

Interculturalism at new crossroads: Faces of exclusion and inclusion.

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A. Diversity in a globalized setting. Trends and challenges.

As a consequence of the mass movement of people at a global level, host immigrant countries experience continuous changes to the demographic synthesis of their societies, hence being transformed into societies with a rapidly changing multicultural character. The question is to what extent these societies can create new models of social relationships that would prevent conflict and foster the creative interaction of cultures (Govaris 2004, p. 12). Official education has long been acknowledged of the significant role it plays in the development of those processes which promote social and cultural inclusion (Markou 2010, p.12). In the Greek context, the response of the educational system to the new reality of cultural and linguistic pluralism presupposes the abolition of its traditional monocultural and monolingual nature. Until this occurs, the possibilities to create a truly democratic and multicultural society are restricted (Govaris 2004, p. 12-13; Parthenis 2013, p. 276). The monocultural and ethnocentric nature of the educational system (see Tsoukalas 1992) is not essentially a Greek phenomenon, but can also be noted in other countries, even in those with a long tradition in multiculturalism such as the UK (Parekh 1997, p. 46-50).

Globalization and the phenomenon of migration, intensified particularly in times of crisis such as that currently unfolding in the Middle East and Asia, constantly change the demographic nature of nation-states. Greece, due to its geographic position, is the main gate way of the migration streams heading towards Europe. Hence, contemporary societies constantly experience great social changes which often lead to the development of a cultural mosaic. The “*closed*” and “*solid*” cultural bodies give way to increasingly open and “*liquid*” forms of social organization and aggregation (Tsoukalas 2010, p. 20).

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The production of values and meaning is no longer subject to local restrictions. Nevertheless, the same does not apply to the human condition which should be signified from these values and meanings (Bauman 2004, p.12). It is at this point that globalisation makes reference to the undefined and the self-driven nature of global affairs and the absence of a visible centre of power. In this new era of globalization, nation-states that traditionally were defining the meaning of concepts such as "culture" or "development" expressing the desire to improve the living conditions of their people, seem to be deprived of opportunities and resources for autonomous policy development (Bauman 2004, p. 86-96). Globalization does not mean the end of policy. However, policy develops beyond the national borders and nation states can no longer implement social policies (Beck 1999, p. 68). Beck raises the question whether modernity is threatened under these new conditions, reminding the argument of postmodern philosophers for the end of reason and rationality. The western discourse of Enlightenment and human rights is regarded as just the voice of "*dead white men*" who suppress the rights of national, religious, sexual or other minorities (Beck 1999, p. 68). As Lyotard argues (1993, p. 25-27), there are no great heroes, major risks and great goals. It is argued that postmodern knowledge refines our sensitivity to difference, strengthens our ability to endure the asymmetric and does not derive its legitimation from the consensus of "experts".

As Giddens insightfully argued (2001, p. 34), we are living in an age of rapid change. In this new era of globalization, the unity between the nation state and the national society is dismantled and new forms of authority and competitiveness are created (Beck 1999, p. 93). The rise of international and European organizations, social movements, NGOs and lobbies has in turn transformed the type and the dynamic of both the states and civil societies. National governments are increasingly involved in a global, local and multi-level system of governance that is difficult to monitor and control. The range of strategic options available to national governments has been reduced and the states seem increasingly unable to determine their own fate (Held and Mc Grew 2004, p. 39-49). Critics of globalization seek to emphasize that the gap between rich and poor countries has widened and that poverty and inequality have been also increased within the internal dynamics of each state (Held and Mc Grew 2004, p. 129).

Despite the fact that cultures have come closer at least technologically and that there is an increase in the awareness of the variety of lifestyles and values which could in turn lead to mutual understanding, what seems to occur sometimes is the accentuation of difference. The acknowledgement of the "other" does not imply in any way his acceptance (Held and Mc Grew 2004, p. 57). In a fluid global scene, those characterised as "different" often find themselves in a precarious position. As Giddens (2001, p. 37) points out, democracy and acceptance of cultural diversity are closely related. While globalization creates new forms of global, supranational organizations or communities that connect people across national borders, to the same degree, it divides communities within and outside the traditional nation-state boundaries. Ethnic and racial differences often become accentuated when the "others" come closer (Hall et al 2003, p. 117). As Bauman points out, the arrival of a foreigner has an impact equal to an earthquake. The newcomer destroys the stability and the secure environment of everyday life and questions almost all the assumptions of the dominant group (Bauman 2002, σ. 31). The problem seems to be consistently related, either explicitly or implicitly, to the degree of "adaptation" of the foreigner to the host country (Sayad 2004, p. 29).

The pedagogical discourse on diversity.

Since the 1960s a new pedagogical discourse for the education of minorities has been developed in countries such as England and France; a discourse which strongly gained momentum in the 1980s when it became apparent of the pressing need to address the impact of migration on the social life of the host countries (Govaris 2004, p. 41-42). Despite the common characteristics of the discourse developed in many countries, the political and educational practices aimed at addressing the new challenges created in multicultural societies, were radically different. We should not take for granted that the same objectives lead to the same policies or that the same policies leave room for the development of the same objectives (Parthenis 2013a). The evolution of the discourse for immigrants' education has led to the development of several models to which we shall briefly refer to here.

The assimilation model was dominant until the 1960s, drawing from Parsons' theory on functionalism. Immigrants were considered to bear an inferior and defective

identity that should be “rectified” through education. The ultimate objective was the complete integration and the acceptance of the culture and values of the dominant group by immigrants. It was argued that the cultural characteristics of the students should not be apparent in the public sphere, as they would entrench the dividing lines between the various ethnic groups, undermine individual rights and hinder social integration (see Markou 2010, p. 63-66; Govaris 2004, p. 46-51). In response to the criticism against the assimilation model, the model of integration arises that acknowledges the existence of diversity, yet at the same stressing the common elements between different cultures. The model aims to strengthen positive appraisal towards minority group cultures to the extent that does not challenge the dominant values of the host country. Cultural tolerance was considered as a key factor to the integration and, finally, to the assimilation of immigrants into the dominant group culture. Pedagogical discourse and practices also followed the same direction (Govaris 2004, p. 51-53).

From the 1970s and in the following decades, there emerged a strong ethnic discourse which challenged the traditional monocultural character of the western national education systems and brought to the fore issues such as the recognition of ethnocultural differences, the identities and the collective rights of minorities. In the context of globalization and the postmodern or late-modern discourse, it was argued that the "old" identities stabilizing societies for long periods of time are in decline. The fields of class, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality became fragmented (Hall et al 2003, p. 401-402). Bauman (2002, p. 52) argues that this post-modern society is preparing hence to exist in a permanent state of uncertainty. The constantly growing demands for collective recognition, the debate over individual right to difference and the issue of cultural self-determination, promulgate an ideological turning point with hidden and unforeseeable implications (Tsoukalas 2010, p.17).

The concept of multicultural education has a broad and sometimes blurred content, encompassing different theoretical approaches. According to Parekh, multicultural education is just the attempt to release children from the confines of an “ethnocentric straitjacket”, and to awaken them to the existence of other cultures, societies and modes of thought. Multicultural education seeks to release people from prejudices, to allow them to develop the capacity to explore other cultures and perspectives and to help them to

manage their choices by being fully knowledgeable of the various options available. The child is not isolated from its own culture but rather becomes capable of enriching it (Parekh 1997, p. 56). As Parekh points out (1997, p. 60) multicultural education does not require the presence of children from minority groups in schools. A system of education that aims to develop students' competences such as curiosity, reflection, critical thinking, self-criticism and respect, must have a multicultural orientation.

In the perspective of radical multiculturalism, the above approach to multicultural education is considered as vague and romantic (Bullivant 1997). Curricula that focus only on how students from ethnic minorities can learn their mother tongue or their history, offer very little in the way of improving students' educational opportunities and life chances which are defined by structural, class and political factors. Thus, it is argued that multicultural education needs to become more radical and politicized taking into consideration those power structures which could ultimately be overturned as a result of conflict and rivalry between groups (Bullivant 1997, p. 79-85). Bullivant's view clearly incurs a critique to postmodern identity which is considered to undermine political solidarity and the struggle for equality (Govaris 2004, p. 58). In the same context, theorists of critical multicultural education promote emancipatory action and the transformation/reversal of the social, cultural and institutional relations and they reject what they conceptualize as conservative, liberal or left-liberal multiculturalism. As McLaren (1994, p. 58) argues, difference should not be interrogated just as a form of rhetoric, thereby reducing politics to signifying structures and history to textuality. There is a need to go beyond destabilizing meaning, by transforming the social and historic conditions in which meaning-making occurs.

Despite the various conceptualizations, Banks (1992, p. 3-49) argues that there is a consensus in the objectives of multicultural education regarding the necessity of reforming education systems in order to provide students from different cultural and social background with equal opportunities for educational and social success. The same difficulties appear in the conceptualization of intercultural education (Govaris 2004, p. 77). According to the principles of the intercultural approach, the inclusion of students from different cultural backgrounds in a dominant education system requires an education that supports all students to acquire those necessary skills and competences for living in a

new multicultural environment. The aim of such an education is to foster in every child the capacity to undertake their responsibilities and to assert their rights under the principles of egalitarianism and equality before the law, parameters which should form the basis on which relationships between the state and citizens can be developed from, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, gender, nationality etc. (Markou 2011). According to the dominant view, multiculturalism is considered as a de facto social reality and intercultural education as the medium to create those conditions which ensure the creative interaction of cultures (Govaris 1004, p.110). An intercultural curriculum should include a variety of courses, programs and teaching and learning practices which contribute to the battle against social and educational exclusion and promote the harmonious inclusion of children from different socio-cultural backgrounds into the host country (Parthenis 2013, p. 226-230).

The various approaches to diversity are directly related to the way we perceive individual and collective rights. In this paper, we will also argue that the empowerment of intercultural education in the current circumstances presupposes the understanding of those mechanisms that produce and reproduce stereotypical perceptions about the “other”.

Cultural differences and the issue of individual/collective rights.

The traditional western model of citizenship developed by T.H. Marshal is related to the empowerment of national integration and the development of a sense of belonging to a political community. The granting of social and civil rights promotes the integration of all people in a common culture, thereby creating a sense of national unity and loyalty (see Kymlicka 2005, pp. 449-451). The national subject born to the dominant culture has accumulated national capital in the form of dominant linguistic, physical and cultural dispositions, hence claiming “more” national belonging compared to people from minorities or immigrant groups (Skeggs 2008 p. 21-22). Kymlicka (1998, p. 17) argues that globalization overturned the myth of a culturally homogenous state and obliged the dominant groups of each nation state to become more open to diversity. This argument will be reconsidered in the light of recent trends in addressing the migration phenomenon.

The traditional western model of rights has been criticized by various theorists, including the communitarians (Kymlicka 2005, p. 401). Communitarians, like Taylor, question the neutrality of the state and its intentions towards the cultural groups perceived as different, especially in matters of religion and education (Parthenis 2013, p. 217). In modern democratic societies, the need to ensure the dignity of all people and to safeguard equal rights for all citizens is stressed out. However, the politics of dignity, the principle of “equal” citizenship and the universalism of some rights were not assumed as enough, giving room to the rise of the politics of difference. The distinctness of each identity need also to be recognized, otherwise all identities will be assimilated into a dominant identity. Politics of difference demand diversified and not universal practices based on the specific cultural group characteristics that need to be protected (Taylor 2004, p. 82).

Taylor emphasizes the relationship between identity and recognition. The discourse on recognition develops in two levels: the inner, private sphere, where the construction of identity is perceived as the result of a dialectical relationship with "significant others" according to Mead's conceptualization, and the public sphere, where the politics of recognition are of increasing importance. Non recognition or misrecognition can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false and reduced mode of being (Taylor 2004, 75; 79-81). The homogenized culture of liberal democracies and the politics of recognizing universal rights forces minority groups or those who bear oppressed identities to accept the dominant culture and abandon their own, therefore hence, ultimately leading to discrimination policy. In this perception, the right of minorities or other oppressed groups to assert collective rights and to raise collective goals is recognised, even if sometimes the individual rights of their group members must be subordinated to collective goals (Taylor 2004).

On the other hand, theorists such as Habermas (1994) prioritize individual rights as corner stone of liberal democracy and they argue that collective interests can be protected through the active participation of all citizens in the formulation of rules of law. All individuals should be free to participate equally in public dialogue, to develop rational arguments and to consent to the optimal decision. According to Habermas (1994), the protection and the respect of individual rights in all aspects of life can ensure the coexistence of different ethnic and cultural groups. All people should be able to develop

in a world of cultural traditions, to critically consider these traditions and to continue or transform them. The rapid transformation of modern societies abolishes all stagnant forms of life. Civilizations now survive through the contact and exchange with other civilizations and not in isolation. We should remind here that Taylor argues that state is not neutral and always favors the dominant cultures.

For almost 40 years after the end of the Second World War, the issue of minority rights was not addressed by the international community as human rights discourse was considered sufficient. It wasn't until the 1990s that minority rights entered the international agenda. According to Kymlicka (2012, p. 72-89) Nation-States can only be deemed as democratic if they recognize that they are culturally and linguistically diverse and they allow the active political participation of ethnic actors. The recognition of minority rights was considered as a contributing factor to the achievement of major goals of the international community, such as peace, democracy and economic prosperity. This new policy is attributed to the fear of the spread of ethnic violence after the collapse of communism, as well as to the hope of establishing a viable liberal multiculturalism in the West.

According to Kymlicka (2012, p. 99-120), the conceptualization of liberal multiculturalism is difficult because of its various forms. It is a fact that all minority groups struggle to abolish the perception that the state belongs to the dominant group and to replace politics of assimilation and exclusion with politics of recognition. Despite the general turn from assimilation and exclusion policies to a more multicultural approach and the grant of certain rights to all ethnocultural groups, it remains difficult to delineate a general model. Minority groups have different characteristics. Some of them are indigenous populations, others are "national" groups (such as the Catalans and Basques in Spain), and others are immigrant groups. All these groups differ regarding their relationship with the dominant states, their aims and objectives. This is why Kymlicka (2012, p. 121-122) argues that any attempt to articulate liberal multiculturalism as a single discourse with respect to some universal minority rights without taking into consideration the particular characteristics of each group in each of the countries, is doomed to fail. It is also important to note that multiculturalism is not only a matter of identities and symbolic recognition, but also a matter of power and control of resources.

As Kymlicka (2012, p. 90-91) points out, the excessive optimism over the prevalence of Western liberal multiculturalism gradually declines. The millions of immigrants, Muslims to a large extent, which arrive in Europe, are now considered as a threat. The recent public discourse in the most powerful EU countries is indicative of the emerging reluctance to multiculturalism. By the end of 2010, the German Prime Minister declared that the efforts to set up a multicultural society ultimately failed and immigrants should be integrated into German society, expressing also the rising anti-immigration feelings of the German society (see at BBC 2010). Soon enough, other European leaders followed. Sarkozy, the former President of France, when making reference to the Muslim immigrants stated that “we cared enough about the identity of migrants but need now to address the identity of the country that receives these immigrants” and that the French national community cannot accept changes to its lifestyle and its core values. He emphasized the failure of policies supporting religious and cultural diversity, pointing out that although diversity must be respected, societies in which various communities just coexist are not desirable (see at Daily Mail 2011). Cameron, the British Prime Minister, stressed out that public expenditure for ethnic minorities who do not embrace British values should be suspended (see at Daily Mail 2011).

The rise of socialists in the presidency did not incur major changes in French policy. Valls, the Prime Minister, stated that Roma must return to the countries from which they originated from, mostly from Romania and Bulgaria, declaring that their way of life is profoundly different compared to the dominant culture, and therefore making it almost impossible to be integrated into the dominant national community. By this statement, the French Prime Minister brought to the fore the stereotypical perceptions about Roma, that they constitute a danger to public safety and hygiene, and at the same time questioned key European policies as the right of free movement (see at Daily Mail 2013). The British government also announced its intention to put limitations in the number of people coming from poorer European countries in search for work, in response to the growing anger within the British community regarding the rising number of immigrants (see at Daily telegraph 2014). Indicative of the anti-immigration feelings in a great part of Europe is that anti-European, xenophobic political parties prevailed in England and in France at the 2014 European elections.

The cultural identity of Roma: Assimilation, inclusion or social exclusion?

Kymlicka's analysis highlights the failure of universal theories, whether relating to individual rights as sufficient to protect the multicultural character of the nation-states or to collective rights, to ascertain the complex and rapidly changed conditions that transform national communities into multicultural societies. In a multicultural society, no single group, whether the majority or a minority can remain entrenched in their own values, practices, attitudes and beliefs and insist on the purity of their identity. International and European organisations usually intervene in issues regarding the traditional "national" minorities, which often constitute the source of conflicts in their claim for territorial autonomy. On the contrary, action taken for immigrants is limited despite the fact that they live in worse conditions, they experience greater exclusion compared to the "national" minorities and they do not raise collective demands which are often perceived as threatening by the nation-states (Kymlicka 2012, p. 239-241). In the current hostile climate for immigrants and multiculturalism, it is considered very unlikely that the rights of migrants can be promoted (Kymlicka 2012, p. 299).

Roma, find themselves situated in a similar position as immigrants. They do not have a historic homeland in Europe, they do not raise issues of autonomy as do "national" groups and they often live in extreme poverty. They usually face extreme forms of discrimination, racial prejudice and exclusion and endure political marginalization and residential isolation (Kymlicka 2012, p. 293). European Union exerted pressure mainly on the post-communist countries wishing to be part of the Union, in order to improve the living conditions of Roma. However, the ultimate goal of EU policies was mainly to prevent a massive movement of Roma to the western countries in search for better living conditions. One can note the indifference of EU about the living conditions of Roma in countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece (Kymlicka 2012, p. 294).

In Greece, the Roma population is estimated to be at least 150000, although it is difficult to establish accurate numbers (Moraitou 2013). In the Greek context, the issue of Roma is not confined to individual or collective rights and to the recognition of their difference. Greek Roma are citizens with statutory civil rights and most of them embrace the same religion as that of the dominant cultural group. Social rights of Roma, such as

access to education, are secured and they are not considered a threat to the security of the country. Furthermore, Greek state has not implemented assimilation policies towards Roma. On the contrary, Roma are recognized as a group with distinct cultural characteristics, living in isolation and in complete obsolescence, with their own codes and practices, not least due to their desire to "protect" their cultural identity, but more so as the only alternative left by the dominant group (see also Kymlicka 2012, p. 147). The stereotypical views held by the dominant group and the discriminatory practices against the Roma have led to their complete social exclusion. Thus, most Roma live outside the residential zones in extreme poverty.

In this paper, we argue that the Greek state has never implemented either assimilation or inclusion policies regarding the Roma population. The only exception is the implementation of university programs funded to a large extent by EU over the last 15 years, regarding the education of Roma, migrant and Muslim students (see Parthenis 2013, p. 230-255; for differences in the theoretical perspective of these programs, see Markou 2010, p. 13-14). Until the mid-1980s, there was no reference to the education of Roma in any official document. Act 2413/1996 introduced intercultural education in Greece, despite its inadequacies in the promotion of an intercultural culture (see in detail Markou 2010, p.13-14). Despite the radical changes that Greek society has experienced over the last 20 years, the Act 2413/1996 has not updated yet (Parthenis 2013, p. 276-277. For the development of intercultural education and the policies regarding diversity in Greece, see also Markou and Parthenis 2014).

Hence, Roma in Greece, as well as in most European countries, experience socio-economic and educational marginalization and exclusion, a reality that stigmatizes modern democratic societies. It is argued that the stereotypical perceptions about Roma that have been constructed over a long period time, are produced and reproduced through state policies and everyday practice of the members of the dominant group, including the school community. Teachers are also products of an education system that produces "good" and "bad" students, thereby incorporating and legitimizing early in their school life the belief that some students are condemned to fail. School fulfils its reproductive role by exercising symbolic violence, building on the power of socially constructed beliefs and perceptions that social subjects do not question. The theory of symbolic violence is based

on the socialization process that provides subjects with the “necessary” perceptive schemes in order to act in the “proper” way in a given situation (Bourdieu 2000, p. 174). According to Bourdieu (1990, p. 54-56), the habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices in accordance with the schemes generated by history. This system of dispositions governs practice. Bourdieu argues that we do not feel the influence of our past selves and dispositions because they are deeply rooted within us, constituting the unconscious part of ourselves. People tend not to recognize the legitimate demands of their dispositions.

These deep-rooted stereotypical perceptions about Roma constitute a major obstacle for an intercultural education that should not only seek to promote the respect and acceptance of all cultural groups, but also create those conditions that will permit all people to claim their right to improve their living conditions and to freely construct their identity.

B. Goals and research questions.

In this paper, we will explore the factors related with regular/irregular school attendance of Roma children in the Greek social and educational context. In specific, the study aims to explore:

1. The role, the beliefs and the practices of principals and teachers concerning Roma education in the Greek context.
2. The perceptions and the values that Roma parents and students hold regarding formal education, as well as their perceptions and relationships with non-Roma parents and students, factors that may influence students’ regular/irregular attendance.
3. The possibilities and the limitations of educational intervention programs based on the experiences of Roma mediators and schools coordinators in the municipal areas of Agia Varvara and Acharnes.

C. Research and methodology.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the factors related to the regular/irregular school attendance of Roma children. Data were collected during the

school year 2012-2013, in the context of the Programme “Education of Roma Children” implemented by the University of Athens during the period 2010-2014. We applied the case study method, a flexible research strategy in approaching social entities (Hakim 1987, p. 61). Case studies can be used for exploratory, descriptive or illustrative goals and they provide researchers with detailed and in-depth information. Four primary schools were selected, two in each of the municipalities of Agia Varvara and Acharnes. In the Acharnes area, there is a high dropout rate in comparison to Agia Varvara, where the majority of Roma children attend school regularly. The two schools in the municipality of Acharnes were selected as *typical cases* of high dropout rate of Roma children. The two schools in the Agia Varvara area on the other hand, represent *non typical cases* with high percentages of Roma children attending school regularly (see Yin 1994). 59 semi – structured interviews were conducted in total (see Cohen et al 2005). In Agia Varvara area, 36 interviews were conducted. In specific, we interviewed 2 principals, 1 teacher, 17 students (boys and girls of different ages), 13 parents/legal guardians (mostly mothers), 2 Roma mediators and 1 school coordinator. The mediator and the coordinator are collaborators of the Programme “Education of Roma Children”. In the Acharnes area, 23 people were interviewed. In specific, we interviewed 2 principals, 2 teachers, 12 students (boys and girls of different ages), 4 parents/legal guardians, 2 Roma mediators and one school coordinator.

Purposive sampling is the method applied in order to collect the data (Kiriazis 2006), as our research design was not to produce a sample representative to a larger population. The results of this study cannot be generalized, however they can help us to better understand the social and educational situation of Roma, to intervene more effectively in order to improve their educational and life chances and maybe to pose some new research questions. The participants were informed of the goals of the research. As far as the interviews with students are concerned, students consent and parental presence during the interviews were sought. The data analysis was based on the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology (for this approach, see Parthenis 2013, p. 168-176). In order to ensure the anonymity of the schools, we named the two schools of Agia Varvara as school A and B and the two schools in Acharnes as school C and D.

D. Results.

Agia Varvara area.

Agia Varvara is an urban area in West Attica in which approximately 5, 500 Roma live, consisting 10% of the total population of this municipality. The Roma are fully integrated in the local economic life, living in homes within the general residential zone with no separate settlements or camps. They are mostly merchants and several Roma families have a satisfactory financial status owning a number of shops in the commercial center of the area. School attendance is regular in primary school and Romani is spoken as well as Greek. Roma are to a large extent Greek orthodox and they usually participate in various cultural events taking place in the area. Social services promote equality, public health and the support of vulnerable social groups and they provide all people with opportunities for growth and participation in the social life of the area.

1) Students and parents of schools A and B.

The analysis and the interpretation of the interviews conducted with 17 students and their parents from both schools in the area of Agia Varvara aim at profiling them and exploring their perceptions in order to interpret students' regular attendance despite the high dropout of Roma pupils in other areas.

All sample students as well as their siblings attend school regularly, live with their families and do not relocate even if their parents have to relocate for work-related reasons. In such cases, they remain home under the supervision and care of their relatives. Students' early experience in kindergarten, including their relationships with their classmates and teachers, is in almost all cases positive, which is important for their future social and educational inclusion (The European Committee 2011). Students' experience in primary education is also positive. They perceive primary education as useful and some of them express particular professional ambitions (policeman, firefighter, teacher, nurse, dancer etc.) and their aspiration to study in higher education. However, what should be also noted is the fact that most of the pupils claim that they face difficulties in school subjects like Greek and Math. Most students could not offer an interpretation why some Roma children do not attend school. Four children claimed however that school dropout is

due to “boredom” while two other students blame the dropout rate on the poor economic conditions of some families.

The analysis shows also some differences between the students of schools A and B. In school B, some students have not attended kindergarten, they express lower personal or professional ambitions and think they face more difficulties in school subjects compared to the students in school A. What should be examined is the fact that the Roma children in school B have a higher cultural capital in its institutional form (Bourdieu 1999, p. 82) as their parents have a higher level of education compared to the parents in school A.

Almost all parents, 13 in total in both schools, have completed primary education and in certain cases, mostly in school B, they have completed the first three years of secondary education, or the total six years of High School. Parents, particularly those of school A, had a positive early school experience, including their relation to the teachers and the non-Roma pupils, while the role of the community and their families was very supportive. In their new role as parents, they also have good /very good relationships with the teachers and the non-Roma parents and they participate in the school life by attending school events. Parental involvement is considered as a very important factor in the educational success of the children, affecting in a positive way many aspects of the learning process (Nova-Kaltsouni 2004, p. 21-33). Parents express high expectations for their children which is very important (Weinstein 2002) and attribute the school dropout rate of the Roma children mainly to their families’ poor economic conditions and the need for seasonal relocation. It has to be noted though that despite the fact that most parents have not faced discrimination or exclusion at school, they do not consider that their children have equal opportunities with the non-Roma children, unfolding thus the power of their socially constructed perceptions.

In conclusion, permanent residence, the early positive school experience of both students and their parents, the establishment of positive relations with teachers and the non-Roma children and their parents, the parental involvement in school life and the connection between school and long life goal achievements emerged as important factors of school attendance. On the other hand, Roma themselves by answering the question as to why there is a great percentage of Roma pupils in other areas who drop out of school,

they claim that the high dropout rate is due to the need for constant relocation, financial problems of many Roma families or even the indifference of Roma children towards education, according to certain students of our sample.

2) Principals and teachers of schools A and B.

Analysing the interviews conducted with the principals of schools A and B and a teacher from school B, we will attempt to highlight the factors which favour the minimum school dropout rate among the Roma children in Agia Varvara in primary education. Both principals implement the standard procedures for the enrolment of the Roma children making the most of not only the local social services, but also the Programme “Education of Roma Children”. They give emphasis to the cooperation with the Roma parents and encourage their participation in school activities. They fully exploit all the possibilities the Programme for the Education of Roma Children offers such as: mediators, tutorial courses organised to support the learning process, psychologists, creative workshops and so on (see in detail Parthenis and Tseliou 2014). Furthermore, they encourage the participation of teachers from their schools in in-service training courses organized by the Programme, which are considered to be very important in order to understand the Roma culture. The principal of school A perceives multiculturalism in a way very close to what is conceptualized as liberal multiculturalism “we have to live all together...without excluding anyone getting into his shell of cultural identity...”. A similar picture emerges through teacher’s discourse who tries to bring the Roma parents closer to the school and points out the importance of the encouragement for their active involvement in school as well as in local life. He also stresses out the importance of teachers’ in-service training so as to at least adopt “a culture of acceptance...if they cannot understand the true meaning of multiculturalism and embrace it”. On the other hand, the principal of school B perceives the meaning of intercultural education in terms of tolerance. Thus, the school should contribute to the preservation of the cultural identity of the Roma pupils “without this being at the expense of other pupils”. In another part of his interview, he mentions “... they will speak their own language too. I do not intend to forbid them to speak their language... unless they (the Roma students) intend to harm other pupils”.

Nevertheless, we should not idealise the educational situation in Agia Varvara, as described by the two principals and the teacher. The limits of *flexibility* adopted by the principals considering the absences of the Roma pupils are not always clear and in any case, are not the same compared to the terms of school attendance of the non Roma pupils. School achievement is also considered to be of secondary importance, something expected to a large extent for a target group with a high dropout rate. Nevertheless, these perceptions limit the possibility of long-lasting school attendance of the Roma children and underestimate their potential for progress (see also Weinstein 2002, p. 1). However, it should be noted that the teacher claims that in many cases school achievement of the Roma students is similar to the achievement of the non-Roma students.

Finally, the principals shift the blame for the school dropout of the Roma children on to family “inadequacies” and the “incompatibility” of their culture with the school one. The way social relations have been constructed, the structure of the school and of the “official knowledge” (see Apple 2008), appear to be irrelevant to the processes of excluding Roma children. The socially constructed dispositions of teachers resulting from their socialization in an educational system that accomplishes its distributive function in a supposedly socially neutral way (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; 1990; 2000) clearly emerge. Even the teacher who emphasizes the importance of “acceptance”, the equal value of all cultures and the need to strengthen the ties between the Roma and the non Roma people, puts the blame for the school dropout rate on the poor financial situation of most Roma families. However, we should point out that all the parents and students, as well as the collaborators of the Programme for The Education of Roma children, refer to the positive role of the principals of both schools in our sample.

3) Coordinator and mediators of schools A and B.

The mediators in both schools consider the establishment of trust among the Roma, the school and the local community as the main explanatory factor of the regular school attendance of the Roma children in Agia Varvara. The coordinator of the area gives also emphasis to the importance of trust, as well as to the actions taken by the Programme, such as tutorials and summer schools, provision of counselling, creative workshops and many other initiatives. Such actions aim at the enhancement of the

learning process and the building of a secure environment for the Roma children. In general, mediators attribute the high dropout rate of Roma children in other areas to teachers' stereotypes and discriminatory practices which have been decreased but not totally eliminated. However, both mediators put the blame on students' families when referring to the few cases of school dropout of Roma children in Agia Varvara.

Acharnes Area

The Acharnes municipality is the largest one in East Attica and its population is estimated to be approximately 135.000 inhabitants. A significant number of repatriated and economic migrants has settled down permanently in the area. The number of Roma people is approximately 3.500 and only some of them have permanent residence within the limits of their municipality. The rest live in camps or settlements on the borders or outside the residential zone. The school dropout rates are higher in areas with semi-urban or agricultural characteristics, whereas urbanism reinforces regular attendance (Rousseas and Vretakou 2006, p.60). There is a mixed residential character in the Acharnes area. In some places there is dense urban construction while in other areas there is a lack of urban planning and illegal construction is evident. The lack of asphalted road makes the access to some areas very difficult. Most Roma are peddlers, merchants or they have seasonal jobs in the fields and their financial status is quite poor. Their inclusion in the local society is also poor and many Roma people are illiterate. The percentage rate of school dropout is very high. In Acharnes, most Roma are Greek Orthodox and they speak they Greek language as well as a Romanian dialect.

1) Students and parents of schools C and D.

In this area, 12 students and 4 parents/legal guardians were interviewed. These students break the rule regarding school attendance, as less than 10% of the Roma children in this area attend school, regularly or not. For example, in school C, two students have siblings who dropped out of school before finishing their primary education, while in school D same thing happens with most of the siblings of the students participating in this research.

In school C, students' school experience varies. Most students attended kindergarten which was a valuable experience for their transition into primary school according to their parents. However, in primary school the Roma children are not provided with the cultural capital required and promoted by the official school. Poverty, the low level of education of students' parents and the reluctance of the school to teach what is required, creates very difficult conditions. As a result, children have poor school achievement, lack of self-confidence, and therefore reduced desire to attend classes. Two siblings of the students in our sample have already dropped out of school before completing primary education. Moreover, some students in our sample do not attend school regularly. In some interviews teachers are held responsible for the school dropout of the Roma children. On the other hand, most children have good relationships with their classmates and express the desire to finish high school and work in a different field and not in the family business or as peddlers.

The father of four students in school C is a peddler who relocates very often working under hard conditions and he attended primary school only until the second grade. However, he argues that his children should be able to have a long lasting education in order to improve their life chances. He expresses a positive aspect about the importance of school, but, as he states, "I can influence them (meaning the children) only until the end of the first three years of High school". One of his children attends a class below his age group and faces various problems at school and in his relations to his classmates and he also did not attend the tutorial course of the Programme for the Education of Roma children. On the other hand, the mother of our sample who has five children in total (of whom two girls participated in this research) and has also not finished primary school expresses a more utilitarian view of the role of school education. Thus, school is considered as useful for her children in order to acquire basic reading and writing skills so as to get into the family business. One of the boys of this family has already dropped out of school after finishing primary school, while the second boy repeated first grade class because of his constant absence. The mother states clearly that she does not wish for her daughters to continue their education after finishing primary school. There were no contacts with the school, the teachers and the non-Roma parents,

strengthening thus the mutual stereotypical perceptions. One of her daughters does not attend school regularly and two other pupils, nieces of this mother in the sample, also do not attend school regularly which shows that the whole family environment does not promote school education. As Bourdieu points out, the more people are deprived of resources the more they are aware of the lack of them. On the contrary, the more people are deprived of cultural goods, the less they are aware of their shortage, something that shows the difficulties of pedagogical action (Bourdieu 2003, p.107).

In school D the conditions for the Roma students are even harder compared to school C. None of the students in the sample attended kindergarten nor their parents have attended school. As a result, when children entered primary education, there was no school experience in their families. The expectations of both students and parents are limited mostly to the acquisition of basic reading and writing skills and to the entering in professions not requiring school education. The fact that some children in a family were attending school and some other no is probably due to personal traits of each child. However, in the long term, the school prospect of all these children seems negative. The family environment is not supportive, while the schools do not encourage the communication and the establishment of trust relations with Roma people. The main responsibility for these negative prospects of Roma students lies to the structure of the education system and to the state policies.

2) Principals and teachers of schools C and D.

In the schools of the area of Acharnes the depreciation of the Roma culture and a strong social determinism that defines almost irrevocably the fate of the Roma children clearly emerges when analyzing the interviews conducted with the members of the school community (see also Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides and Fragoulis 2009). The principal of school C attributes exclusively the high dropout rate of the Roma children to their life style and their low appreciation of education. Thus, the principal lists the areas where Roma “differ” from the dominant group: “...marriage, engagements, relocations, the people they mix with, their profession... going to school is not a priority for them...they stay out late, they don’t wake up in the morning...they have different habits”. Moreover,

“...they lag behind the other students...they come from a poor socio-economic environment, they have poor stimuli. There are exceptions though...some kids manage to get out and progress...most Roma parents are afraid to bear responsibility...”. On the contrary, he argues that all educational agents do the best they can and they cooperate well with the Programme for the Education of Roma Children. At the same time, he expresses the view that the Roma cultural identity “has to be respected” and he calls for their inclusion in the wider society without losing their culture.

Similarly, the principal in school D attributes the high school dropout rate to the families of the children, “The Programme, the mediator, the coordinator, the teachers and myself go down there (to the settlements)...parents have let them loose (meaning their children), they do not keep basic rules of sanitation, they don’t have clothes and shoes...”. The principal argues that Roma do not send their children to school because they think that they can survive without receiving education and she emphasizes the distance between the children’s living experience and the official educational framework. As she mentions, there is a gap of communication and she thinks that nothing can change that, “... for them (the Roma parents), it is as if I am a representative from NASA”. Both principals seem certain that there cannot be an effective educational intervention and may be this explains why they do not consider teachers’ in-service training courses organized by the Programme for the Education of Roma Children as important. Finally, the principal in school D expresses a very limited perception of Roma cultural identity “...we let them come to school all dressed up, wearing jewellery and makeup, that means acceptance”.

The two teachers in school C also consider the family environment as decisive factor for the school dropout of Roma children. They stress out that they respect the Roma cultural identity and they try to bring it into the classroom for educational purposes. They use various teaching methods, such as individualized and collaborating teaching, as well as other methods such as role playing or film projections. When however one of the teachers referred more specifically to the practices she was using, she said that the Roma students cannot keep up with the curriculum and that some of them face obvious learning difficulties, medicalizing thus social issues. Teacher claims that she helps the Roma students by adjusting the teaching material to their perceived as low educational level.

According to Bernstein (1991, p.128) teachers, when some of their students cannot follow the pace of the curriculum, either loose up a little bit from the program or they reduce the amount or/and the quality of what they teach. All these practices however create a more advanced system of stratified educational practices. Finally, although one of the teachers mentions that there is an improvement in school attendance rates of the Roma children, as well as in the cooperation of Roma parents with the school community, the other teacher claims that Roma still do not show any interest in school education.

3) Coordinator and mediators of schools C and D.

The mediator in school C considers as main factors of the school dropout of the Roma children the lack of trust and cooperation between parents and the school community, the depreciation of school education, child labor and other problems that the Roma children face inside the school environment. She also argues that the reduction of school dropout rate is directly connected with teachers' behavior towards Roma children. Similarly, the mediator in school D attributes the school dropout to the negative attitude of the teachers and the non Roma students towards the Roma students. It should be reminded here that the mediators of the two schools in Agia Varvara also considered the school community as responsible for the school dropout of Roma children, but they argued that this is not the case in Agia Varvara. The mediator of school D points out the positive role of the Programme for the Education of Roma Children in the improvement of the situation in Acharnes area. Moreover, he stresses out the necessity for more financial, psychological and emotional support of the Roma families, as well as initiatives for solving the communication problems between the Roma and the teachers. The coordinator argues that the creation of a school without stereotypes and discriminatory practices against the "other", which would also take into consideration the distance between the Roma and the school culture, needs more time. Moreover, she argues that the Roma children cannot easily adapt to the school because they receive less family support than their classmates, many of them have not attended kindergarten, they lack social skills and also because of teachers' negative attitude towards them. Finally, she points out that the effectiveness of programmes such as the Programme for the Education of Roma Children depends on whether they are permanent or not.

E. Discussion.

In this research, we argued that social marginalization of the Roma people is mostly due to stereotypes and perceptions of the dominant group and the school community which are likely to produce and reproduce practices of exclusion of the Roma in all fields of public life. Exclusion takes place despite the fact that the Roma people and the members of the dominant group share to a large extent some fundamental elements of culture, such as the Greek language and the orthodox religion. Most Roma people use in their daily communication the Romani language, but they still can understand and use the dominant language. However, the socially constructed dispositions of the dominant group and the incorporation of the perceptions about the “inferiority” and the “diversity” of the Roma people, establish the conditions for discriminatory practices against the Roma.

All people should have the right to raise their children according to their own culture, traditions and beliefs in order to maintain them. Of course, all children should also have the right to analyze every aspect of their own culture, be critical and then decide what is meaningful for them and worth keeping. However, discriminatory practices against the Roma lead to their isolation and the lack of interaction with the other cultures. Roma parents believe they have to remain isolated in order to survive and many of them avoid sending their children at school, as they do not recognize any value to school education. It is rather expectable that Roma do not feel they have any obligations as citizens, as long as their rights are under constant violation. Obviously, the usual practice of Roma parents not to send their children at school is not justified. However, the role of the state is not confined to “remind” all interested parts that the Roma parents are obliged to send their children to school, but also to create the conditions that will make this possible. Since it has been decades without any remarkable changes in this situation we should be aware of that progress in these matters requires time and patience. An open and genuine dialogue between all parts could be reluctant, difficult and sometimes fruitless.

Data analysis showed that there are great differences between the areas of Agia Varvara and Acharnes regarding the educational and the social inclusion of the Roma people. The spatial settlement of the Roma population highlights these differences

between the two areas, which are also depicted in the schooling of the Roma children. In Agia Varvara, the Roma people live in houses within the residential zone of the Municipality, they actively participate in the economic life and public affairs of the area and have also created cultural clubs. Although stereotypical perceptions about the Roma are also present in Agia Varvara, great effort has been made so as to make Roma children and their parents feel as equal members of the community. On the contrary, in the area of Acharnes the Roma people live in isolated camps and settlements, bringing to the fore a clear spatial boundary between the members of the dominant group and a group of inferior “others” who live under often insulting for our democracy conditions, with their own living codes and their own culture which is perceived as “anti-schooling”. The Roma parents do not think it is necessary to approach the school or the local community, while principals argue that there is a huge gap between the Roma culture and the official school which cannot be bridged. The Roma pupils are considered to be a homogenous group without cultural capital or an inferior one and a defective identity which makes them “lost cases”, so the school cannot do anything but accept this dire and irreversible reality.

Nevertheless, the results of this research for the area of Agia Varvara should not be idealized, as current socio-economic conditions bring to the fore structural inadequacies that threaten the progress achieved with the contribution of the educational/local community and the Programme for the Education of Roma Children. Up until recently, the local prosperous economy was giving to Roma children the chance to work in profitable family businesses and to secure their future. Thus, employability was to a large extent secured, irrespective of the actual knowledge, skills and abilities that Roma children had acquired during their school education. However, this employability should not be considered as a given fact anymore. In case of a collapse of the local economy which will also affect the solidarity of the broader community, all the structural weaknesses in the education of the Roma children in Agia Varvara will emerge. Social and educational action should be taken in order to make possible for the Roma children to have a long lasting school career leading to the acquisition not only of academic qualifications, but also of the skills and abilities necessary in the new era of knowledge society and economy. Obviously, in areas like acharnes, in which the majority of the

Roma children do not attend school, a long term policy must be planned in order to bring and maintain them in school. The Programme for the Education of Roma Children aspires to contribute to this direction. In the last phase of this Programme (2010-2014), various educational and social interventions took place in order to bring and maintain Roma children into school and fight long lasting stereotypes and discriminatory practices. School achievement and the acquisition of the necessary skills and abilities must be brought to the fore now.

In this article, we cannot refer to all the actions which must be taken. In brief, we will mention some actions that have already been implemented and can be further enriched like: in-service training courses for teachers and principals must be continued and multiplied on a wider scale in order to fight stereotypical perceptions and discriminatory practices and to highlight innovative, student-centered approaches with an emphasis on the active role of the subject in the construction of knowledge (see Parthenis 2013, p. 88-116). The dominant perception of a socially neutral school, which constitutes one of the most powerful mechanisms of the reproduction of educational inequalities, must be questioned. School must take the responsibility to educate all students and not to transfer this responsibility to students' families.

The removal of the stereotypic perceptions also requires actions which will strengthen parental involvement in school life. Tutorial courses should be multiplied in order to support the learning process of the Roma students. Courses must be also organized for the Roma parents in order to enhance their social inclusion and promote the benefits of long lasting education for their children. In the era of knowledge society, we should not be satisfied by the fact that (some) Roma children attend school, regularly or not, and that (some) Roma parents attend a few school events, without ignoring that even these minimum goals have not been attained in total. The support of the school units by the coordinators and the mediators, as well as by specialized scientific personnel like teachers, psychologists and social workers is necessary for the transition of the Roma children and parents from a typical "presence", very important in the first place, to active participation in school life. Of course, the various problems that Roma people face regarding their education, employability, accommodation and health care, cannot be

resolved without well organized and long lasting state policies. International and local organizations for the protection of the rights of the oppressed groups usually take action only when the problems have been made public. Thus, there is an imperative need for the state, the scientific community, the organizations for the protection of human rights and for all democratic citizens to take action and plan various educational and social interventions in national and local level in order to establish the conditions that will allow in the long term to abolish stereotypes and discriminatory practices.

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