

**THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY:
AN EXAMPLE FROM HODÁSZ**

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Abstract

The paper examines the social mobility process of Romani youngsters in a settlement that is in one of the most disadvantaged regions of Hungary. Hodász became the centre of interest due to the relevant research concerning the mobility issue, because here, just contrary to the communities have similar sociocultural features, there are number of young Romani who could stand out by learning. The author interprets in wider aspects the determinative local norms, and the scale of values of local Vlach Romani community make possible for lots of local youngsters, that they can be graduated. In the second part of the paper the reader can understand the intellectual career by three studies, and consequently the social integration doesn't automatically yield social mobility. In the situational analyses of Hodász example can be circumscribed the specific preconditions of intellectual career in the case of the young Romani and disadvantageous.

Keywords: social mobility, integration, Romani community, intellectual career,

Diszcipline: cultural anthropology

Absztrakt

A TÁRSADALMI INTEGRÁCIÓ ÉS A TÁRSADALMI MOBILITÁS: HODÁSZI PÉLDA

A tanulmány Magyarország egyik leghátrányosabb helyzetű kistérségében található nagyközség esetében vizsgálja a roma származású fiatalok társadalmi mobilitásának folyamatát. Hodász település a vonatkozó kutatások tükrében azért került a figyelem középpontjába, mert ellentétben a hasonló adottságú hátrányos helyzetű zárt roma közösségekkel, itt feltűnően nagy számban sikerült a fiataloknak a tanulás révén kiemelkedniük. Az elemzés átfogóan értelmezi azokat a helyi társadalom működését meghatározó szabályokat, az oláh cigány közösség lokális értékrendjét jellemző sajátosságokat, amelyek lehetővé tették,

hogy roma fiatalok nagy számban szerezzenek felsőfokú végzettséget. A tanulmány második felében három esettanulmányon keresztül az olvasó azt is megértheti, hogy az értelmiségi pálya, az ennek keretében lejátszódó integráció nem eredményez automatikusan társadalmi mobilitást. Ennek belátásához a szituatív elemzés révén, Hodász példájában meghatározhatóak azok a tényezők, amelyek az értelmiségi pályára kerülés alapfeltételeit képezték.

Kulcsszavak: társadalmi mobilitás, integráció, roma közösség, értelmiségi pálya,

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

Hodász is a village in the Mátészalka District in North-Eastern Hungary and has a population just over 3000. This little village achieved outstanding results in social integration with its special practices. Hodász lies in one of the most disadvantaged micro-regions of Hungary. According to its economic and infrastructural conditions, employment rates and social situations many factors make the everyday life of the local community more difficult.

According to our studies on social composition 62-67% of the population is member of the Roma ethnic minority and only 33-38% of the local community is Hungarian. (The method of expert estimation was used to approximate the ratio of local Roma population). Ethnic ratios have considerable impact on local social-cultural-economic relations. Our previous experiences show that in the case of settlements where the reorganization of ethnic ratios can be observed, therefore the relation of majority and minority is exchanged (in this case Roma minority becomes the local majority), social processes (e.g., social structural changes) accelerate. Usually, the aging members of the Hungarian population stay in the village, while younger Hungarians from communities with greater mobility move away in a short time.

Another typical process is the emergence of antagonistic relationships between the remaining groups and younger Roma communities. Characteristic signs of this process are the appearance of

increasing segregation-isolation strategies and excluding attitude in many areas of everyday life, or even the ghettoization of settlements. These processes and their complex effects often worsen the coexistence of these communities and make their life more difficult (Kotics, 2020).

However, the case of Hodász shows difference from the typical patterns because here the coexistence relations cannot be described along the above-mentioned social processes. During our studies on the village we identified the development of special ethnic coexistence system. We can say that the experience of belonging to the local community (“local Hodász ethos”) overtook the sense of ethnic affiliation. Consequently, different forms of affirmative relations can be observed between local sub-communities (Hungarian, Vlach Roma, Romungro). The transethnic corridors between the ethnic groups of the local society in Hodász represent fairly the mutual acceptance of each other. This manifests for example in the increasing number of mixed marriages or in different cultural adaptation processes (cp. Szabó, 2022).

The analysis of socio-demographic data of Hodász shows that employment indicators of the local population are increasing steadily. The number of educated inhabitants is growing and the number of Roma among them is increasing as well. However, according to Census 2011 this ratio is still below the national average. In Hodász 2.8% of the population has a higher education degree and the county average (10.5%) is the second lowest in Hungary. “Education for the Roma population above 15

years of age is below the national average. While in 2012, 24.6% of the national population did not have a higher level of education than eighth grade, while this figure was 77.7% within the Roma population. The difference between the Roma and the national rate is also very high for the GCSE and post-secondary education. In the entire country 31.3% have reached the level of a high school graduate, the proportion among the Roma population is just 4.6%. The proportion of post-secondary graduates for the entire country is 18.5%, while this ratio is less than 1% among Roma.” (I1).

Education level indicators themselves can lead to valuable conclusions but if they are matched with employment data, we can see that Hodász follows the characteristics of settlements in disadvantaged regions. 68% of the working age population is employed, 32% is unemployed, which shows a significant difference from the national average (in 2011 5.72% was the unemployment rate in Hungary). At the same time our studies and empirical experiences show that public work programme ensures income for many inhabitants of Hodász as well, however, this form of employment is not ethnically organized. Moreover, it is special in Hodász that an increasing number of young Roma graduates works in their profession.

If a local community has any atypical sociocultural indicators, it is justifiable to discover the reasons of differences. The 1950's brought significant changes in the society of Hodász from the aspect of ethnic coexistence. The activity of Miklós Sója, a Greek Catholic priest must be emphasized. His aim was to support the local Vlach Roma community and help their social integration. The Greek Catholic Church built a church in the middle of the Roma settlement and has established many social institutions through the years. Religion, the power of faith and the desperate work of Miklós Sója had positive effects on Roma living conditions and the different institutions sustained by the Church still provide stable workplace for a high

number of local Roma. All these changes had evincible impacts on settlement-level as well: the relations of previously segregated and isolated ethnic groups started to improve, and the social and economic differences of sub-communities started to equalize as well (cp. Szabó, 2022).

The social processes of the village are modified further by many opportunities where Hungarians and Roma can meet as equal partners and have chances for cooperation and collaboration. This means that mixed ethnic circumstances can evolve not only in the educational institutions but in NGOs and in different fields of the labour market as well. The increasing number of Roma graduates in Hodász was an important condition of these circumstances.

The aim of our study was to uncover the reasons why the case of Hodász is special and could evoke wider interest. In our analysis we discuss with the help of three case studies those local opportunities that made the emergence of this special local society possible. Based on our results we introduce in detail the socio-demographic features of young Roma students from Hodász.

Study on university students of Roma origin

A comprehensive survey (Human Register, 2020) was conducted on the sociocultural composition, geographical recruitment and higher education situation of members of Roma Colleges for Advanced Studies (Biczó and Szabó, 2020a). According to current regulation a Roma College for Advanced Studies (hereinafter Roma College) is a higher educational institution which aims to support talented young Roma, functions as an integrated university community and meets the regulation that the ratio of Roma students in the college has to be at least 70%.

Terms of membership are Roma origin, disadvantaged situation and/or interest in Roma culture.

The profile of the “typical” Roma college student has been created according to the data of the 11 Hungarian Roma Colleges collected in the Human Register 2020. Based on this Roma College members are mainly students of Roma origin from peripheral villages or small towns, living with their families and few siblings. Generally, they choose shortage occupations with lower entry requirements but high social relevance (in the field of education, social sciences, health care) (Biczó and Szabó 2020a, 99.) This general description is largely true to the studied thirteen young Roma graduates from Hodász, most of whom were members of Roma Colleges during their higher education studies.

Our surveys on native places of students had surprising results. At the time of our survey (in 2020) Hodász gave the highest number of Roma students into the higher education system. It is important to note that our database contains only students who were members of Roma Colleges, but in this case it raise an interesting question. The full sample consisted of 326 students, from which 13 came from Hodász. So it should be important to explain, how such a small village, like Hodász could be so successful in the motivation of Roma to continue their studies.

We know from the sample of students of Roma Colleges that their parents are poorly educated. In the case of fathers it means eight grades of elementary school, while one half of the mothers completed elementary school and the other half has finished vocational school. It means that the studied young Roma from Hodász are first-generation college students. The employment status of parents is maybe an even more important background factor. It is prominent that only three fathers were unemployed, and none of them was employed in public work at the time of the survey. In conclusion we can say that the education and employment features of parents of Roma College students are more favourable than the average.

Besides supportive family background students need many personal qualities and skills for successful studies in higher education. Perseverance, regularity and permanent daily routine are of high importance in the case of Roma students, because in absence of these skills it is difficult to complete a degree. Roma students have to face many difficulties (i.e. lack of competences, learning disabilities, negative discrimination) which often results in drop-out.

Family background represents a determining factor. The thoughts of the foster mother of one Roma graduate exemplify that involved people themselves identify the role of family as an important factor: “Well, to that I can say that depends on the environment. Where he or she belongs, that means a lot. And what these young wants, what he or she gets from the given community. This means a lot. [...] if the family doesn’t stand by as a background, saying I let him or her go. But if the environment doesn’t care or pay attention... I don’t know what would have happen in that case.” (Biczó and Szabó, 2022)

A social worker who has been working through years in Hodász summarized the main factors that hold back young Roma from further education in tradition-following communities as follows: “Vlax Roma in the local community live their culture every single day. So, there we don’t speak about traditions, for them it’s part of their everyday life. The most evident is that they use Romani language with each other. It doesn’t matter whether they are in stores, go the pharmacy or to their teacher at school. They keep their traditions in the same way. There are things that have started to change a bit, so you can see the ravages of time here as well. The tradition of elopement still exists, they follow the romani crisi, so there are Roma laws and those are more important to them. They live this every single day, children grow up in it. It is hard to imagine in Hungary, but here it is still a huge problem, that children start to learn the Hungarian language at

the age of three when they go to kindergarten. And they also start to socialize with the majority society in the kindergarten.” (Biczó and Szabó, 2020b).

„Because of traditions, because of language use, because they don’t speak the Hungarian language the same way, not on the same level. And for example, this was a huge problem when the first group entered higher education. A completely strange environment, where you should learn technical terms, however, we don’t even understand Hungarian on such a high level, therefore we don’t understand the nuanced expressions.” (Biczó and Szabó 2020b).

This means that the family background, living environment and sociocultural opportunities determine the chances of young Roma whether as a condition of entering higher education or as difficulties in successful compliance of university studies. With further analyzation of features of students of Roma Colleges we can find a markable item of data, i.e., ten of the thirteen students have graduated from the Pista Dankó Education Center in Biri. Moreover, all of them took advanced level school leaving examination. Twelve students entered higher education with a language certificate. Another remarkable fact is that they all identified themselves of Roma origin. Six students are multiply disadvantaged, three are, and only four of them do not belong in any of these two categories. (The four students cannot be classified as disadvantaged because of their age, but according to empirical experience they meet the other criteria of this category.)

Compared to the whole sample of Human Register 2020 the numbers show considerable difference as in the case of students of Hungarian Roma Colleges only 25% is disadvantaged, 27% is multiply disadvantaged and 48% is not disadvantaged. Therefore the socio-economic conditions of the whole sample are more favourable than of student from Hodász (cp. Biczó and Szabó, 2020a). Ágnes Lukács (2017) laid great emphasis on the

mapping of sociocultural background of Roma graduates. From her point of view this background factor has significant impact on social mobility. Conclusions of her study showed that besides non-segregated living environment education level of parents, stable workplace and increased value of education in families are those factors that were typical of most studied Roma graduates. Lukács emphasize that Hungarian is the first language of most Roma graduates (or Roma who were higher education students at the time of the survey) or at least they speak Hungarian on native level. The mentioned background factor cannot guarantee social success but can give higher chances for graduated young Roma to successfully enter the labour market and become useful members of the society.

According to the above described observations at first sight the sociocultural conditions of Hodász, and the intersectional social situation (Vincze 2012, 73) determined that young Roma cannot be successful in higher education. With their success they disproved the difficulties of their circumstances, therefore sociologists should find answers to their outstanding performance (cp. Nyíró and Durst, 2018).

Hereinafter we discuss in details the successful further education practice which determine the integration processes of young graduated Roma in Hodász through three case studies.

Roma kindergarten teacher of the year

In 2020 I made a documentary titled *We can learn a lot from each other... with* my colleague Gábor Biczó from an anthropological aspect about the contemporary social and cultural processes of Hodász and Hungarian-Roma local coexistence relations (Biczó and Szabó, 2020b). One important character of the film is G.R., a young woman who was born in Hodász and has a kindergarten teacher degree. Her background meets the above-described

characteristics of the average Roma College student (HR2020), however, she has already been working as an entrance with a degree in 2020 at the time of our survey, therefore she was not involved in our research. She grew up in a tradition-following Vlach Roma family, which means that their parents raised their daughters for traditional woman roles keeping the protocols of Roma culture. Her mother tongue is the Cerhari dialect of the Romani language, she has learnt the Hungarian language in the kindergarten. Besides keeping the traditions her family started to support education which is a kind of distancing from local traditions. According to local Vlach Roma traditions the education of girls was taboo, especially moving into dormitories, because in that case they are no longer under the control of male family members (Biczó, 2019).

„Our father didn't bring us up to marry at the age of fourteen and he argued a lot with my mother on not to send us too far, and what would happen with us in the “big world”. So, our father convinced our mom that we definitely have to study further, because if we want to break out and have better existence for ourselves, then we have to study. So suitors came in vain, my father refused all of them, and in the case of my younger sister as well.” (Biczó and Szabó, 2020b)

Her mother brought up G. R. and her two sisters alone under narrow financial circumstances. They lived on the edge of one Roma segregates, from where even reaching the centre of the village was difficult.

„Her mother, Gina's mother started working at the age of ten and has four grades of elementary school and she had to work very hard to provide their daily bread. And she must be a man and a woman at the same time. So breadwinner and mother in one. For her it was easier to say that there is a way out from public work and your daughter can get on better in life. And you can give her an easier life. The question for her was doubt was how she could finance it. And I am very

grateful for her to believe that there is always a solution, and we are going to solve problems together [...]” (Biczó and Szabó, 2020b).

After successful graduation G. R. started to work as a kindergarten teacher in the local kindergarten. She won the REYN-award of Roma kindergarten teacher of the year in 2022. This means that her exemplary life, activity and work became acknowledged not just locally but on national level.

G. R. lives in a mixed marriage, his husband comes from a local Romungro community. This previously inconvincible relationship also represents that the cultural differences of local ethnic sub-communities do not create problems in everyday life.

Supporter from supported

In 2022 another documentary was made with different aims and other young Roma graduates. Our view was that there are young Vlach Roma graduates who can serve as a role model, and the introduction of their example can serve as a practical and successful tool to soften the stereotypes of Hungarian majority about Roma.

The main character of our documentary titled *What would have been if...*, R. L. can serve as an example for young people with similar disadvantages and/or Roma origin, his life is creditable for the majority as well. The documentary introduces that despite the difficult circumstances anybody could become a successful, responsible, exemplary intellectual (Biczó and Szabó, 2022).

R. L. is a young Vlach Roma man, graduated in social pedagogy in 2022. He has already been working in his profession during his studies. His background did not predestine such a successful life, he was very young when his father was sent to jail. Then his mother raised him and his younger brother alone. They drifted into poverty.

„Looking back from now, as children we laughed about, she cooked outside. But if I think it through

now, there was no other option. She cooked for us outside, she heated water at the fire pit, she cooked there. Because we didn't even have the money to buy a gas cylinder. We had electricity from our neighbour, so at least we could use a heater or something in the winter. I have been bullied a lot because of this at school, because I couldn't buy new clothes, or my mother, or new shoes or whatever. She still sent me to school in clean clothes, she rather washed it with her hands. But, yes, I remember taking a bath in a basin and she heated water like that. So, those were tough times" (Biczó and Szabó, 2022).

His mothers' supportive attitude towards education played a significant role in their life. She deliberately aimed to educate his sons in suitable schools. Thus, they did not learn in the local elementary school, which is characterized by spontaneous segregation processes, but in the hope of better educational conditions and future chances they went to school in the neighbouring settlement.

„We were admitted to school and then different atrocities came from children. I had no seatmates because we don't sit next to the Roma, because smells bad, because he is black. And things like that. From teachers as well, the feeling, that somehow the diary always opens at your name. It doesn't matter on which side of the diary you are, it always opens there. And I got to know this feeling there, that it doesn't matter how much you know, it will never still be enough. This feeling lasted for long, I was beaten many times for being a Roma in that school. Some children beat me badly in the schoolyard. I was hurt and bullied constantly, but I came home and said nothing at all. My mother was there, she was sick. I don't want to bother her with my little problems. That's how I thought about it." (Biczó and Szabó, 2022)

In the meanwhile, it turned out that his mother had cancer, doctors couldn't save her, so R. L. lost her when he was only ten. R. L. had to face early the stereotypes about his origin, which often

manifested in physical abuse. According to his narrative he often became the victim of racism, school abuse and discrimination by teachers. Meantime his father served his time in jail and raised his two sons at in the beginning alone, then together with his new partner. Despite all the difficulties he decided to study further after secondary school. His teachers and the school director played an important role in this decision. After graduation R. L. successfully overcame every difficulties and works in his profession at the moment. He is satisfied with his life, he is independent, cultural differences cause no problem in his mixed Hungarian-Roma relationship.

R. L. proved himself, to his family and his teachers: to those who believed in him and who did not. „She [his form teacher at elementary school – H. Sz.] constantly strengthened in me that I will be a jailbird. I won't reach anything in my life. She mentioned it multiple times in front of my class." (Biczó and Szabó, 2022).

The life of R. L. well-represents how a multiply disadvantaged person could become a professional helper of others in similar situation.

Career advancement and identity crisis

The subject of our third case study is a married couple from Hodász with Vlach Roma origin. The wife K.R. grew up with her parents and two siblings in one segregate of Hodász. Vlach Roma woman roles defined her upbringing in her family. They lived in closed communities, education and knowledge were not integral parts of the traditional values and norms of older generations. On the other hand when K.R. went to secondary school one of her older sisters broke with family traditions and became a higher education student.

„And when we went to secondary school I didn't care about further education, about I would like to go. I just cared about my final exams, and let come what may. Then my older sister and our cousins

said that they would like to continue their studies. But I didn't really care about it, do what they want. I always cared about the moment. At first they were not allowed to move into dormitory, only to enter college. Usually, girls are not allowed to live in dormitories because of our traditions. [...] But finally my sister wanted it so badly that they had to agree." (Biczó and Szabó, 2021).

Present-oriented thinking is an important characteristic of Roma communities. Future planning appears differently than in the case of social majority. However models of her family had greater impact on K.R., thus she also decided to study further. She graduated as infant and early childhood educator. At the moment she is at home with her second child.

After graduation finding a proper workplace was difficult and according to her narratives it mainly had ethnic reasons. K. R. could find a job in her profession after one year of unemployment.

The husband M. R. grew up in the middle of a segregate, under narrow circumstances. Entering higher education after his final exams was a conscious and planned decision. He completed a youth career guidance training, at the moment he is studying romology on a correspondence course. He could not find a job in his profession until now, so "at the moment I have a grocery, my mother is the employee. The grocery was established a few days ago. This is a former store, it was a thrift shop, I could open that with the support of a tender. I managed to open that shop with the help of youth entrepreneurship support program. And a certain time has passed, it was possible to change, and I thought that food would work better than clothes in this area" (Biczó and Szabó, 2021).

In their case after graduation social mobility stalled, fell through, because they could not move away from their original environment. There are no available positions that suit their professions and provide stable income in the neighbourhood of their segregated living environment. Their life is

characterized by permanent struggle and striving after moving into urban area. A documentary was made about their story in 2021. The film represents the special situation of young Roma intellectuals, i.e., they as many other Roma graduates can stuck in a special situation which can be described as a permanent transition between the interfering force of their environment and the intention of integration into social majority (Gulyás, 2021). „Here in Hodász, apart from the fact that we have this house, we are building, we never going to find a more proper workplace. So we don't want to stay, and don't have reasons to live here. Only our family binds us here. But I think anywhere we go, we will visit home [...] A lot of things happen in my life that pulls me back [...] at home I can't evolve, which plays an important role in it, because my role is different. [...] Maybe this is why my life is inconvenient here. I think this is why, because it is hard, really hard for me to live here." (Biczó and Szabó, 2021.)

Summary

With the study of the above described three cases and the life of other young Roma graduates from Hodász we can draw important conclusions about the factors which play key roles in the development of the special local social integration practice of the Vlax Roma community. We hope that we can find answers how a Roma population live mainly in segregated environment in a disadvantaged region can have such a high number of intellectuals.

If we list the above introduced special and in similar environments partly occurring factors we can see that their effect cumulate. We can say that family background (Feischmidt, 2008), supporting attitude of schools (especially the Biri secondary school), the power of special local sample, additionally the presence of personal determination are those factors and characteristics that can lead young Roma to intellectual professions.

Comparing the results of Ágnes Lukács (2017) with our sample from Hodász we can see that the disadvantaged situation of the village fundamentally determines the opportunities of its inhabitants. Despite of this the rate of local Roma graduates in the community is growing. One important reason of this process is that parents see the value of education and despite of their narrow circumstances they support higher education of their children as a “good investment”. Another important factor is, that we identified a strong, convergent system of relatives among Roma in Hodász living in closed communities. The intention to follow the model of other families had motivating effect. According to the narratives of the interviewee the inner models of families function as motivation factors. Nobody wants to fall behind the others, therefore they educate their children.

It is interesting to observe the temporal evolution of the process in Hodász. The first Roma graduate, late Mrs Rézműves, who took a step forward with self-effort and the support of church played a key role. Most of the young Roma who graduated in 2016 as kindergarten teachers went to the settlement kindergarten that was founded by her. Later the five Roma kindergarten teacher served as a role model, which inspired some young Roma to continue their studies.

„The community handled quite well that they entered higher education, however that they finished it, not so well. There was a negative response. When you throw a rock into a lake, the water starts to ripple. The same thing was noticeable here. With entering higher education, they have seen other parts of the world as well. They came to know new rules, new roles. They changed their style, communicated differently, behaved differently, dressed differently. And here the members of the community mainly saw appearances. That she plays a part. She graduated, so why she is so special. There was a kind of jealousy and they watched them

appraisingly. Both the community and young graduates had to learn how to deal with it. I say hats off to each graduated Roma child who learnt to identify oneself.” „Mainly they took up a position where they spent their trainings, where their work could be evaluated, there the feedbacks were very positive and they got employment contract, so they all started to work there.” (Biczó and Szabó, 2020b).

Based on the above-described observations in the case of segregated, disadvantaged Roma communities living in poverty mobility (that determines social integration processes) significantly depends on education level. Supportive environment can provide some of the conditions that are needed to reach this success. Besides, as the example of Hodász represents, the evolution of inner motivation mechanisms of involved communities is necessary. In the case of Hodász, the changed way of living and formation of new norms due to the practice of Greek Catholic religion played important role in the process. Furthermore the prestige of education in the closed system of families was also a crucial reason of the relatively high number of graduates.

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