for example, someone to follow, or ask for some advice. The most important thing is the independent decision of the person to choose their new path.

I offer for all people this book from Andrea Ohidy, who is interested in the Roma/Gypsy studies, who likes to read biographies and/or who looks for some motivation to realize his/her aims. The author writes, people can think about these interviews and can analyze them further, so please read them from these views as well.