

**Roma in the Czech Republic:
Adolescence, Identity and Schooling**

A Case Study of Three Teenage Girls from Prague

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Abstract

This study focuses on the identities and self-perception of Roma adolescents in the Czech Republic and the educational implications these may have for this particular group of students. In particular it attempts to shed light on how these individuals perceive themselves, their schooling and future adult roles they expect to take on in life. Furthermore, the perceptions and involvement of Roma parents was also examined in an attempt to explore their views on education that they transmit to their children. A theoretical framework was developed based upon the ecological systems theory, theories on the identity development in adolescence, ethnic minority identity as well as the existing literature on the schooling of ethnic minority pupils. A qualitative approach followed by a multiple case study design was taken with semi-structured interviews as the research method. The empirical study was conducted with three female participants from one low-threshold facility for children and youth in Prague. Data was analysed using the phenomenological approach which regards the reality not as a given entity but as socially constructed by individuals according to their everyday experiences. The key findings of the study suggest that Roma children do not have negative identities developed, there are no negative values they associate the schooling with and an overall positive attitude towards their future prospects and adult roles has been identified. Moreover, parental involvement did not show any indicators of oppositional practices towards educational institutions. On the other hand, the girls' accounts evidence the lack of pre-school education, school attendance issues and general low student engagement across all three cases.

Key words: identity, Roma, adolescence

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Table of Contents

1	General Introduction to the Study.....	1
1.1	Introduction.....	1
1.2	Research Problem and Sub-questions.....	1
1.3	The Rationale and the Need for the Study.....	2
1.4	Historical Perspective.....	3
1.5	Background Information.....	3
1.6	The Relevance of the Topic.....	4
1.7	Roma and Education.....	5
1.8	The Purpose of the Study.....	6
1.9	The Importance of the Study.....	7
2	The Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework.....	8
2.1	Introduction.....	8
2.2	Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory.....	8
2.3	The Notion of Role.....	9
2.4	Roma and Ethnic Minority Identity.....	10
2.5	John Ogbu and Ethnic Minority Schooling.....	13
2.6	Erik Erikson and Identity in Adolescence.....	15
2.7	Summary.....	16
3	Research Methodology.....	19
3.1	Introduction.....	19
3.2	General Approach and Strategy.....	20
3.3	Case Study Design.....	20
3.4	Validity and Reliability Issues.....	22
3.5	Sampling Procedure.....	22
3.6	Methods for Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews.....	23
3.6.1	Limitations of the Research Method.....	24

3.7 Gaining the Access.....	25
3.8 Data Collection Procedure.....	26
3.9 Ethical Considerations.....	28
4 Data Presentation and Discussion.....	30
4.1 Introduction.....	30
4.2 Katarina.....	30
4.2.1 Identity and Sense of Belonging.....	31
4.2.2 Environmental Factors.....	31
4.2.3 The Value of Schooling.....	31
4.2.4 Parental Influence on Schooling.....	33
4.2.5 Future Goals and Aspirations.....	33
4.3 Helena.....	35
4.2.1 Identity and Sense of Belonging.....	35
4.2.2 Environmental Factors.....	35
4.2.3 The Value of Schooling.....	36
4.2.4 Parental Influence on Schooling.....	36
4.2.5 Future Goals and Aspirations.....	36
4.4 Zoe.....	37
4.4.1 Identity and Sense of Belonging.....	38
4.4.2 Environmental Factors.....	38
4.4.3 The Value of Schooling.....	39
4.4.4 Parental Influence on Schooling.....	40
4.4.5 Future Goals and Aspirations.....	40
4.5 Discussion and Interpretation of the Results.....	41
4.5.1 Self-identity.....	41
4.5.2 Parental Involvement.....	43
4.5.3 Independence.....	44

4.5.4 Dance.....	45
4.5.5 Pre-school Education.....	46
4.5.6 School Attendance.....	47
5 Concluding Remarks.....	49
5.1 Introduction.....	49
5.2 Conclusions.....	50
5.3 Recommendations.....	51
Bibliography.....	54
Appendix A.....	60
Appendix B.....	64

1 General Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This particular topic was chosen for the research owing to the fact that the researcher is particularly interested in exploring the matters of race and ethnicity in the educational context. Here the aim is to investigate some educational aspects of Roma children such as their attitudes towards formal education and to what extent they might be influenced by their parents. The main idea from which the whole project evolved is to try and identify possible factors that influence them in defining their choices and possible causal links between societal factors and their low achievement, low enrolment in and early drop out from the school. One's position within a certain society inevitably influences their position in education system and vice versa thus the education seems to be a powerful mechanism for reiteration of social inequalities.

1.2 Research Problem and Sub-questions

The aim of this study is to identify whether there are links between Roma children's ethnic identities and their self-perception, self-esteem and aspirations. How do they see themselves within the social environment they belong and which role they intend to take on in their adult lives? All people have several social identities, but some of them are more prominent than others and different contexts between which we negotiate determine which identity is relevant for any of these settings (Parekh, 2008). The justification for the choice of this topic lies in the fact that it is relevant to both the researcher's home country, Serbia, and the Czech Republic which both face the same issues of massive underachievement of Roma pupils in schools which further excludes the possibilities for them to compete equally with other non-Roma members of the society in the labour market.

1.3 The Rationale and the Need for the Study

More specifically, alarming facts and figures show that Roma pupils in many cases do not attend schools (regularly), showing the tendency of early drop out or they are overly allocated to special schools, called ‘practical schools’ in the Czech Republic (Council of Europe, 2012; EDAP, 2010). The children from this ethnic group are disproportionately assigned to these special schools intended for pupils with certain disabilities and this discrepancy can be detected if the figures are compared to Roma overall representation in the population of a country (ECHR, 2007). The inequalities are deepened by the general climate and practices in these schools where it is very likely for them to be met with low expectations and weak curriculum with teachers frequently repeating the teaching units and most likely limiting their overall expectations to basic literacy and numeracy skills.

However, the ‘landmark decision’ on this issue in the Czech Republic took place in 2007 with the case *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic* before the European Court of Human Rights. The court ruled that the practises were of discriminatory nature and that 18 applicants were unjustly discriminated and denied their right to education on grounds of their ethnicity or race (ECHR, 2007). This was a critical point that enforced the change and search for new methods and policies that would allow for better educational opportunities and prospects for Roma pupils. Nevertheless, in spite of these reforms, new policies and the fact that we are approaching the end of Roma decade (2005- 2015), both the Czech Republic and Serbia along with other countries with great Roma minority such as Romania, Slovakia and Macedonia, are still showing poor results in the attempts to integrate this group of students properly (Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005- 2015, 2013). For these reasons, this research is aimed at offering a better insight into the worlds of individuals belonging to this vulnerable group and it is hoped it can contribute in the endeavours to comprehend their perspectives and pinpoint their main cultural and psychosocial characteristics and so contribute to the improvement of the educational prospects of these individuals.

1.4 Historical Perspective

During the Communist period in the Czech Republic it was believed that the successful integration of Roma could be achieved only through absolute assimilation which left deep consequences for this ethnic group and their identity which was denied throughout history (Guy, 2001). According to Fraser (1992) the turning point for Czech Gypsies was in 1958 when the national authorities decided that their group identity needed to be demolished. One of the aims of such strict measures and the new law was to root out the nomadic lifestyle with the aim of emancipation and advancement of this group of population. The Communist policy of assimilation is also to be blamed for the fact that many Roma stopped using the Romani language in their communication even among themselves and gradually Czech became their main means of communication with a variance from the standard in a form of a Romani 'ethnolect' of Czech (Czechkid, 2013).

This phenomenon was noted also by Hutnik (1991) who explains that throughout the history whenever there was the physical characteristic or a cultural trait in a certain ethnic minority group which was considered unacceptable by the majority, the attempts were made with the intention of eliminating or assimilating it into the dominant society.

1.5 Background Information

All the factors that have been mentioned so far create mechanisms that lead to forms of exclusion for Roma people, in the first place in educational context and then in society in general. As it was already noted, only few of them enroll in secondary (high schools) and tertiary (higher) education which further inhibits their entering the labour market equally with the people of non-Roma origin (Amnesty International, 2012). The low living standard and poor conditions in which these pupils grow up and develop alongside the described institutional mechanisms all together lead to a gradual fall out of Roma pupils from the mainstream educational sector. The factors that lead to inequalities of these students and make their status so complex have both

ethnic and class foundation. Another important aspect that needs to be taken into consideration when analysing their position within a larger society are their family practices that have a great impact on these children's choices, especially while still young. For this reason, it was worthwhile including into the overall framework of the study parental involvement and family circumstances that affect children's aspirations and future prospects. The study takes all abovementioned factors into account and the consequences these may have on pupils' development, an important aspect of which is ethnic identity, self-esteem, discrimination, educational achievement and overall psycho-social well-being (Hughes *et al.*, 2006).

1.6 The Relevance of the Topic

The relevance of the topic for the researcher's professional practice is justified by current issues and alarming status of Roma pupils in the education system in Serbia. Namely, Roma children face numerous barriers and their underachievement in schools perpetuates social inequalities and generates their further exclusion and marginalisation. For various reasons, most Roma children miss out pre-school education which was also evidenced in the findings and will be explored more in-depth in the discussion and analysis chapter. For this reason, besides possible language difficulties which may be an additional burden and obstacle, there is this gap between those children who had and those who missed the kindergarten provision from the very start of the primary sector, which then just grows wider with time. Moreover, poverty, discriminatory practices, lack of preparation for the primary school, insufficient parents' motivation for their children's education, particularly girls, inflexibility of the system towards Roma pupils' needs are all reasons why many of them drop out without obtaining even primary education, to name only few. These issues need to be addressed by developing effective social strategies and implementing educational interventions that would improve the position of Roma children within the system and is only feasible through linking of all social subjects involved at wider (macro)levels (Cvjetičanin & Živanović, 2012). The main barriers for equal participation of Roma in the education system are the following: the lack of basic means for living and inadequate housing conditions, the lack of school accessories and textbooks, the insufficient knowledge of the majority language, the difficulties in mastering the curriculum, the lack of

learning help and support at home as well as discriminatory behaviour of classmates and even some teachers (Macura-Milovanović, 2006; Sramova & Poliakova, 2009).

1.7 Roma and Education

In recent years, there has been a significant amount of research conducted on the topic of negativist attitudes, prejudice, discrimination and xenophobia towards Roma pupils. These phenomena were investigated and identified both among teachers and pupils whose interaction with Roma children on everyday basis affect the concepts these children build about themselves (Sramova & Poliakova, 2009; Ljujic *et al.*, 2012). Looking back at the main research question of this study about Roma pupils' identities and their self-concepts, it is not difficult for one to assume the link between these environmental factors and the implications they have on these children's development. The attitudinal factors that are at work in the educational settings of Roma children, but that also apply to the schooling of ethnic minority children in general, influence these children's self-esteem, sense of worth and their overall identities because as Lawler (2008) claims, the identities are socially created and one form of this process is through academic performance. Also, the fact that also applies generally to this topic but also to the whole concept of inclusive education (and society) is that the teachers' attitudes directly influence their engagement regarding the difficulties they face in relation to ethnic minority children's educational achievement (Knowles & Lander, 2011). This issue emerged during one of the interviews but this teacher was obviously supportive and the girl was aware of this fact. On the other hand, teachers often simply lack adequate professional training and preparation to teach in the inclusive and democratic school which celebrates diversity (Florian & Becirevic, 2011).

For all these reasons, the researcher found this relation important and worth investigating for there could be the causal links between Roma pupils' self-concepts and external factors that shape them which then further influence their educational choices and ambitions. According to the same pair of authors, these processes might have further implications that manifest

themselves in the causalities between social inequalities produced in this way and negative outcomes reflected in personal difficulties that is, special needs in education.

Thus, it is often the case that an ethnic minority child is misdiagnosed with behavioural and psychosocial difficulties which is recently being a subject of a great debate among researchers since these assessment tools are designed by educational authorities from a dominant society, which the schools generally belong to, and these low scores may be caused by language and cultural differences between dominant and minority members of society (ECHR, 2007). Similarly, certain Roma authors note that the Romani identity has always been managed by the people who are of non-Roma origin (Guy, 2001).

1.8 The Purpose of the Study

This description of the background for this study is presented in this initial chapter with the purpose of justifying the relevance of this research project for the researcher herself but also for Erasmus Mundus master's programme in Special and Inclusive Education. As Broadhead and Fox (1990, cited in Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 52) argue: 'A topic may be important if it makes a visible problem more understandable'. It is aimed at understanding the issues of maladjustment of Roma pupils in the education system by investigating individuals' subjective views which might help extrapolate more general explanations of these students' specific cultural and minority values and concepts. Their identification might help in addressing their specific needs and building strategies for increasing their participation and achievement which would enable them to step out from the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion.

All these factors have been noted in this introductory part of the report since the idea is to explore all possible critical influences, be it home environment, classroom, curriculum or the discriminatory practices Roma children may be facing. So, this study does not aim to favour any of these factors, to give any of them the precedence over others or to claim definite causalities between two notions that need to be checked in the form of hypothesis. Rather, it strives to make most of Roma teenagers' personal accounts and through their interpretation identify significant points which may contribute to further research and general knowledge in the field. For this

reason, the researcher found Bronfenbrenner's ecological model the most appropriate to develop the framework which could take all the agents and layers of environment into account when describing the individual's beliefs and values. However complex it is to explain the concept of identity, particularly in the case of members of ethnic minorities, the researcher found the topic itself immensely interesting and worth exploring.

1.9 The Importance of the Study

It is highly important to address the question of the significance of this research. The researcher holds the view close to one of the feminist research principles which requires the emancipatory element in every educational research- that it should empower all participants in the process. This 'power issue' is quite significant in this particular piece of research because it investigates self-concepts and perspectives for the purpose of empowering the members of a certain ethnic group that the researcher herself does not belong to. This 'power issue' in research seeks to answer the following issues: 'whose research, research for whom, research in whose interests' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 35). Thus, one has to take all these considerations into account when assessing the value of the research since there is always a danger for the reproduction of the inequalities and asymmetries of power and control. This issue was recognised by the researcher herself throughout the research procedures because on several occasions the respondents seemed to assume the researcher's values and stances which could be reflected in their responses. This is particularly problematic for the research on Roma questions because most of it comes from the outside of their community, which in spite of all the strivings for their emancipation can have the effect of maintaining the status quo. This was also observed by Leontiev (cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979) who expressed his concern that most of attempts to scientifically explain our complex social reality end in perpetuating the status quo.

2 The Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework of the study was developed from the work of several important theoreticians on individual's development, identity and minority studies. The first of them is Bronfenbrenner, the author frequently cited and the starting point for many similar studies, with his ecological system's theory in which he proposed a model in order to explain complex interaction between a developing human organism, to use his own terminology, and different environmental settings within which they operate (Harrison *et al.*, 1990). Thus, his focus of analysis is on the behaviour as an outcome of the complex interplay between different layers of the environment and an individual. In the following study, his theory can serve as a proper framework to investigate the schooling of Roma children and their development into adulthood. This is regarded as a critical period because adolescents who are at the end of their compulsory schooling are faced with vocational choices they are to make and which will determine their future (Head, 1997). However, the attempt is not to search for causal relations or try to explain which factors lead to the development of a certain trait or behaviour but to offer a kind of 'snapshot' of interviewed Roma adolescents at one point in the important period of their lives. Furthermore, it is an attempt to get an insight into the students' attitudes and expectations and examine them within a broader picture, taking into account the aspects of an individual's environment which are beyond the specific situation in which the subject under investigation is present (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

2.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner described his model of 'ecological environment' as an arrangement of concentric circles, one building upon the other. Starting from the person's immediate environment, these structures are defined as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Johnson, 2008). The concepts that lie at the foundation of his theory seemed

applicable regarding the main aim of the study- to try and describe Roma adolescents in the city of Prague taking into account the agents in their immediate surrounding such as family, school, friends but also those on a larger scale which are cultural, social and even ethnic characteristics of these individuals. The difficulty to provide the explanation for the subtle developmental processes was noted by Bronfenbrenner himself. Namely, he observed that it would be necessary to deprive the subject of the hypothetical circumstance in order to determine its causal effects on development. However, due to ethical considerations this is simply 'impossible to execute' (McCall cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He was also critical of the then state of affairs in psychology, claiming that the focus was too much on the personal properties while the environmental characteristics were neglected and presented only in rudimentary concepts. Similarly, Saharso (1989) stated that in the existing research on the identity development in ethnic minority children, the social contextual factors were neglected. This author explored self images of immigrant children and their perception of life chances. Bronfenbrenner argued that the understanding of human development can only be grasped if the interaction between multiple layers and persons is examined so he proposed a scientific approach which he named the *ecology of human development*. Another vital aspect of his scientific observation is the significance of the phenomenological perspective- it is not the objective reality that matters or is true but how that reality is experienced by the subject in question. Therefore he emphasised this phenomenological approach in the ecological research. This argument fits into the design of this study, because it aims to describe the social reality from the individual's point of view unlike quantitative studies that report on the underachievement of Roma in schools without providing valuable personal accounts of members of this vulnerable group.

2.3 The Notion of Role

One of the research questions is to check the theoretical viewpoint that ethnic minority children tend to develop negative self-images, the feeling of being less able and thus have low-expectations of themselves, usually after being faced with discrimination. The interest is not in the reality as it supposedly exists but 'as it appears in the mind of the person' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, one feature of the microsystem that is of a particular interest to this study is

the *notion of role*. Namely, the period of adolescence is crucial for assuming the roles of adulthood and Erikson marks it as one of the psychological crises in the identity development that he named 'Identity versus Role Confusion' (Head, 1997). These are scientific concepts from which the design for the study was further developed. Other sources that serve as the integral part of the theoretical framework for this study are mainly research findings on the topic of identity (especially identity development in adolescents and ethnic identity of the minority pupils), Roma population, multiculturalism and the schooling of minorities. This research developed from the perspective which takes the concept of identity as fundamental to the debate about diversity. Nowadays, the concept of identity is in the spotlight of the social science with numerous theories and perhaps the equal amount of critique. What every individual strives for is to try and make sense of one's own self within the settings they operate in, be it family environment or wider social units. As Hinman (2003, cited in Knowles & Lander, 2011) claims, an individual's personal beliefs, values and attitudes are challenged with the change of social setting. The ethnic minority children often cannot identify with the dominant society which may further lead to the development of negative images of themselves. Therefore, they usually identify with something more appealing and close to them other than school, usually a group of like-minded peers (Knowles & Lander, 2011). People tend to make sense of their experiences and store information according to the memories they associate these with, which all builds up to our self-knowledge (Garrett, 1998).

2.4 Roma and Ethnic Minority Identity

Roma people are often seen as a group with certain peculiarities and even exotic characteristics, rather unique among other European nationals, with specific attributes of their culture, tradition and history (Czechkid, 2013; Horvai, 2012). However, in order to understand their specific cultural needs it is equally important to take into account their self-perception, self-definition and identities as well as their life aspirations and choices.

The idea is that the consciousness of the minority children is colonised. Namely, there is a change in their thinking which is influenced by the social climate which is controlled by the

dominant group in that society. Under these types of influence, the members of different minority groups can develop negative attitudes towards themselves. It is also not uncommon phenomenon that a group which has been historically discriminated and stigmatised and used to being the subject of mockery over a long period of time actually adopts this negative attitude and feelings about its own ethnicity. Also, when we talk about ethnic identity there has to be a clear distinction between the integration of an individual member of a certain group and the assimilation of the group as a whole. It is difficult to talk about Roma as a single ethnic group because many studies have shown that the members insist on differences between various sub-groups, in the Czech Republic the most popular division being between Moravian and Slovak Roma (Czechkid, 2013). Among many authors, Boscoboinik (2006) also claims that although Roma are often referred to as a uniform minority group, the reality is much more heterogenous within Roma communities, with groups differing among themselves on grounds of historical lifestyle, religion, traditional professions or other criteria. It is believed that many members of Roma community do not possess the strong feeling of belonging to Roma owing to this lack of unity.

There is a kind of ‘a self-fulfilling prophecy’ in the case of the ethnic minority children. The most of the examples in the literature are those of African-American and Mexican pupils in the United States. This piece of research is a small contribution to the important question of how the discourses between different races happen to influence and shape children’s sense of identity. In other words, it will try to answer the dilemma how students come to ‘develop and sustain’ a sense of identity in terms of ethnicity and how this can influence their overall performance in the classroom. The study also aims to investigate how their ethnicity influences behaviour and how they develop their sense of self. Among others, one of the characteristics of the racism is its formative nature (Connolly, 1998). It is highly important to take into account the active role that the individual members of every group play themselves in the process of construction of their own lives but also of wider social environment. In other words, not only the factors in the social setting are relevant for the individual development but it is an interactive dynamic process between each individual and their environment.

When talking about personal identity, what researchers are interested in is the psychodynamics of the individual which is qualitatively different from the social dynamics of the group. This has

been noted earlier as the crucial distinction between the processes of the individual's integration and the assimilation of a group. Consequently, our self-concept will be influenced by how we believe to be perceived by others (Head, 1997). Humans are reflexive beings so there is a kind of feedback mechanism since we tend to interpret (almost) everything others do and say. There is very good observation noted here (by Head) that the terminology in the field of identity is quite problematic and imprecise, so it can happen that a person picks two books with the word identity in the title but finds that they are completely different in their approach and treatment of the subject. Furthermore, in any kind of research including this one, one should be careful of the danger that the use of certain concepts may bring. Namely, one has to be aware of their possible limitations and recognise them timely in the process.

Unfortunately, there is more possibility for the adoption of a negative identity in certain social groups than others since the range of choices is somewhat limited in them. Needless to say, the school is a social institution and the arena in which many developmental processes of children take place. However, according to some studies for certain students it can be a place associated with unpleasant experiences and something to be endured rather than a site that facilitates one's personal and intellectual development.

As Romanucci-Ross and De Vos (2006) argue, skin colour is the most powerful characteristic which serves as a basis for social stratification and discrimination. The researchers developed a typology of ethnic-identity styles that helped them gain a better insight into the choices that immigrant adolescents make with regards to their academic engagement. Similarly, this can be applied to our sample although the target group of this research is Roma population.

Besides being structural, the exclusion can also be attitudinal. Children's sense of self is considerably shaped by the reflections of significant others mirrored back to them. There is this phenomenon known as 'double-consciousness' (Doucet & Suarez-Orosco, 2006). It often happens that the negative stereotypes about one group prevail which causes the concern and fear among its members of being reduced to the stereotype. This is a vicious circle in which this self-handicapping increases. Stereotype threat is another concept which requires clarification and which has both immediate and accumulative erosive effects. John Ogbu is an important author on this issue (1981; 1992).

2.5 John Ogbu and Ethnic Minority Schooling

Ogbu offers his developmental theory which he named *cultural-ecological theory* focusing in it particularly on the schooling of minorities in the USA and primarily African Americans. Needless to say, besides being well respected among anthropologists and educational researchers, he was equally criticised. According to his theory, the way minority members respond to their circumstances (and schooling) ‘are not an irrational or random set of activities; they form a part of culturally organised system which evolves through generations of collective experiences in tasks designed to meet environmental demands’ (Ogbu, 1981: 417). Furthermore, he elaborates on the origins of human competence introducing us to the development of instrumental competencies which we find of the utmost importance for the study presented in this report. These competences include different kinds of general and specific skills which are culturally defined and which children acquire owing to specific child-rearing techniques, preparing them for future, as well culturally defined adult tasks (Ogbu, 1981). Moreover, the instrumental competencies that minority children seek to master are those of the successful members of the population they are members of. Since one of the points this study aimed to explain more in-depth is the notion of success and how these children perceive it, another concept that Ogbu studied is going to be useful for our overall theoretical framework and that is *subsistence demand*. Namely, our study explores whether they link success directly to the economic stability and also if the school success is seen as a way to this economic prosperity. Ogbu puts a lot of focus on subsistence tasks and strategies in his ecological theory and states that all populations have their way of responding to subsistence demands and that these responses are all determined by the given circumstances. He also claims that this subsistence demand ‘has become intimately tied to man’s quest for status enhancement or self-esteem’ (Ogbu, 1981: 419). The examples he shared of a ghetto can be applied to Roma communities who due to various reasons often live in segregated social structures similar to those of American ghettos. Ogbu states that the members of the ghetto culture rely on alternative resources, nonconventional and marginal economic resources also known as ‘street economy’. In addition to this claim, in his ethnological studies he came to the conclusion that they often, after a long history of discrimination and social barriers, do not believe particularly in the prospects that

education has to offer and thus tend to resort to other possible alternatives. It is common to find systems of parallel beliefs and values that are transferred to the young which can be seen as a sort of 'compensatory education'.

Also, another idea borrowed from this author was his distinction between different kinds of minorities and their views on education and schooling. On one hand there are so-called voluntary minorities who view schooling 'instrumentally'; in other words, as a 'tool' to develop and learn new skills which will improve their chances for economic progress. On the other hand, we have involuntary minorities that are believed to view schooling 'oppositionally' or as threatening to the group's cultural integrity (Ogbu, cited in Foster, 2005).

Ogbu looked into cultural frameworks of certain minority groups and their educational implications for the children belonging to these specific groups. The following Ogbu's statement was one of the starting ideas for this project, a kind of hypothesis that needed to be tested 'What children bring to school- their communities' cultural models or understandings of 'social realities' and the educational strategies that they, their families, and their communities use or do not use in seeking education are as important as within-school factors' (1988, cited in Ogbu, 1992). He is as an anthropologist interested in cultural forces that vary between groups and tries to prove that school success is dependant on the values and meanings that are socially transmitted onto children by their ethnic communities. Consequently, the students' efforts towards school performance and learning depend on these meanings and values the children associate with school success and achievement. One of the main research questions is directly related to the previous theoretical point: whether they believe that the schooling will help them to gain an equal status in the labour market, that there will be a so-called 'payoff' later. Similarly, the study addresses the values Roma children associate with education and whether they view it as something unwelcome to deserve a certain status among peers.

A certain research was conducted which investigated whether being a good student and a high achiever for minority children actually means conforming to the standards of the dominant society or this is something which is desirable in general. Is the conforming to these requirements seen as a form of assimilation? These authors also write about abovementioned scenario where the members of minority groups can become resigned to negative reflections they are faced with which further leads to hopelessness and self-depreciation which may in turn have

the effect of low aspirations and self-defeating behaviour, self-doubt and shame. Of course, this is not the only mode of reaction to discrimination and prejudiced attitudes since others tend to mobilise and resist the negative images and injustice they encounter. There are two types of resistance so, on the other hand, the education can be perceived as a tool for success and advancement. In any case the adequate support mechanisms are needed in order to achieve desirable course of development and achievement in schools (Romanucci- Ross and De Vos, 2006).

2.6 Erik Erikson and Identity in Adolescence

As this study is aimed at revealing an understanding of Roma young people ‘in relation to the society in which they grow, learn and later make their contributions’ (Woolfolk *et al.*, 2013: 83), Erikson’s comprehensive theory contributed immensely to the framework from which the whole outline for the empirical research was created. He viewed development as a sequence of different stages and in his theory all later stages are dependant on how the conflicts of the previous ones were resolved. The ways in which an individual deals with resolving each of the crises will have lasting effects on that individual’s self-image and their view of society.

Erik Erikson took a more sociological approach to the notion of identity than some other psychoanalysts. He rejected to focus entirely on psychic factors and added social factors as equally important in the process of identity formation, which is a process ‘located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture’ (Erikson, cited in Epstein, 2006: 7).

The study focuses particularly on the fifth stage that covers the period of adolescence and in brief, the teenager has to achieve identity in ‘occupation, gender roles, politics and religion’ while the important factor that has a major influence during this phase are relationships established with one’s peers. The fact that peer group members influence one’s motivation and overall achievement in school was also noted by Ryan (2001, cited in Woolfolk *et al.*, 2013). This point requires emphasis and has to be linked to another theoretical point explored in this study. Namely, according to Ogbu’s theory the school success can be perceived negatively by

peers among ethnic (involuntary) minority children and lead to rejection and disapproval so this needs to be taken into consideration when examining Roma children who are generally not doing well in school. Can this be one of the reasons they are failing? It might be they are anxious about distinguishing themselves from their groups and communities, especially because these community links in Roma are very strong among their members, so they might prefer to blend into the majority which is more comfortable option. Or is it they don't believe enough in their own abilities and strengths? These are all the questions that could help gain a better insight into Roma adolescents' views on themselves and their socio-cultural context. Erikson emphasised following notions as highly important in the development of one's social identity: the emanation of 'self', the identity quest, the relationships that individuals establish with others and the role that one's culture plays throughout life (Woolfolk *et al.*, 2013). Although human beings start developing their sense of self from early childhood the period of adolescence is the first time an individual is confronted with and makes a conscious effort to answer the question "Who am I?" (Kroger, 2004).

2.7 Summary

Taken together, the theoretical framework evolved from various empirical anthropological studies on ethnic identity of minority students, their schooling experiences and family environmental factors but also psychological studies on the development of identity, particularly the critical points during adolescents. However, this piece of research is not intended to monitor the development which would require a different longitudinal design carried out over a longer period of time but hopefully this piece of research will offer new theoretical perspectives in the current debate on the alarming facts and figures of Roma education in the Czech Republic and serve as a useful resource for future research that may focus on different aspects covered here.

In reviewing the existing literature on the topic, the gap in qualitative research that includes children's voices and opinions was recognised whilst most of the studies that were found were quantitative and had the overrepresentation of Roma in special schools in focus. Nevertheless, here the researcher is extremely careful and has to avoid strong claims since primarily it was

English database of resources that was searched through and there is always the possibility of studies published in Czech being overlooked by the researcher.

It is also worth noting that the design for this project went through several changes during the process. Initially, the core subject that interested the researcher was the development of ethnic identities and how it affects the inclusiveness in the school setting but eventually, after numerous consultations with the professionals in the field and careful revision, another educational aspect of Roma adolescents emerged that seemed to have greater importance and relevance for Roma adolescents in Prague. This specification has to be emphasised regarding the fact that there are many different groups of Roma living throughout the country that differ among themselves in their views on tradition and their relationship with the ethnic background. Thus, we need to localise the research in terms of its purposefulness and say that it was deemed irrelevant to investigate Roma ethnic identity of children from Roma ethnic background residing in Prague. This is due to the fact that these city members of Roma population are believed not to have strong ethnic feelings and tradition practices and to be rather integrated and 'urbanised'. On the other hand, this may not be true for other Roma groups in more rural parts of the Czech Republic. For this reason, the study and its findings should not be generalised and applied to the whole country but looked at as a case study of Roma girl adolescents in the city of Prague.

As was previously described, this study aims to describe Roma students' identities and their perception of the future with regards to education. Likewise, it wants to identify the values they associate with the schooling process and whether it is viewed as linked with social advancement. Is the value placed on it negative and for what reasons?

The similar study conducted in Romania by Popovici (2008) to a certain extent corresponds to the objectives of this study and served as a useful basis for the development of the ideas being explored. Still, his research is of a quantitative type and focuses on Roma family factors that influence the choice of children continuing to the secondary education. However, the phenomenon under investigation in this study is centred on students' own self-esteem, beliefs in one's own abilities, motivation and ambitions while taking into consideration external factors as well. According to many theoreticians, it is preferable to have qualitative design when investigating topics of such kind for it leaves an open space for all important features that may emerge throughout the process which for instance, would not be possible with the questionnaire

as a method because it has definite set of questions and there is no room for raising new questions that are not already included in it.

According to the researcher's previous experience and sound knowledge on the topic a few observations arose. First, the hypothesis that ethnic minority children develop negative identities when confronted with discrimination seemed pivotal to the issue of self-esteem and worth testing if we are to describe Roma perspective properly. Secondly, after a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and comparing it to the first-hand experience, the researcher reached an assumption that with contemporary Roma the fact that they tend to develop opposing attitudes towards schooling may not be easily explained by wide-spread interpretation that schools represent institutions of the dominant society so they developed the fear of being assimilated but that alternative explanations and causalities need to be identified in order to explain their poor performance and underachievement.

The interest for this topic and research originated from the viewpoint that besides cognitive development other aspects of students' development have equal importance regarding the school achievement and performance. That which also needs to be considered are social and emotional development if we are to understand and cater for each student's needs. Woolfolk et al (2013) also refer to Urie Bronfenbrenner and Erik Erikson alongside with Sigmund Freud as the most influential theoreticians with regards to personal and social development. They tried to give explanations for the ways we come to understand our own selves and what impact major influences in children's immediate environment- parents, peers and teachers may have on their developmental outcomes.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter aims to present the research methodology and design that were considered appropriate for the subject and objectives of the study. It will also introduce the reader to both strengths and weaknesses of the methods that were used and underline the limitations that influenced the whole process of this empirical study to a certain extent. This study was not designed to cover a wide sample for survey of Roma population but to make an opportunity for Roma adolescents' voices to be heard.

The general approach and design should reflect the researcher's perspective and this methodology chapter will hopefully justify the method and strategies deployed. On the whole, the main approach applied was interpretive since the researcher was interested in discovering the individual's point of view and interpreting the specific data obtained in the process. However, there are certain segments of the design that could be referred to as normative for the starting theoretical point is that these individuals are shaped and their behaviour is regulate by external forces (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Due to this dual approach, the study can be said to be applying the combined inductive-deductive approach. Namely, deductive reasoning implies approaching the phenomenon from the general to particular that is, the hypothesis precedes the particular instances of the phenomenon in question. On the other hand, inductive approach to reasoning develops in the reversed order- the analysis of individual instances or cases builds up to the hypothesis and possible generalisations. This mixed-approach quality of this particular piece of research is reflected in the fact that both theory as a starting point and individual personal accounts were interpreted interchangeably in order to explore the area of knowledge, being of an equal value for the researcher in his quest for valuable explanations of the subject matter.

3.2 General Approach and Strategy

The general design of this research study is of a qualitative kind which is deemed to be in line with the research topic. The qualitative approach seems more suitable when conducting the empirical research in the field of education and when the aim is to investigate the personal viewpoints and experiences from the individual point of view of the subjects, which is the case in this particular study. Furthermore, the approach that was chosen for the analysis is phenomenological approach which focuses on how reality can be and is socially constructed. Also, it looks at individuals as active agents who ‘construct’ their realities according to their everyday experiences (Denscombe, 2007) which corresponds with the topic of the study: the self-perception of Roma pupils and how their choices are influenced by this as well as environmental factors. This was noted also by Giddens (1976, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2007) who claimed that ‘the meanings that subjects hold are part of their constructions of the world’. However, the knowledge of the phenomenon was also seen as being constructed by the reality (itself) of the world that individuals experience and live in (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Having said this, it is worth noting at the beginning of this methodology section that both data and methods of this study are of the qualitative type.

3.3 Case Study Design

The strategy that will be followed is a multiple case study design which has proven to be the most suitable to address this research project (Yin, 2003). One of the characteristics and arguments for choosing the case study design is that it aims to describe a more grounded context for a phenomenon that is the subject of the investigation (Hartas, 2010). Furthermore, this strategy will be followed since deemed appropriate to deliver the idea which is at the foundation of this research project- to get a better insight into Roma students’ identities and how they reflect on their schooling directly from the point of view of the individuals within this minority group (Yin, 2003).

In planning the research design for case studies, the theory is equally important as with other types of designs and the key contacts that need to be established in order to conduct the research depend on the theory on and the understanding of the research topic. Regardless of the purpose of the study- to develop or to test a theory, the development of the theoretical framework in designing the case studies is essential. Similarly, the theoretical base for this study was developed from the range of topics that were deemed relevant as well as necessary to provide a comprehensive description of what is being studied. Another reason why a well developed theoretical base is of the utmost importance for a good case study is the fact that it allows ‘the level at which the generalisation of the case study results will occur’ (Yin, 2003: 31). Furthermore, this generalisation that will be achieved is of an ‘analytic’ kind and should be distinguished from the statistical generalisation that is sought for in the quantitative research designs.

This attribute of the case study was also described by Robson (2002, cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2007) who claims that case study opts for ‘analytic rather than statistical’ generalisation and aims to develop a theory that can help to understand other similar cases of the specific phenomenon that is being studied. Furthermore, Cohen et al (2007) described certain characteristics typical of this type of design, one of them being ‘an overriding interest in people’ which is probably crucial in understanding the scientific importance that case studies have. The material obtained in this way ‘can provide powerful human-scale data on macro-political decision-making, fusing theory and practice’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 255). As such, case studies are ‘a step to action’ since they start in the real world and contribute to it while results can be applied for different purposes.

On the other hand, there are certain theorists who are against this design, considering it to be irrespectable and illegitimate for which reason the case study has to pass all tests of validity and reliability. According to Yin’s categorisation of case study designs, this particular case study belongs to the category of the *critical case*. Namely, the rationale for using this type is to test a theory and to contribute to the general knowledge on the subject, perhaps even reinforcing further research in the field (Yin, 2003).

3.4 Validity and Reliability Issues

Taken together, all efforts were made to meet the criteria for conducting a valid social research. One of the principles that was followed to ensure trustworthiness of the study was the triangulation from multiple sources of evidence. These sources included unstructured discussions with the members of staff on the topic itself and on the participants in question. The nature of the study was such that it could not benefit from the method of observation but the data could be gained only from the direct inquiry. However, the researcher tried to be as included as possible to gain participants' trust but also to learn more about Roma population, which was beneficial for the overall understanding of the matters under investigation. Namely, the researcher volunteered in two organisations that operate as low-threshold facilities for the children and youth from vulnerable groups and whose clients are mostly Roma children. Furthermore, before starting data collection procedure, the researcher had many valuable consultations and discussions with the managers of the teams on what changes should be made to the initial research proposal and what is particularly interesting and worthwhile to investigate. Likewise, they shared other substantial information that one can only get by first-hand experience of working with these children on a daily basis and that would otherwise remain inaccessible to the researcher but for the managers' kind help and consideration.

3.5 Sampling Procedure

Research questions in most cases provide the guidelines for the choice of the categories of population that are going to be the focus of the research and thus sampled. Similarly, the sampling for this study was conducted according to the goals of the specific piece of research. The sampling was purposive and the target group were pupils within 13 to 16 age range and in their final years of compulsory education or the initial year of high school. Furthermore, in purposive sampling the participants were chosen in such a way as to be relevant to the research questions. In other words, its aim is to sample cases strategically 'so that those sampled are relevant to the reserach questions that are being posed' (Bryman, 2012: 418). Yin (2003: 47)

argues that there is the same logic behind every multiple case-study and it is replication as opposed to sampling logic. By this, he prescribes that the careful selection of each case must be ensured so it either

- (a) predicts similar results – a literal replication
- (b) predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons – a theoretical replication

In this particular study the former type was used and given that the girls were more willing to participate than boys, this determined the final sample consisting of three Roma female adolescents within the age range 13 to 16 (more precisely 15 and 16).

3.6 Methods for Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews

The method for data collection was a semi-structured interview which allowed for getting rich enough qualitative data. However, certain notable limitations emerged regarding the choice of research methods that were to be deployed for this project. Firstly, it seemed senseless to conduct the observation of any kind due to language barrier and regarding the research phenomenon that is being studied. So, the researcher considered this method inappropriate to provide valuable information given the aforementioned reasons. Secondly, even with the semi-structured interview as the only method for data collection difficulties to reach valuable findings arose. The lack of opportunity to conduct the pilot study to test the tool and to conduct the follow-up interview with some of the informants set an obstacle to gain a better insight into the cases that were examined in this study. Thus, the semi-structured interview was the only means of data collection. Nevertheless, the method was substantial for gaining the first-hand information from Roma adolescents that are the focus of the study. Also, the qualitative interview is a method required to unravel complex influences, relationships and causalities (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and this study aims at identifying Roma students' self-perception, attitudes and influences and educational implications these may have.

Marcia (1980, cited in Head, 1997) also favours semi-structured interviews when conducting the studies on the questions of identity because they allow for the discovery of people's beliefs, how

firm they are and how they were reached. Yin (2003) claims that interviewing in case studies is most commonly of an open-ended nature because participants' opinions and beliefs on the topic are pivotal in this type of studies. He also makes a distinction between these and *focus interviews* which is probably more appropriate category under which the interviews that were conducted for this project could fall, according to how he defined them. Namely, in focused interviews an informant is interviewed for a short time and although they may keep this quality of open-endedness, the interviewer is more likely to follow the list of prepared questions from the case study protocol. Also, this method seems to be the most suitable considering all the conditions under which this study was conducted. Being unable to engage in a participatory observation owing to the language barrier and time limitations, the semi-structured interview was employed which is an attractive alternative for the qualitative data collection. (Bryman, 2012). The qualitative interviewing or so-called in-depth interviewing does not have the imperative of structure for the sake of comparison as is the case in doing the survey. On the contrary, there is a greater flexibility in creating and following the interview guide while the emphasis is on greater generalisability of the research questions that the study aims to answer and on informants' individual perspectives. Furthermore, we are more interested in the interviewee's point of view, in conducting the interviews it is allowed not to strictly follow the interview guide and it is encouraged to go off the list of questions as we are more interested in what interviewees see as important and relevant. Thus, it allows the flexibility of asking the questions not included in the interview guide as a follow-up to the interviewee's response. However, there is still a need to keep a certain level of structure, especially in doing the multiple case study research so as to ensure cross-case comparability and not to lose the sight of the main research ideas. On one hand it is important during the whole process not to ask leading questions but on the other hand there has to be a kind of balance since it would be unethical to completely hide the research aims from the participants.

3.6.1 Limitations of the Research Method

There are limitations that have to be taken into account regarding the use of the semi-structured interviews as a method. Namely, since it was difficult to find the participants for the study itself,

there was no room for conducting the pilot interview as a simulation of the real interview situation with the child as an interviewee that would follow it. So, owing to the inexperience of the researcher as an interviewer, certain mistakes that otherwise could have been avoided occurred and inevitably influenced the whole data collection process. Probably the main mistake was to have several yes/no questions which could have generated better data if they had been formulated in a different way. Also, due to the language barrier it was impossible for the researcher to meet the requirement of being an active listener in the process. Although the language is to a certain extent similar to the researcher's mother tongue to allow grasping the gist of the interviewees' responses, the researcher was still prevented from being alert and reacting with follow-up questions promptly and had to wait for the actual interviewer's consecutive interpretation of what had been said. Similarly, there are some other points that need to be considered regarding the interviews in general. According to Yin (1993: 92) these are only *verbal reports* and have to be treated as such, since there is always a risk of 'bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation'.

3.7 Gaining the Access

The process of gaining the access to the organisations and to potential informants involved several phases. Namely, in July the researcher contacted one organisation that is known for working with children and youth from vulnerable categories and which offers them after-school activities and consultation on different issues with the aim of preventing socially pathological behaviour and substance addiction. The researcher offered to volunteer in their organisation and briefly described the background and the current work on the master thesis. The staff responded soon but since not being in charge of replying to such enquiries they explained that the official approval had to be given from the manager of that sector who was on a vacation at the time, so that took some time and finally the volunteering commenced in mid-August. This manager was the first gatekeeper to allow the access to the organisation. After joining this club, the researcher was immediately connected to another similar club in another district of Prague. The next step was to talk to club managers and explain them the purpose of the research and all information that were considered necessary to share with. It was explained that their help would be needed in

conducting the study and that also it would be much beneficial if it was them who would talk to children because they already knew them, trusted them and had already established good relationships. The researcher also offered to provide the organisation with the feedback after the analysis of the findings which might contribute to their activities and stimulate similar studies among Roma activists in the future.

Also, in one of the clubs the manager expressed concern about other people (interpreters) coming to the club and communicating with children and said she preferred they did it instead. This is an important ethical point to stress since the club represents a kind of 'safe haven' for children threatened with social exclusion and they are supposed to feel safe and protected and not to suspect that someone is experimenting or using them for similar purposes.

The second club that was accessed eventually was the only site of the research because the first club was closed for longer than planned due to some technical problems and that unfortunately overlapped with the weeks during which we planned to conduct the research. Consequently, this narrowed down the chances to find more teenagers willing to participate and affected the sample size in general; the interviews had already been arranged with some of the children in the first of the two clubs but it was impossible to do this outside the club because it was agreed with the manager to conduct the interviews in this setting during the working hours of the club.

Furthermore, the clients of these so-called low-threshold clubs (Nízkoprahové kluby) are mainly Roma children and young people so gaining the access to the clubs directly opened the opportunities for the research. This should be stressed as an advantage because in a way a certain selection had already been carried out and the target group reached. Otherwise, if Roma children had been chosen from the classrooms it might have been unpleasant or embarrassing for them to be singled out, so luckily due to the circumstances explained this was avoided.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

There was no tentative plan intended for data gathering that was supposed to be followed due to the uncertainties in gaining the access to the potential informants and the provisional plan had to

be revised several times throughout the process. However, the basic procedure went as planned- to arrange interviews with the young Roma people willing to participate, to conduct the interviews on one occasion with each of them and to tape record the interviews. Although it was difficult to predict the exact timing of the interview concerning the time needed for the consecutive interpretation, the approximate duration estimated to 30 minutes for each student proved right. This uncertainty of the duration of the interviews is owing to the flexibility of the semi-structured interview as a method, since it allows a greater freedom in following the order of the questions in the guide, their formulation as well as time and attention that the interviewer will give to each of them (Robson, 1993). However, the reason for not expecting the interviews to last longer than 30 minutes is due to the short attention span and lack of patience of teenagers who are the target group of the study. The interviews were structured in such a way as to answer the research questions that guided the whole data collection procedure (Punch, 2006).

There was a great limitation regarding the language to be used in the interviews and the researcher apprehended that even the Czech language could be an inadequate means of communication for Roma teenagers. Fortunately, all three participants are speakers of Czech as their mother tongue and at least the fear that they would not be able to express themselves clearly was removed. The fact of not having a common language in which the researcher could communicate with informants was overcome by engaging a trained interviewer (the club manager) who was interpreting the students' responses consecutively. However, it felt that this amount of data was not sufficient for meaningful analysis by coding and the additional translator was engaged to translate complete responses. All these factors play an important role in determining the trustworthiness of the study and the researcher made an effort to find all available resources in order to make this project feasible.

The interviews were conducted at two occasions. On the first day two and on the other day one of the interviews. All of them lasted approximately from 20 to 30 minutes.

The data obtained was analysed using qualitative methods. First, the process of *coding* was applied to group informants' responses into categories (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Robson (1993: 385) defines code as 'a symbol applied to a group of words to classify or categorise them'. Another qualitative method that the researcher applied was *memoing*. This is the process used simultaneously with coding and it helps to make useful links between all stages of data analysis

(Robson, 1993). Both emic and etic approaches guided all the stages of data analysis such as the formation of categories and themes and their interpretation (Berhanu, 2005).

Owing to the small quantity of data, the analysis did not require use of words processors and similar tools for processing the qualitative data which in the research world proved to be rather useful when conducting a large-scale research. Similarly, due to the fact that the study is of the small-scale type there was no need for engaging assistant researchers.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In this empirical study special attention was paid to the ethical considerations to ensure that all criteria required for a valid research project are met. There were no special requirements to obtain permissions for the conduction of the research from the Czech governing bodies so the main task was to gain consent from participants that is, from their parents or legal guardians because the target group for this study are adolescents aged 13 to 16, so still minors (BERA, 2011). Consequently, they were given the consent which informed them of the aim of the research as well as all other necessary information that should be included in a valid consent form. For example, the participants were informed prior to the interviewing procedure that their identities would be kept anonymous and that all measures would be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the information obtained which would be used solely for the purpose of this project (The Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society, 2009). Also, it is worth noting that the consent form was initially created in English but needed to be translated into Czech, which is the mother tongue of informants and their parents (A sample of the consent form in both English and Czech is available in Appendix A). Another circumstance that should be described is that it was inconvenient time of year to look for potential participants in local schools (because the dissertation module started at the time when schools were closing for summer holidays and in September school staff are too busy with the starting of a new school year) so the access had to be found in a different setting.

On the whole, every effort was made to conduct a piece of ethically informed social research (Blaxter *et al.*, 2001). This might be particularly problematic when conducting the qualitative interviews because of the closer contact with informants.

However ambitious a research project might be, due to the fact that the educational research strives to address complex social phenomena, a certain piece of research does not simply lead to a piece of policy-making (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Bearing this in mind, one has to understand that the research in general including this very study can only generate new knowledge in the field that might facilitate further exploration due to this complexity of the connections between politics, research and policy-making.

Again, like in the previous chapter the so-called ‘power issue’ has to be raised which the researcher fears may have affected the informants’ responses. Namely, although the interviewer was known to the teenagers for a long time and it seems to the researcher they have established very close and open relationship, the fact that none of us involved in the process was Roma apart from the students may have lead them to reply in a form they thought would be satisfying and which may not reflect the real values held by Roma individuals or their respective families. Furthermore, during the interviews there were some other members of the club staff present in the room which is actually a main office and the only available room at the moment which the researcher was not able to influence. Thus, it is possible that the children did not feel comfortable to raise the question of discrimination or some other negative experiences in this balance of power and surrounded by several people who were not Roma themselves. On the other hand, the interview guide did not contain direct questions regarding discrimination but were of a more open kind so the children could elaborate most on what they found important or willing to share.

4 Data Presentation and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present the data obtained in conducting this research in relation to the theoretical framework presented earlier in this report. First, the description of data will precede the analysis based on the literature review. According to this framework, the study aimed to answer the following themes: sense of belonging, environmental factors determining Roma adolescents' life choices, the value of schooling, parental influence on schooling and future goals and aspirations.

These themes emerged throughout the process of reviewing the existing literature on the topic of ethnic minority children and their identities, especially the African American children who have been historically doing worse in schools than majority children. One of them is the idea of 'naughty black child' who is one of major concerns for the educational policy-makers in the United States who are looking for ways to address the exclusion and underachievement of these children (Benjamin *et al.*, 2003). These concepts can be translated to the context of European Roma whose issues require new ways of addressing in order to improve their achievement in schools as education for them is still only a mechanism for reproducing the existing inequalities. Another common characteristic that Roma share with African-Americans is their 'shared knowledge regarding the historical experiences of oppression' (Hughes *et al.*, 2006: 756) which might influence parental practices and child-rearing strategies, transmitted from one generation to another.

4.2 Katarina

Katarina is sixteen years old and she is in the 8th grade of compulsory education. She was in the mood to talk and felt very comfortable during the interview. She did not seem as if being in a hurry as two other girls who were impatient to go out and join their friends. She is mature and confident and also cares a lot about the way she looks. Here follows the description of how she

answered the questions which will be analysed together with the rest of the responses in the analysis part of this chapter.

4.2.1 Identity and Sense of Belonging

She considers herself both Roma and Czech: *‘So, I consider myself to be both, sometimes I consider myself Czech, sometimes Roma. I don’t know why but that’s just how I feel’*. Although she was not sure of being able to give a good enough explication of this, her clarification actually perfectly describes the processes that take place with the identities of ethnic minority children:

‘I don’t know, sometimes I just have kind of a day. I mean, it depends on among which people I am. So, when there are Czechs around me, at school for instance, I feel Czech too. And for example, when I’m here at the club, I feel Roma again because here the main thing is I’m Roma. But when I’m somewhere else among people who are different from me, then I feel like Czech’.

4.2.2 Environmental Factors

Katarina feels that the possibilities are completely open to her and that she can choose to follow whichever kind of life route she wants. She does not consider herself to be determined by her parents’ choice or the factors in the wider environment. This is how she put it: *‘Well, it’s open for everyone, right? As you said. And I think the family wants it that way. To go further and not to be a cleaner. To be something. I think my way is open’*.

4.2.3 The Value of Schooling

She would like to continue with her education after the compulsory part but she looks as if being more in favour of informal ways to get the recognition. It is worth noting that her family

background is such that she has a strong support from her parents for this kind of attitude. Their upbringing is apparently affecting her life views and choices now she is almost an adult, but this is the theme that is the focus of the next sub-chapter: *‘No, I’m still in the 8th grade because I failed. And I had to postpone so I want to finish in my 8th grade if possible and I want to either go to a conservatorium or to a vocational school to become a hairdresser. And if they don’t accept me for the hairdresser programme I will go to the conservatorium because they will admit me without any problems. Because the headmaster really wants me there. My dad works there so it will be without any problems. Well, I will see but I want to finish school in 8th grade’*. It is interesting that never again throughout the interview did she mention this vocational school for the hairdresser since her main ambition in life is to become a famous singer/dancer. Similarly, the fact that she wants to finish her school sooner than expected (regularly the duration is nine years) leaves one with the impression that she is eager to enter this world of celebrities where she probably feels she belongs since both her parents are famous among Roma community as well as her boyfriend who is a famous rap singer. As was mentioned in the methodology chapter, the researcher gained the background information for each of the girls from the club manager.

So, she would like to enter this private academy where her major subject would be dancing. She had two years of postponing at the age of six and entered the primary school later: *‘Yes, it was when I was in kindergarten. I wanted to stay in the kindergarten’*. At this point she wanted to make sure that the researcher did not get an impression that she was not ready enough (intellectually) to start with the primary education and that this was solely her decision because she interrupted the interviewer during the translation: *‘[...] I wanted to play in kindergarten? Did you say it like that?’*. Perhaps she understood that the interpretation did not match her words because the interviewer was explaining that the fact *‘she wasn’t developed enough’* was the reason for her starting late.

She appreciates school achievement: *‘I think it’s a completely normal thing. That we need to study. Otherwise we wouldn’t be able to go further. And if it weren’t for school I think I wouldn’t be able to manage myself. For instance, to study only at home. So, it’s good’*.

4.2.4 Parental Influence on Schooling

She claims that her parents certainly want her to continue with the education. Katarina says that she does not talk too much with her parents about school but only when she needs their help with the homework or in any other way. She feels it is like this because they know she can manage on her own and that they do not have to be too worried. However, they are showing their interest since a usual daily routine after she comes home involves questions such as: *‘What about school? What grades did you get?’*.

4.2.5 Future Goals and Aspirations

As it was mentioned earlier in the description of her answers, her main goal is to become a famous actor/dancer because when asked about what she wanted to get from life she replied: *‘Well, I would want to be famous for sure. Because, I like dance so I would want to get somewhere a lot’*. To the part of the question regarding the possible obstacles she perceives in achieving her goals she replied by giving an example of a certain friend from her close surrounding who she feels is envious and would not be happy if she succeeded. Otherwise she did not identify more serious factors that could hinder her in the realisation of her plans.

Also, although she would really like to succeed and enjoys dancing she currently has a dancing group that she is obviously a leader or at least an important member of. She believes in her own abilities and that it is possible to live her life as expected but she pinpoints the importance of having contacts that will facilitate her success: *‘I think so, I think that I would do it but I wouldn’t want to leave my group. But otherwise I think I could do that myself. I have connections that I would manage myself. I could reach better’*.

She shared that lately she had certain thoughts about singing. Perhaps she feels she could be more popular if she was multitalented and regrets not having obtained formal music education: *‘I have recently been thinking that I would enjoy singing but I told myself I can’t sing, that it’s too*

late because when I was little I used to play the piano and I finished with that. It's too late to start learning something new so I don't give a damn anymore'.

Katarina summarised what she finds important for this question: *'What do I need? Well, to believe in myself, right? That's part of the game. What do I need? I don't know. To have the connections to help me. Because I wouldn't be able to achieve that myself. So, I believe I should mainly believe in myself. That's all. I don't know more'.*

But when asked where she can position the education in the whole plan and whether she could do even without graduating she confirmed: *'I need the education...I mentioned that I would be able to manage myself but I mean if they didn't admit me to the school then I would do to achieve myself. But I think that the education is needed. It wouldn't be the same.'*

Nevertheless, she was not so strong in justifying this stance, that school is important and it brings a change. She supposes that everything would take much longer if she didn't graduate from this academy but still believes that talent would be sufficient to make her famous, which is her goal.

As with other girls, it was difficult for her to imagine her future in five years: *'But I think I will live a normal life'*. She is sure she will have children by that time. It is important for her to live 'normally' and to have a nice husband who will support her both financially and in general terms. Her future spouse should be as well 'normal' which implies he would not be stupid and someone like-minded.

In addition to her response to all prepared and follow-up questions, she added that she is lately facing difficulties in school because this school year they were introduced with some new subjects that are hard to master and it is more difficult to follow the curriculum.

She concluded that it is most important not to be 'dumb' *'and for me it's important not to give up and to have good grades at the end of the year so I can get admitted to the school'*.

4.3 Helena

The girl is 15 and she is in the first grade of a vocational school. She attended a special school before entering the high school. Like the first girl described her replies were very short and it was difficult to get her to talk more about herself. The interview with Helena was actually the shortest from all the three conducted, lasting approximately twenty minutes. She is a naturally cheerful person and described by the club manager as problematic in her past with a significant improvement in recent years, since they have known each other for years.

4.3.1 Identity and Sense of Belonging

Helena considers herself both Czech and Roma which is a significant marker of integration as one form of acculturation and which more attention will be given to this emerging theme in the analysis part as well as to the analysis of the formulation of the question itself. She would describe herself as being 'normal', the word she used many times throughout the interview and she explained that for her this 'normal' means: '*Among us*'. It was too difficult for her to respond to the question of belonging, she didn't seem to feel a strong sense of belonging to one particular group and after a long clarification she finally expressed that she could say to belong to the group of girls who also attend the club regularly and practice in a dance group with her.

4.3.2 Environmental Factors

She believes that her future prospects are completely depending on her abilities and decisions. In order to describe this she used a Czech proverb: '*As you make your bed so, you must lie in it*'. Thus, she does not feel that her parents or members of the extended family determined her life course or that it has been designated in any other way. She already touched upon the question that followed later in the interview guide by saying that the mother is an important figure who influences her life significantly and who makes her go to school.

4.3.3 The Value of Schooling

The questions regarding this topic were slightly modified in the case of Helena because she already finished her compulsory education and continued to the next level, so she was asked about the choice of the vocation, her school experience and the values she associates the school with. She is learning to become an arranger and has general subjects such as maths and Czech as well as the practical part which includes drawing and designing. After the completion of the programme she will hopefully decorate and arrange wedding celebrations and shop windows. She believes that her parents and other members of the family want her to graduate from this vocational school. When asked to express her views on schooling and school achievement she stated it is important and added: *‘Well, I mean it’s important because then when you don’t have school, that’s the way it is’*. She claims that she does not enjoy school and goes there simply because it is expected of her. Nevertheless, she realises the importance of the education and that it is the way to the employment, since the school will provide her with the ‘paper’, as she calls it.

4.3.4 Parental Influence on Schooling

Helena claims that her parents are interested in her schooling and inquire on a daily basis: *‘They ask me every day. What happened at school? What did you do? What did you study? Some nonsense for sure’*. She believes they inquire regularly because they want to make sure she is doing fine and that she will not end up bad. So, according to her they have these general inquiries in order to keep her accountable for her education.

4.3.5 Future Goals and Aspirations

At first she expressed she didn’t know what her ambitions and aims are but then she gave a general statement: *‘No, well just to do the school. Well, to take care of myself’*. So, she obviously expects a common life like most of her peers, to finish the school and become independent.

Helena does not feel that there are certain (external) factors that could be hindering her from achieving her goals. She could not identify any obstacles on her way to lead her life as expected, for now at least. When asked what is needed to achieve these goals she replied rather honestly and in a mature way: *‘To pull myself together and start going to school’*. She explained that not attending school regularly is the current issue that she needs to work on: *‘Well, I should work on myself a lot’*. She considers that the future cannot be predicted but still she feels that it is herself who has to influence it and she is the creator to a certain extent.

She cannot imagine herself in five years; it was again too difficult and required anticipation which she was probably surprised with: *‘I don’t know at all. I don’t simply have...I don’t know. I don’t know. See myself in four years, wow! I really don’t know’*. But after a patient reformulation and help of the interviewer she came up with a reply: *‘I don’t know. I’ll probably have finished school. I will be maybe at home. I don’t know’*. She added that she does not want to have children before she is twenty-five. She clarified that by saying she would probably be at home she did not mean to be a housewife at the age of twenty but: *‘Like, I mean I’ll be home during week, I’ll go to work, on Fridays I’ll go out. What do I know, I don’t know’*.

And then Helena concluded with what was noted earlier in the description of her answers, about her self-perception: *‘Well, I don’t know. I see myself like, normal’*.

4.4 Zoe

Zoe is fourteen years old and she goes to the 7th grade of a special school. She has always been going to the special school, she did not start in the primary sector and then transferred. She never went to kindergarten or any other kind of pre-school facility which was recognised as one of the critical points and will be discussed more in detail later in this chapter. Zoe is pretty rough for a girl in her manners which was also reflected in certain responses she gave. The difficulty in interviewing her as well as other girls was that they were reluctant to elaborate more on the questions they were presented with but it seemed that this was not deliberately but that they actually lacked words to express these (complex) concepts. The interviewer put every effort to interpret the questions for them and make sure they properly understood what was asked of them.

However, their vocabulary is limited to the colloquial phrases they use in everyday interaction and perhaps this is a rare occasion when they are expected to express their feelings, thoughts and beliefs.

Moreover, the researcher was informed that this girl is a rather troubled child and that her family background is quite problematic.

4.4.1 Identity and Sense of Belonging

To the first question on whether she feels she belongs to Roma, Czech, both or something completely different she replied that she feels both which again proves the strong evidence of integration and the ability of Roma people to negotiate their different identities according to the context they find themselves in (The sample of the complete interview guide can be found in Appendix B). And when as a follow-up question she was asked to describe where she belongs more precisely, for instance to a certain group of people, the reply was rather negative and nihilistic: *'Nowhere'*. This was rather surprising for a teenage girl and the researcher was expecting this negative attitude from all replies that followed but fortunately the overall account she gave was not so gloomy after all. When asked to whom in particular she belongs perhaps she claimed: *'To myself. To no one'*. And she further claimed that she doesn't belong to any group of peers, that it is only her boyfriend David and her, who seems to be a strong support for her.

4.4.2 Environmental Factors

The second group of questions referred to their feelings about different environmental factors that they may recognise in their nearest surrounding or wider society. Zoe did not think that her life trajectory has been determined by either her parents or some other possible agents in her environment. Here the interviewer in a way helped her by offering an answer since she was not able to come with one herself: *'And what about your mom and dad? Do they expect that you behave in a certain way? That you will have a certain kind of job or...? If anything at all is*

expected from you? And what? Your parents expect that you will learn a profession?’ She confirmed this by just nodding. But then the next follow-up question brought up another important question- the role of teachers in these students’ development. When asked what she thought her friends and teachers expected from her, her reply was rather intriguing: *‘My teachers think I don’t study’*. She added that it is common to hear statements such as this one: *‘I don’t think you’ll ever graduate. On the one hand because you are not able to and on the other hand because you would have to improve in order to be able to do so’*. But after being requested to further explain their attitude and whether they support them in any way, the answer was positive and the girl agreed that the teachers motivate them to try harder in their efforts to succeed by saying: *‘If I improve a bit it is in my power to get somewhere. And that I need to work on my behaviour. And I need to go to school more’*.

4.4.3 The Value of Schooling

Zoe expressed her wish to continue after she finishes with compulsory education and her future vocation would be catering. Her mum wants her most to learn a profession and there is no one in her family who does not support this idea. Both of her parents earned vocational degrees, her mom is a florist and the dad is a cook. Zoe stated that the school will teach her something but it seemed that she was only trying to please us with her answer because her explanation was as follows: *‘It will teach me that I will learn at least something’*.

After being asked to clarify this point she added: *‘I can improve my behaviour, I can get to learn more than what I have known. To count and to write, to learn how to work on the computer.’*

She views school success as something ‘normal’, she agrees it is important and: *‘It is good for something. Good for life’*. She feels that there are certain skills you learn in school that can help you find solutions when you find yourself in certain life situations and that one would not be able to realize these things without having attended school. However, she was not able to define what it is that can be better in one’s life with getting the proper education rather than without it.

4.4.4 Parental Influence on Schooling

The first thing Zoe mentioned about what her parents say when they discuss her school is that she needs to improve. Her mum advises her that she should work harder and go to school more. In her opinion, she thinks that the parents want her to do well at school in order to learn something and not to end up in a correctional facility.

‘To become something. For instance, to be able to get anywhere’.

‘Where anywhere’?

‘Not to stay somewhere where junkies are’.

The fact that she relates school closely to the behavioural issues and highlights its corrective function will be explored more closely later in the chapter in its analysis part.

4.4.5 Future Goals and Aspirations

Zoe finds dancing her main preoccupation and ambition in life. She would like to be involved in making a movie ‘Let’s Dance’. Moreover, she sees herself in five years perhaps in England and by then she expects to achieve several important things: *‘I’ll have finished school. To be at least something. For instance, not to need anyone for life. To quit smoking. To have everything.’* Opposite from the initial impression she left, she concluded with highly positive expectations when asked how she imagines her future: *‘Nicely. Everything will be good’*. She explained more in detail what she finds important to achieve this bright future: *‘I need to finish school. To be able to do something. To go to work. And to have a flat and children’*.

The researcher asked her to go back to the point when she mentioned England and why she would like to go there. She explained that her sister is there since recently and she would like to visit her and eventually stay there if she found it better than in the Czech Republic.

4.5 Discussion and Interpretation of the Results

In the cross-case comparison of participants' accounts and the analysis of data obtained, some interesting commonalities emerged that may be important for some future studies and further research regarding the identities of Roma children.

4.5.1 Self-identity

One of the research questions that this study aimed to investigate is on how Roma adolescents perceive themselves and whether they feel that they belong to any particular group. This study tries to explain the process of self-definition from socio-cultural perspective (Kroger, 2004).

The particularity of Roma teenage girls' identities is manifested in the fact that all of them declared that they feel both Roma and Czech. Katarina was the one who explained it more in-depth by saying that her sense of who she is depends on the context she finds herself in. Connolly (2003: 168) claimed this in his study of the development of children's ethnic identities by the following explanation 'racial groups and identities are not static and fixed but are the product of negotiation and struggle and are likely to change between one context and the next and over time'.

Here what seems as a failure in the design of the interview guide must be highlighted. Namely, the researcher realised only too late that perhaps the option 'both' should not have been included in the initial question. Probably it would have been better if we tried to see whether the girls would come up with this answer themselves, without being offered this answer. Then some more interesting explanations would have been given and with the question formulated in this way they just presented us with an answer 'both' but generally were not able to justify their choice. So this point should be regarded as a weakness of the research tool.

Furthermore, their declaration of feeling as 'both', Czech and Roma reflects a mode of attitude or behavioural strategy that would, according to J. W. Berry's model of acculturation fall under

the category of *integration* (Berry, 2003). Following his model, integration is the concept which holds that maintaining the cultural identity and characteristics of a group and maintaining relationship with other groups are of equal value, it favours both the preservation of culture and interethnic contact. The problems arise when culture is regarded as race and takes over its role in a society. It is viewed as 'something that one is born into' (Belton, 2005). These deterministic views allow the space for exclusion by attributing certain characteristics contained in the common past.

According to the philosophical observation by Fay (1996: 36) this duality should not be viewed as the identity confusion and the lack of 'true self' in certain individuals but he allows the possibility that the 'true self' does not exist at all and that 'self is rather a way of being which is created anew in the very process of interacting with others and with one's environment'. And when Katarina explains that '*But when I'm somewhere else among people who are different from me, then I feel like Czech*' what is reflected in her words is this property of self, that it is constituted in reference to an other, that which is different and from which one distinguish oneself (Norval, 1996).

Another significant finding regarding the girls' sense of belonging is that they were quite comfortable in expressing their feelings of identity and self. Also, none of the girls expressed affiliation to any of the sub-groups of Roma population (Boscoboinik, 2006; Czechkid, 2013). On the other hand, neither they specified that their not belonging completely and utterly to Roma is owing to the fact that Roma community is not strong and unified. In general, judging from the period of repeated informal observation in two clubs, the researcher found that most Roma children freely express their belonging to *Gypsies* while regarding white people as *Gadjos*. They do not use the term *Roma* at all, which although held as politically correct is obviously used mostly by non-Roma with regards to Roma themselves.

4.5.2 Parental Involvement

Erikson (1968, cited in Kroger, 2004) viewed identity, besides possessing other qualities, also as a generational notion and claimed that the parents are responsible for providing their children with an ideological framework, which these then may either follow or fight against.

What was evident across all three cases is that the girls' parents are showing considerable interest in their children's schooling. Their responses varied so while Helena and Katarina both mentioned their parents' inquiring on a daily basis about the activities and grades in school, Zoe explained more in a general way that they advise her to work harder and for them the school seem to be more of a correctional institution which serves to prevent their child from socially pathological behaviour and addiction. So, one of the hypotheses that the study aimed to check was on how Roma parents' value schooling and transfer this to their children, whether it has an instrumental value for them or they have developed more oppositional attitude towards it (Foster, 2005).

Moreover, it aimed to discover whether there are any indicators of mistrust that Roma parents communicate onto their children when discussing educational institutions (Ogbu, 1992) or of anticipated barriers to their future success (Hughes *et al.*, 2006). However, anything that would lead to these findings, any negative value that their parents place on the educational system could not be identified in girls' accounts. The parents do not seem to oppose educational institutions and strive to motivate their children to do better but it does not go further from these verbal encouragements. Often is the case that Roma parents do not engage personally in the work of their children and on the other hand, as will be later discussed, the models of academic success are scarce among Roma community. All the girls find school important but there is this discrepancy between their views and the real achievement and effort they put into their school attainment.

4.5.3 Independence

In the description of their vision of future some of girls' answers varied, the one on parenthood for example. On the other hand, their accounts were similar for certain aspects of future life. One of the themes identified with two girls was 'gaining independence'. It was articulated in a different way but with the identical meaning. Helena said that she would like '*to take care of myself*' while Zoe stated that she expects '*for instance, not to need anyone for life*'. One's social environment sets the standards for what is regarded as the marker of adulthood and becoming a grown-up. What seems important for the two of them is not to prolong this dependence on the family and start taking care of oneself (Hatcher, 1994).

It is particularly interesting to analyse closely Katarina's response because she did not express ideas similar to those of Helena and Zoe and several times throughout the interview she highlighted the importance of having 'contacts' and 'connections', getting to know the right people who can help one in one's endeavours and she hopes to find a husband who will be able to support her financially. According to this, she is the one relying most on her environment because it could be that she has a strong support already from her parents and extended family and therefore expects to have it from her future spouse. On the other hand, having connections and sharing collective resources is one characteristic that Roma people are believed to strongly possess- the collective spirit of caring and sharing with the members of one's community.

In their anticipation of future prospects, none of the girls perceived potential socio-cultural or any other conditions that would constrain them from achieving their goals (Kroger, 2004).

Katarina is also the one who can be singled out in this cross-case comparison by what appears to be a certain inconsistency in her responses. Namely, she was the one who left the strong impression that she was trying to please the interviewer and the researcher with her answers while Helena and Zoe were quite straight in their replies and did not seem to premeditate how to respond.

4.5.4 Dance

Another commonality for teenage Roma girls that was observed throughout this research, both in their responses during interviews and the researcher's observation in this low-threshold club is that their main after-school activity and interest is dancing. This can be attributed to the traditional way of life of Roma people and the significance music and dance have for this group of people, which is a valid conclusion itself. However, another important indicator is shown here: the role models available in the community. Namely, due to the fact that there are few Roma who are both successful academics and also influential and well-respected in their communities, the models available to these girls and boys are mostly singers, dancers and other kinds of celebrities, which makes it more likely for them to identify with the latter group to 'recognise themselves, and to be recognised, as such subjects, to desire such recognitions, and thus to invest in them' (Benjamin *et al.*, 2003: 551). This was particularly evident from Katarina's response whose main ambition is to become famous and is so fascinated with the world of celebrities which is wholeheartedly supported by her parents who are the part of that world themselves.

This point was explored by Ogbu (1992) in his ethnographic study of minorities he categorised as involuntary, although this will not be discussed here as Roma minority status is rather complex and an extensive topic in itself which cannot be covered in this thesis. However, Roma communities demonstrate many characteristics of minorities Ogbu described as such and his theories on minority schooling were deemed applicable to the target group of this empirical study. Namely, he said that these minorities as opposed to voluntary minorities have role models among their community members who do not have a significant positive influence on schooling. In other words, their communities do not provide enough evidence of educational and professional achievement to their youth. The profession of a musician has been traditionally well-respected among members of Roma community which is reflected in girls' aspirations and lifestyle (Czechkid, 2013). However, the times are demanding a certain adjustment from their side and moving towards some other, perhaps not so appealing professions.

Furthermore, even if they continue to secondary education, majority of Roma usually enroll in vocational schools (three years) and not in academic-based programmes, which was evidenced with our participants. However, here one needs to be careful with over-generalisations and bear in mind that the target group for this case study were Roma children who are clients of the low-threshold clubs and can be characterised as vulnerable, in danger and usually coming from troubled homes, which makes them scarce of resources and opportunities.

4.5.5 Pre-school Education

The first critical indicator that appeared in two cases (the third girl was not asked on this because the official interview guide did not contain this question) is that the initial period before entering the primary school was problematic. Zoe declared that she did not attend the kindergarten at all, while Katarina said she spent three years in pre-school facilities for the unknown reasons. This is the burning issue with Roma pupils- on top of economic inequalities and inability of many parents to help their children with school assignments, this attainment gap is created from the very beginning of the schooling trajectory which is then only widened with every new school year.

The difficulties in accessing pre-school institutions are well-known, at least among Serbian Roma. They face different barriers which as a consequence has a low rate of Roma children enrolled in pre-school programmes. On the other hand, those attending are often enrolled in those institutions with the poorest conditions and lower quality of provision. Additionally, Roma parents face difficulties in registering their children due to bureaucratic regulations- they are usually required to obtain a proof of residence and additional documentation that is difficult to access. Thus, parents are often deterred from registering their children who are then disadvantaged from the start compared to their non-Roma peers. This problem was detected also by Czech authorities and is one of the targets set in the *Strategy for Combating Social Exclusion for the period 2011- 2015* approved by the Czech government in September 2011 and expected to improve conditions in socially excluded localities populated mainly by members of Roma community (Agentura pro sociální začleňování, 2011: 17). The measure proposed in this

document is ‘to create methodology for screening of pre-school children, whose school attendance is endangered by social exclusion and to provide pre-school education to selected children’.

The researcher shares the view of Benjamin et al. (2003) who hold that although the individuals may suffer the real social and material consequences of belonging to a particular group, this characteristic is not necessarily their main determinant and one should not presuppose that these consequences are fixed, not subject to change or that this condition is something given. Freire (2000) also promotes the fight for the liberation which requires the perception of reality by those who are oppressed not as the definite state from which there is no way out, but as a set of limitations which they are able to transform.

4.5.6 School Attendance

Similarly, the next issue that seems worth discussing and needs to be tackled here is the school attendance. Especially Helena was straightforward on this topic and admitted that she is not attending school regularly, which might have consequences in the future. This problem is common among Roma pupils and it requires strict monitoring since these children are in a greater danger to drop out and be condemned to definite exclusion, because as Helena put it:

‘Well, I mean it’s important because then when you don’t have school, that’s the way it is’

Another observation that is important to bring attention to is that the critical period for those Roma children who managed to continue to a vocational education is when they enter this new environment. Namely, it is often the case that during the compulsory schooling they attend schools with majority Roma children where they feel safe and comfortable. However, when they move to a new setting there is a danger of being bullied by children of non-Roma origin, which can develop negative feelings they associate the school with. These attitudinal barriers create harmful psychosocial conditions that further negatively affect education performance of these minority children. The information was shared with me by the club manager that several girls who enrolled in their vocational education this September complained of being ridiculed by

white girls. Here, this requires further elaboration because although the girls obviously easily share these feelings with the manager many of whom she has known since they were small, they did not tackle the question of discrimination during the interview. So, it might be that they did not feel comfortable in the presence of the researcher although they were questioned by the person they were familiar with. The conclusion might be that they wanted to be as affirmative as possible.

5 Concluding Remarks

5.1 Introduction

The period of adolescence can be a difficult time of growing risk for individuals from Roma communities. Education system is supposed to be a tool for fighting the social exclusion but it still does not succeed in saving many of these pupils from failure (UNICEF, 2013).

The concepts of ‘ability’ and ‘failure’ continue to be constructed and nurtured by the schooling practices (Barton & Slee, 1999 cited in Benjamin *et al.*, 2003). The framework for this study was developed from the research and theories conducted in the US regarding the underachievement and continuous failure of African American and Latin students, which were in line with the interests of the researcher and evaluated as corresponding to the topic. The issues require new ways of addressing the systematic exclusion of minority pupils and this is how numerous theories, one of the most influential being the critical race theory, came into being and evolved: as a critique and response to the incapacity of existing models, such as the ideology of multiculturalism, to provide feasible solutions (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Knowles and Lander, 2011). Prato (2009) also poses this question when asking whether inclusion of all minorities actually eliminates discrimination. So, discrimination was one of the overarching notions for the whole theoretical framework and the researcher investigated the potential signs of it as well as possible consequences that might be triggered by discriminatory practices.

On the other hand, along with environmentalist and deterministic theories and perspectives, it is important ‘to allow an appreciation of the active role that individuals themselves play in the construction of their lives and wider social environment’ (Connolly, 1998: 16). This segment of framework which incorporates an active part of individuals was developed from Erikson’s social theory of identity. Sen (2006) also claims that influence is not equal as complete determination so choices are still open to individuals regardless of the significant influence of cultural forces.

In the education of Roma, another significant variable are the low-expectations of teachers and administrators, the so-called ‘soft’ bigotry (Philipp, 2012), which is also the case with certain ethnic minorities in the United States as mentioned earlier in the report. Consequently, schools

often fail to prepare minority students for secondary and tertiary levels of education. The illiteracy and drop-out rate in Roma pupils is still alarmingly high, while girls prevail among those who drop out (EDAP, 2010).

5.2 Conclusions

The identity of these children is strikingly marked by observed duality and negotiating between Roma and Czech affiliation. They do not seem to feel threatened and in fear of losing their cultural, ethnic or any other aspect of their complex identities. Also, these low-threshold facilities are good places for them to practice their traditional dances and songs but also to talk about their cultural identity and nurture it. They obviously make them feel accepted and appreciated; otherwise they would not go there regularly on a daily basis and participate in the organised activities voluntarily. This is a good example of how the Czech Republic is facilitating the inclusion of its Roma members. However, there is always a danger of moving into the direction of another form of acculturation and that is segregation. Namely, there was a striking difference between the two clubs the researcher had the opportunity to attend regularly and while one was visibly multicultural and inclusive the other was exclusively Roma, owing to its location in the district of Prague with large Roma population. The social processes on a larger scale are manifested in the structure of the children attending the clubs although both of them have absolutely identical regulations on which segment of the population their services are intended for.

This state of affairs is not surprising because the feelings and attitudes of intolerance and segregation are most often a two-sided reaction. When faced with rejection and hostility by wider community, groups tend to close within themselves as a form of struggle and defense (Belton, 2005). Goffman (1986) names this a protective capsule that the family, or in this case the local neighbourhood, provides for their youth who have been stigmatised in a wider community. Thus, since being a two-way process the efforts are required from both sides: there is a need to build better trust of Roma members on one side and on the other to overcome prejudice and discrimination among majority members. The coexistence is not possible without

some universal values shared by both groups and by ‘a sense of belonging to a community larger than each of the particular groups in question’ (Laclau, 1996). Recent reports are showing that discrimination against Roma population is even on the rise due to the global economic crisis (EDAP, 2010).

However, none of the girls interviewed mentioned or touched upon the topic of discrimination and racial relations with non-Roma members of the society and did not show negative tendencies or features of their identities.

The study aimed at exploring Roma adolescents’ identities and the educational implications that might be related to these notions. Besides the main focus on the identity and schooling of ethnic minority children, the study also explored their career aspirations for future and adult roles they intend to take on in their life. Also, parental involvement and cultural factors were considered important in the investigation of these students’ views on schooling and educational choices. Furthermore, the general qualitative interpretive approach was applied in the design of the project and the analysis of the findings. The multiple case study design with the semi-structured interview as the research method was evaluated as appropriate for exploring the topic of interest.

The study could be enhanced if the follow-up interviews followed the initial ones to examine more in-depth certain points that were identified as important. Also, a better insight into respective cases could be gained if a more comprehensive ethnographic design was developed, so that it includes parents and other important individuals in the nearest surrounding of main participants representing the cases of this multiple case study.

5.3 Recommendations

The findings suggest that the enhanced monitoring of the enrollment of Roma children in pre-school facilities is needed. Similarly, their attendance needs to be under close supervision and must not be neglected as these pupils are in danger of drop out more than any other group of children throughout Europe, Roma girls in particular (Agentura pro sociální začleňování, 2011; EDAP, 2010).

Roma people are still the most discriminated social group in Serbia by the recent report of Nevena Petrušić, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality (Ravnopravnost, 2012). Stereotypes and prejudices against Roma population contribute to social isolation and exclusion and ‘ethnic distance’ is still very big. Of special concern are open and widely spread hate speech, threats and attacks on the members of this community, both in Serbia and the Czech Republic.

The study helped the researcher gain an in-depth view of Roma adolescents, their characteristics and specific needs. The knowledge and experience gained in the process could be beneficial if translated to the Serbian context for future projects with Roma pupils in focus.

The study hopefully offered new perspectives for further enquiry on self-perception of Roma and their own interpretation of reality that could help in facilitating their inclusiveness in the education system and majority society (Daniel Strauss, 2012).

As it was noted earlier in the report, in the context of education and educational research the question of whose interests are being served remains open. The researcher is particularly concerned with this issue with regard to the education of members of Roma population, considering that most research projects are conducted by non-Roma individuals and groups. This distribution of power eventually leads to ‘the enduring production of inequalities’ (Benjamin *et al.*, 2003). So the reflexivity obliges the researcher to allow for this fact in the analysis of the girls’ responses and possible silenced thoughts.

The solution to this lies in participatory research that would empower members of the community who are the target group of research in order to equip young Roma with skills needed for future leaders. An example of this is the project *Roma Adolescent Agency Initiative* that is being conducted in Serbia, Romania and Italy by The FXB Center for Health and Human Rights of Harvard University (FXB Harvard University, 2013). Similarly, this idea was proposed by Freire (2000) in what he named *the pedagogy of the oppressed* which he claimed cannot be built *for* but together *with* those who are oppressed who need to be engaged in the struggle for their liberation.

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Appendix A

SOUHLAS SE ZPRACOVÁNÍM DAT

Zpracovatel/instituce: Ivana Rajkovič, studentka postgraduálního studia Speciální pedagogiky na Pedagogické fakultě Univerzity Karlovy

Účel studie: Postgraduální diplomová práce magisterského programu v oblasti speciální pedagogiky a inkluzivního vzdělávání: *Vývoj identity romských dětí během dospívání, vliv školy a rodinného prostředí na jejich identitu, sebevímání a rozhodnutí, která činí.* Studie se bude zabývat tématy jako sebevímání a důvěra ve vlastní schopnosti, ambice do budoucna, a tím, do jaké míry jsou si děti vědomy dostupných možností do budoucna. Cílem tohoto projektu je zjistit, jaké faktory ztěžují romským dětem dosahovat dobrých výsledků ve výchovně vzdělávacím procesu. Dalším cílem je snaha o získání lepšího náhledu na osobní stanoviska romských dětí; rozpoznání důležitých faktorů ovlivňujících volby, které tyto děti činí a poskytnutí dalších informací v oblasti inkluzivního vzdělávání.

Postupy: Studie probíhá v období 15. 8. – 15. 12. 2013. a veškerá data by měla být shromážděna v průběhu září. Strukturovaných, či částečně strukturovaných rozhovorů se budou účastnit až čtyři osoby z řad romských adolescentů z Prahy. Jejich výběr závisí na návrzích jednotlivých klubů, které děti navštěvují, na dostupnosti, a dobré vůli jejich rodičů. V případě, že to bude nutné, může být po ukončení těchto rozhovorů navržen ještě jeden následný rozhovor. Účastníci rozhovorů budou požádáni o souhlas s vytvořením audionahrávky těchto rozhovorů, tyto audionahrávky budou však po přepisu do písemné podoby zničeny.

Důvěrnost: Totožnost Vašeho dítěte je považována za důvěrnou. Jeho/její jméno bude v údajích změněno na jméno fiktivní. Data shromážděná v rámci této studie budou použita pouze pro účely provedení tohoto průzkumu a nebudou poskytnuta žádné další osobě.

Účast: Vy a Vaše dítě se můžete svobodně rozhodnout, zda se chcete, nebo nechcete účastnit této studie. Neexistuje žádná forma postihu či ztráty dosud poskytovaných výhod, pokud se rozhodnete studii nezúčastnit. Bude-li třeba, mohou být navrženy následné rozhovory, účast v nich je však taktéž dobrovolná.

S přátelským pozdravem,

Ivana Rajković,

Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, Katedra Speciální pedagogiky

M. D. Rettigové 4, 116 39 Praha 1

+420773046123

Souhlas: Souhlasím s tím, že můj syn/má dcera se zúčastní výše uvedené studie.

Podpis zákonného zástupce, matky nebo otce:

Datum:

Podpis osoby provádějící studii:

Datum:

INFORMED CONSENT

The researcher/institution: postgraduate student Ivana Rajković at the Charles University in Prague, Pedagogical Faculty, Department of Special Pedagogy.

The purpose of the study: A postgraduate master thesis in the field of special and inclusive education: *Development of Roma children's identities in adolescence, the influence of school and family environment on their self-identity and self-perception and choices they make.* The study will discuss the topics such as the children's self-awareness and their belief in personal abilities, their ambitions for the future and the extent to which they are familiar with the opportunities that are available to them. This project is intended to detect factors hindering Roma students' educational performance and achievement. Also, the aim is to help gain a better insight into the personal perspectives of Roma children, identify important factors that influence the choices they make and to provide additional knowledge in the field of inclusive education.

Procedures: The study duration is from 15th August – 15th December and the data is supposed to be collected in September. Up to four informants will be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews and they include the Roma adolescents in Prague. The choice of informants depends on the suggestion of different clubs the children attend, availability and good will of the participants and their parents. A form of follow-up interview might be proposed if necessary. The informants will be asked for the permission for tape-recording, and the audio materials will be destroyed after the transcription.

Confidentiality: Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. Your names will be anonymised- substituted by other names. The information being collected will only be used for the purpose of this research. The data will not be disclosed to any external sources.

Participation: You and your child are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate. Potential follow-up interviews might be proposed if necessary and will occur on a voluntary basis as well.

Sincerely yours,

Ivana Rajković

Charles University in Prague; Pedagogical Faculty; Department of Special Pedagogy.

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Authorisation: I agree to my son/daughter taking part in the above mentioned research.

Father, mother or legal guardian's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

Appendix B

- 1) Do you think of yourself as being Czech, Roma, both or perhaps something else? In other words, to define themselves and their belonging to a certain group.
- 2) Do they feel they are expected to follow a certain type of life trajectory?
- 3) Do they want to continue to secondary education?
- 4) Do they think their family members want them to continue with their formal education?
To elaborate more on this one. For example, if the answer is not then to try to come up with possible reasons for this attitude.
- 5) What are their and their parents' views on schooling and educational achievement? e. g. Is it appreciated? Is it viewed as a way of achieving better life?
- 6) What are their ambitions? Do they think there are factors hindering them in achieving their goals?
- 7) What are their expectations for the future and what do they think is needed to achieve their goals?
- 8) How do you see yourself in few years' time?

Ivana Rajković

Erasmus Mundus Special and Inclusive Education

Charles University in Prague

Pedagogical Faculty

Department of Special Pedagogy

