

STUDII DE ATELIER. CERCETAREA MINORITĂȚILOR NAȚIONALE DIN ROMÂNIA  
WORKING PAPERS IN ROMANIAN MINORITY STUDIES  
MŰHELYTANULMÁNYOK A ROMÁNIAI KISEBBSÉGEKRŐL

Nr. 55

**Plainer Zsuzsa**

**AUDIT CULTURE AND THE  
MAKING OF A “GYPSY SCHOOL”**

**Financing Policies, Curricula,  
Testing and Educational Inequalities  
in a Romanian Town**



INSTITUTUL PENTRU  
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Titlu: *Audit Culture and the Making of a "Gypsy School". Financing Policies, Curricula, Testing and Educational Inequalities in a Romanian Town*

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## Rezumat

■ Scopul lucrării de față este înțelegerea factorilor complecși, responsabili pentru crearea unei „școli pentru țigani” – cu performanță educațională slabă și reputație nefavorabilă – într-un oraș din România. Pentru a descrie acest fenomen, autoarea introduce noțiunea de *cultura auditării*, înțelesă ca un set de norme și practici culturale folosite pentru clasificarea performanței profesionale individuale și instituționale. Așa cum reiese din acest studiu de caz, agenții de politici publice pentru învățământul românesc (în pofida intențiilor lor de a facilita integrarea educațională a romilor), prin politicile de finanțare a învățământului – involuntar – îngreunează atingerea scopului propus. Politicile de finanțare a școlilor la nivel local contribuie la îndrumarea copiilor de etnie romă către școli, în care – în lipsa materialelor didactice adecvate și sistemul clar de recunoaștere a performanței profesorilor – educația de calitate rămâne un scop greu de atins. Totodată, noțiunea *culturii de audit* relevă contextualitatea etichetei negative de „școală pentru țigani” care în anumite contexte acționează ca un stigmat, iar în altele ca o resursă instituțională. Având în vedere acest aspect, studiul identifică situațiile sociale în care conceptul este perceput ca unul negativ, și contribuie la reproducerea stigmatizării etno-rasiale.

## Abstract

■ However segregation and discrimination are very important factors that block access of Roma to quality education, there are a series of less visible phenomena also responsible for school inequalities. Aim of this paper is to understand how some of these sophisticatedly linked factors lead to the making of a “Gypsy school” in a Romanian town, a school with low educational performance and bad fame. In doing so, the notion of audit culture is introduced, understood as a set of culturally mediated norms and practices of ranking. As this approach comes into sight, one may understand how – despite the commitment shown by the Romanian policy-makers to facilitate school integration of the Roma – a series of regulations unwittingly obstruct this aim. As it is revealed below, the framing of the national financing policies may involuntarily lead to tracking the Roma children into certain schools, where – in lack of a variety of teaching materials, refined testing and a clear system of rewarding the teacher’s performance – quality education becomes a hard-to-reach target. The contextuality of the bad label of a “Gypsy school” is also relevant in this research as it is either a resource, or a stigma depending of the situation.



## Contents

Audit culture – theoretical approach	■	5
Auditing from above – three aspects of state-ruled education in Romania	■	6
1. Structure	■	6
2. Financing	■	6
3. Programmes for Roma	■	7
Auditing from below: policies of financing and the school elite	■	7
1. Local school history: mass enrolment and recruiting	■	7
2. The two sides of mass recruitment: a resource and a stigma	■	9
2.1. Advantages	■	9
2.2. Disadvantages	■	10
The third level: audit culture and the teaching staff	■	11
Conclusions	■	13
References	■	14

# AUDIT CULTURE AND THE MAKING OF A “GYPSY SCHOOL”

## Financing Policies, Curricula, Testing and Educational Inequalities in a Romanian Town<sup>1</sup>

■ Making of “Romani ghetto schools” or “Gypsy schools” is acknowledged to be an important source of school inequalities in Eastern Europe. Authors like Mircea Surdu and Savelina Danova describe these institutions as ill-equipped ones, with unqualified teachers and predominantly Roma children, who were rejected by other, higher-quality educational units. Due to their scanty conditions these institutions have low school performance and low level of attendance, while the rate of truancy is very high. Emergence of such schools – in Surdu and Danilova’s view – could be explained by urban ghettoization and the reluctance of non-Roma parents to enrol their children in an institution attended by Roma (Savelina and Surdu in Rekosch - Sleeper 2004).

However, negative labelling of the Roma can hardly be denied; in my view, ethno-racial classification alone sometimes cannot reveal the reproduction of educational inequalities. Emergence of “Gypsy schools” may sometimes be equally explained by systemic insufficiencies of the national policies, certain regulations apparently not linked to minority aspects of the national framework for education. But – as the following sections may inform – these systemic constructions unwittingly contribute to the reinforcement of Roma school inequalities.

### Audit culture – theoretical approach

■ For explaining the emergence of a “Gypsy school” in a Romanian town, and highlighting its relation to the general framework of the educational system, a new concept, that of audit culture is introduced. Audit culture in Cris Shore and Susan Wright’s approach (Shore – Wright in Strathern ed. 2000: 57-90) has two, interrelated aspects: on the one hand it refers to mechanisms of classifying and ranking institutions, on the other hand it reveals the processes of shaping the professional self.

Subsequently, at a personal level audit culture refers to discourses (semantic clusters, practices, institutions, norms) understood as cultural forms and practices that coin the professional identity “the way in which individuals construct themselves as professional subjects” (Shore – Wright in Strathern

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<sup>1</sup> My ongoing research started in November 2011, and was seconded by the school elite (headmaster, ex-headmaster, vice-headmaster), elementary school teachers, the school mediator, special education specialist, children enrolled and their families. I’d like to thank for their contribution.



ed. 2000: 58). At institutional level this notion also implies techniques of performance, quality, control, discipline, accreditation as well as good practice.

Moreover, audit culture is not just a set of techniques meant to put institutions in a place; it also brings into light a top-down direction of evaluation: principles of ranking are invented by leading institutions, the norms require implementation, internalization or even resistance by lower levels of power and agency. (Shore – Wright in Strathern ed. 2000: 58-61). But the process of classifying is sometimes hidden by an – apparently – neutral and rational set of instructions; thus audit culture highlights not just a new governmental rationality but – tacitly – a new political technology, too:

Audit procedures present themselves as rational, objective and neutral based on sound principles of efficient management [...]. However these procedures revolve around normative statements and measurements [...] that simultaneously rank institutions and individuals against each other. (Shore – Wright in Strathern ed. 2000:61).

Audit culture in this study is applied to the realm of the Romanian educational policies. It analyzes how the topflight agent in this field (the Romanian Ministry of Education) sets up its policies of financing and how these norms are institutionalized in a school. Within the school two levels are discerned and investigated: that of the school elite (headmasters, ex-headmasters, vice headmasters), who implement and respond to legal requirements imposed by the ministry, and the level of teaching staff (teachers, auxiliary teachers, elementary school teachers, special education specialists) who embody the requirements of the everyday schoolwork. In case of school elite and teaching staff the individual aspects are also taken into account: professional achievements, performance and recognition are seen as pieces of the sophisticated web of audit culture.

## **Auditing from above – three aspects of state-ruled education in Romania**

### **1. Structure**

From a top-down perspective the Romanian educational system has three levels: the Ministry is superior to regional inspectorates (one for each county and Bucharest). Educational units – schools – are subordinated to the inspectorates but they also depend on municipalities as these latter's local budgets partly contribute to school management and financing. Education in Romania has four stages: pre-school, or kindergarten (three to seven years), compulsory education with its four years of primary and four years of lower secondary school, followed by another four or five years of upper secondary education of different types (theoretical, technical, vocational, apprenticeship). Graduating school may be an entrance to university and later to post-graduate programmes. A great majority of the educational units are state-ruled ones, the ministry being responsible for curricula, accreditation of teaching materials and financing. (OECD, 2003). Teacher training is validated by the inspectorates who were also responsible for teaching staff recruitment until 2011.

### **2. Financing**

According to the probated Law of Education (Law nr 1/2011, Art, 104), likewise its earlier versions (84/1995 and 354/2004), financing of the Romanian educational institutions is based on a quota (an amount of money) calculated in accordance with the type of institution and the number of the children enrolled. Based on enactments of the Law number 29.265/07.04.2005 and the amendments of its 1995 version (Law number 84/1995 amended by Law 354/2004), stakeholders of the Romanian educational institutions, local authorities as well as the inspectorates can be charged with closing the school which has a low enrolment number.

One moment of putting such measurements into practice was at the end of 2009, when the Romanian Government issued the decree number 114 of 2009. As it is affirmed by the document, due to the downturn of the national and international economy, in order to assure observances of the commitments made to the international financing organizations, the Romanian government undertook measurements to reduce state budget deficit. According to the minister of education, one item of those measures aimed the termination of 15 000 places in the national system. When school leaders complained about how difficult it was to carry out such requirements, the national authorities advised them to merge schools with an enrolment rate lower than numbers ascribed by the educational law (Gândul 2009). Subsequently, a wave of institutional merging and closure had been begun all over Romania since 2010 (Marcu 2010, Gazeta de Sud 2010), and despite of its partial success, it has remained a tendency even since (Mateaş 2012).

### 3. Programmes for Roma

Under the impact of the EU adherence, the Romanian government undertook a series of educational policies for Roma in the mid 2000s. These programmes – previously initiated and carried out by different NGOs, international organizations and institutions of the state – aimed to guarantee equal access to education by penalizing segregation, teaching Romani language and culture, hiring Roma school mediators, set aside special places at schools and universities for Roma students, implement remedial programmes to increase school performance (Sarău 2012).

## Auditing from below: policies of financing and the school elite

■ Together with its bad reputation in the town (it is considered a no-go institution, see this section), the educational unit chosen as subject for my investigation has some quantitative indicators that may contribute to its label as a "Gypsy school". About 80% of the enrolled children declare themselves as Roma in the official statistics, a great majority of them attending the elementary school (I–IV classes). Despite of the high intake (over 450 children) as headmasters admit, truancy rate and school abandon is very high. The school has a Roma mediator to communicate between parents and the institution, and also a series of remedial programmes attended by some non-Roma, too, who could not graduate the compulsory education. The two sub-sections below go further in analyzing the institution. Local school history may help to understand how – as an impact of financing policies – the number of Roma children had been increased in this "place". Duplicity in recruitment strategies may help to comprehend how mass enrolment is not only a resource but also a factor responsible for reinforcing the stigma.

### 1. Local school history: mass enrolment and recruiting

The vice-headmaster and some of the teachers had been living in the district for many years and attended this school or the neighbouring one some decades ago. The first traces of the local school and urban history are reconstructed from their memories.

Initially it was a Jewish school in the 1890s, later a boys-only school then a girls-only one, then a mixed school. It was known as knife-tosser, as the children threw the ink bottles at the teachers if they were not contented with the grades. It was a special world here, close to the dam, as the youngsters were gathering in gangs. I could walk here freely, as my uncle was a boatman at the dam, so everybody knew me, although I was an enemy, a person from the neighbouring area. It was forbidden to see the girls from different districts. It was the region where the wagoners lived as the market and the flea market was near. The wagoners were the Gypsies, the Hungarians were workers, working in the factories. Later in the 1970s and 1980s, when the new civic



centre was built, many houses were demolished, new blocks of flats emerged, for high-up people. These have sent their kids to other, better schools. Here remained the rest, the working-class people and their children. There was but one Romanian class in the 1950s, but now this is the majority, as many Romanians moved in during the industrialization. But the majority before 1989 were working-class children, and there were locals, not newcomers. Decent people they were. We had no problems with the effective of children before 1989 as we had parallel classes. But now many houses are inhabited by old people, as many have left the district and even the country.

Simultaneously with the emergence of the new civic centre (built to be a new downtown in Ceaușescu's model of urban restructuring) (Răuță in Vainovski – Mihai ed. 205-237) the presence of the Romani population increased in the area. Initially these new coming families were settled down in a Roma colony at an hour walking distance, but, as part of the same process of reshaping urban sites, the colony was blurred. The Roma families were forced to move out in houses and blocks settled closer to the school. As an old woman, grandmother of one school child recalls:

I felt so sorry about the colony, it was demolished, although we had everything for us, I can't complain. We had a one-room flat and a kitchen there but it was demolished, and the Gypsy block of flats built. But I did not live there as we made a change. I saw the conditions there I saw that the water was flowing down the stairs. So I made a change, as I said I cannot stay here, it drives me crazy. My husband worked in the tan yard, so he was allocated an apartment here, close to the church square. Later we had to move out as it was not our own but later we moved over and this is how we reached here.

Moving in from the one-time colony was just one reason for the increase in the number of Roma children in the school; new forms of enrolment were also responsible for the process. Post-1989 legal framing of the educational agenda brought – inter alia – a change in the policies of school recruitment. In opposition to the state-communist period, the years of transition dismissed the territory-based and compulsory enrolment and enabled the parents to feel free in choosing a school for their children. Benefiting from this new context, the better-off families moved their children out from the working-class school, leaving the poorer and less performed ones behind. In order to solve shakeout and escape institutional closure due to the low number of the kids, the headmistress of those years invented new strategies of recruitment. One step of this strategy was the enrolment of the orphanage children, among them many Roma. And many of these children – as the teachers point out – were not just ethnically different but also with an atypical school behaviour:

At the beginning everything was fine with orphanage children as orphanages were looking after them. These kids were emotionally wounded; they stayed in the corner, refusing to come out. There was one – I was told not to ask anything from him – as his father killed his mother in front of him. So we had to adjust the curricula to their needs. [...] True, there were some children, who still refused to come out from the corner kicking their head to the wall but others graduated university. (vice-headmaster, teacher)

So, as it is commonly shared among the teachers, mass enrolment is responsible for lowering of school performance and attendance:

Problems [with school performance and school attendance] started in the 1990s, when the school enrolled children from the orphanage. It was so as the headmistress of those times wanted to keep the school open by all means." (teacher)

But enrolling children from orphanage was originally an idea suggested by the inspectorate. It encouraged the school to accept children rejected from other institutions in the town:

In 1993 I received a phone call from an inspector. He wanted to know if we except orphanage children, who were already refused by the neighbouring, better-off schools. They called school X and Z [prestigious local institutions] but nobody accepted them. We did. (ex-headmistress)

In addition to enrolling orphanage children, the school elite welcomed any other student (usually with low school performance and problems in behaviour), refused by other educational institutes of the town:

We had children as we did not refuse anyone. In our meetings with other headmasters all over the town I told them: you can send children to our school, you can send everyone you do not need, as we respect children’s rights in the spirit of certain projects, and I named the ERASMUS or other projects I was in. So this was it, we built up ourselves from the children of others. It wasn’t quite a good solution, as they sent us children with problems, who tried to become integrated, thanks to our colleagues. Otherwise we would remain without jobs, as school population was in decrease. So now we have children of all kinds. (ex-headmistress)

These two strategies of recruitment that caused an increase in the number of Romani children entailed the hiring of a Roma school mediator, responsible for enrolment. As the school staff univocally states, it has been her charge to collect, “stock-take” the children living in the district. Similarly, many parents admit, they got in touch with the school via the mediator, who herself lived in the colony many years before. Other (Roma) students were directed to the school by their previous educational institutions. As many say: it became widely known in the town that there is one school where everybody is welcomed, so this is how they reached there.

As the above mentioned strategies clearly show, the initially planned enrolment gradually turned into a spontaneous mechanism of “gathering everyone”. And, as the following section informs, this recruitment has two faces: it can be a resource but also a stigma.

## **2. The two sides of mass recruitment: a resource and a stigma**

### **2.1. Advantages**

As the ex-headmistress highlights, accepting “children of all kinds” was not a just a solution to maintain the teaching staff, but also a strategy that – adding to the symbolical benefits gained by the school leader – increased the symbolical recognition of the school elite and the school itself.

We applied for a SOCRATES project, it was the first SOCRATES in Romania for grammar schools, and we were eligible, as we had children with problems. It was a project in collaboration with Italian and Finnish schools, so we could visit Italy and Finland. The children, who were involved in the programme, had already graduated, but in the early 1990s they had the opportunity to visit Finland, being hosted by Finnish families. [...] Later I was invited in the Romanian Parliament to give a presentation about our experiences with the project. True, it was a bit difficult, as many were upset: why this school was chosen? Why a district school instead of elite ones? Later all this stuff with applications was transferred to the inspectorates. There was one inspector with applications but it was later on.

Bad infrastructure, considered typical for “Gypsy schools” was, too, used as a resource, as it enabled the one-time headmistress to apply for PHARE funds, used for reconstructions in the school (e.g. central heating). Narratives below on negotiations with local and national authorities can clearly show how structural disadvantages were used as resources in a competition for material resources:

Then there was the project with central heating. We were eligible as it was launched for schools with bad infrastructure and majority of Roma children. Local inspectors



asked me, if I planned to go to Bucharest? I said yes. The minister was really nice. I showed him pictures about the conditions in the school and said: do you see what conditions an alumna from a Bucharest university must face? – **laugh** – I was an alumna of a university in the capital, and I did not hesitate to mention it each time I paid my visits to the officials. I usually told to the local inspectors that I had already discussed the issue in Bucharest, while the Bucharest officials were told that I had the approval on the local level. Besides, I had an excellent relation with the press. I got along well with one journalist from the local newspaper, and gave him a call when something happened, for instance, when the ceiling fell down. He made a picture and an article on our miserable conditions, so I could attach all these to the application folder.

Another outcome of mass enrolling students with low school performance was the school's eligibility for catch-up programmes: The Second Chance, the Reduced Attendance (Fără frecvență), the "make up" programme (a remedial programme, in Romanian: programul de recuperare). Being the only educational institution in town that undertook hosting of such programmes, the school gained a unique position in the field of local educational units.

## 2.2. Disadvantages

The decree number 114 of 2009, especially its paragraphs regarding educational institutions, brought a new turn in the local school history. In order to fulfil the enacted ministry requirements, the inspectorate decided to merge the school with a neighbouring one. This latter had 207 children enrolled, was relatively well-equipped and had a middle-class school clientele, compared to my research site, an institution with lower school performance and a predominant Roma majority among the children. But the number of students here was about 400 in 2010, over the minimum of 300 ascribed as mandatory for a self-standing educational institution. Children and parents of the former school were submitting a protest to the inspectorate and organized meetings against the school mixing. According to the protest children and parents rejected the merging, as the school they were forced to join, had just 20-30% of the children enrolled for secondary school, while in their school this rate reached 98% (Petiție 2010).

According to declarations given to the local press<sup>2</sup>, reasons for mixing were infrastructural: the "better-off" school had two, renovated buildings, despite the low number of students. As local officials stated, the school was using but half of one building, so maintaining the remaining one made it unable to pay salaries for the teaching staff. Infrastructural inequality is admitted by the vice-headmaster of the "Gypsy school":

Three years ago [in 2007] there was a rumour about mixing that school with another, so they moved in our neighbourhood. They had two buildings, and a headmaster able to arrange everything, so they had conditions, much better than ours. But the number of children they enrolled had been radically decreased, so one of the buildings became entirely useless. Due to this rumour many parents moved their children in a better school, close to the town centre, so the number of students remained in decrease. In 2009 the issue of mixing reappeared, the inspectorate wanted to mix them with us. The parents were protesting, it was a scandal, you can follow it in the local press.

According to the press, the parents from the "better school" refused merging, as the new institution was 25 minutes further than the initial one. According to the parents, the new conditions would have been inconvenient [nefast] and reputation of the new school not so good. Their new institution would have been less equipped, and the children attended remedial programmes, because they could not face requirements of the full-time education. "We have chosen the school because of its good fame, not its distance to our home. If the kids are moved out they will learn in an inadequate environment." "Ne-am ales școala în funcție de renume și nu de distanța față de casă. Dacă ni se mută copiii, vor învăța într-un mediu nefast." (Adevărul 25.01.2010a).

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2 See the bibliography on the media coverage of the mixing.

But according to the vice-headmaster, there was another set of arguments rejecting the school mixing:

They did not want to come here as it was a Gypsy school, and it was a shame to attend it. They had less Roma kids there, as the previous headmaster refused to enrol them. This is how their number of children decreased.

One press article highlights the same issue: the students belonging to Gábor families<sup>3</sup> are claimed to be the reason to reject this mixing. Although it is not spoken out – states the article – the better-off parents think that Romanians and Gypsies cannot stay together. In the author's view, parents and students think the school "is not a normal one", "it is with high rate of truancy", with "handicapped children" who are "uncivilized" and up to stealing and committing violent acts. This – concludes the journalist – is in fact hidden reference to the Roma origin of the kids: "One mother, though refused to give details, referred to the students from that school, majority with Roma origin" "Una dintre mame care, deși n-a mai dat alte amănunte, se referea la elevii de acolo, proveniți preponderent din rândul etniei rome" (Țic 2010). According to the article, the headmaster himself thinks that the presence of Roma kids in the school lies beneath the reluctance of the mixing (Țic 2010). Under the impact of the inspectorate's rejection of school merging, the "better-off school" was later merged into another educational institution. "We survived due to the variety of the remedial programmes" – concludes the vice-headmaster.

Narratives and media coverage of this conflict clearly show the flip sides of the mass-recruitment policies. According to the above-cited newspaper article, "bad infrastructure", "inconvenient conditions" are in fact euphemisms for an ethno-racial labelling: they stay for the stigma of a "Gypsy school". Protests against school merging bring forward traits like "low school performance", "low rate of secondary school attendance", so typical for lower class schools and their students (Bourdieu 1989). But – in the climate of competition – these features are linked to ethno-racial differences and reinforce the link between negative labels and the Roma from Romania.

Through the framework of audit culture the school history and the conflict reveal how state-designed policies of financing are turned into mass enrolment in a local context; it also informs how an institutional response to these policies may entail changes in the school's status (eligibility for projects) and contributes to the developing of the professional self (many of these advantages result from the personal initiatives of the ex-headmistress). Together with these benefits the implementation of financing policies also leads to reinforcement of low school performance, truancy and stigmatization of the school. More unwanted outcomes (increasing school inequalities) of financing policies may become more visible when introducing the third, "deepest" level of analysis, that of the teaching staff.

## The third level: audit culture and the teaching staff

■ Reactions of the teaching staff to the nation-widely coined policies of recruitment and financing may add new pieces to this framework. Interviews about their experiences with Roma children made us understand how state policies turned into mass enrolment were embedded in every day school practices. Four agents seemed to have relevant experiences to this issue: the three elementary school teachers, having Roma-only classes where the majority of the Romani children were enrolled, and the psycho-pedagogue, a staff member qualified in helping children with special educational needs.

According to the interviews, a common complaint of the form teachers is the lack of a specialized curriculum, suitable for their students. Working with the commonly used teaching materials is impossible, as these children usually do not have the necessary knowledge:

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3 According to the school statistics, only a small fraction of the Roma children are of Gábor origin.

**How could you manage to teach all kids to read?**

Firstly we worked out the programme but it is just hypothetical. Unfortunately we are obliged to use it. The authorities do not want to understand that these kids need a different teaching plan. The neighbouring school, which has predominantly Roma children tried to work out a special programme but it was rejected by the Roma ministry bureaucrat and labelled as discriminatory; they think it is discriminatory if the Roma kids have a different plan than the others. So we have nothing than the officially assigned plan. But it is a heterogeneous group; only two girls knew all the letters in the second form, when I started to teach them. So I made the plan, which was impossible to be used. Then I set the textbooks aside, handed out the first form textbooks and we began with the ABC. Those who attended the school regularly became able to read by the end of the school year. [...] These kids do not attend kindergarten. Two girls did but they were attending only the summer kindergarten organized by an NGO. They do not have social life, pliancy for each other. They do not know how to sit down and eat. So I had to teach them to eat. So there are some big expectations in the national curricula but it is impossible to apply them here. Let me give you one example: according to the nationally set requirements all children would have had to finish the ABC by the end of the second form. I think in their case the end of the third form would be more realistic." (one of the form teachers)

In small-talk discussions the teachers usually complain about their salaries. They find unjust the lack of an extra payment as they work in more difficult conditions than their colleagues from "better" schools. In Bourdian terms they claim a material incentive as they have to teach children who did not acquire the necessary social and cultural capital from their families, and whose socialization is almost entirely done by the school staff (Bourdieu 1989).

Misrecognition by the system could be well illustrated by the following fragments. The lines below are parts of an interview conducted with one of the elementary school teachers, very popular and well respected among the Roma children and parents.

We begin the first term with joining up, acquiring the knowledge taught in kindergarten. They do not know colours, number of the days, notions of time. I do not hurry them; they will catch up and learn everything through playing. Playing is important. [...] At the beginning they were unable to hold hands. And basic things: to keep their things tidy. So we had to learn to clean and they liked it. [...]

**But it needs creativity and invention...**

I have been dealing with drama pedagogy since 1996, so I know plenty of plays: plays to remember names, plays to increase group cohesion which is the most important. [...] There is one special course on drama pedagogy, I am the organizer, but it is not yet audited by the officials. Many colleagues attend it as our tuition fee is low. We teach through theatrical elements, we play plenty of games. But playing is not the aim but a tool to be used in the class. Many plays reinforce group cohesion: for instance processing a tale, distributing the roles. They have to work in groups, for instance they have to make a drawing together. So they became capable of group work by the end of the fourth form. I got acquainted with drama pedagogy at the Bolyai Summer Academy and liked it. It took me two years to become a specialist but later we were allowed to organize trainings together with a friend.

**How is it recognized by the school?**

There is no official recognition either in payment or in the evaluation of my work. It is equal with all other mandatory courses for the teaching staff organized and audited by the inspectorate. At the beginning it wasn't "welcomed" by the inspectorate but later, when alternative teaching methods came into fashion, everything changed. We are not a registered union, this might be the problem. We are but two women who invited other people, about eight persons, to attend a training course. We were looking for sponsors, we bring some food like bread and butter, arrange accommodation in a local

school. The union of Hungarian teachers sponsored us with a modest sum of 50 RON [about 10 Euros], the school gave us classrooms.

**Does the official curriculum permit using such methods?**

I don't care. I usually say if there is somebody who can do things better, he is welcomed to take my place. These kids cannot hold the pencil, I can't ask them to write. I have to teach them the basics.

The presence of the psycho-pedagogue in the school is important for two reasons: he/she is the person, together with the psychologist, who gives the expertise necessary for issuing the certificate about the special educational needs; such official document engenders material benefits for the child and its family. Secondly, the psycho-pedagogue helps children in combating their learning difficulties. His/her professional assistance is given in accordance with some test results (both psychological and cognitive tests are used either by the local psychologist and psycho-pedagogue or by a neurologist). According to the local school expert, the nationally set and required methods of testing are biased, and these in many cases obstruct to accord a targeted assistance:

The tests measure cognitive skills and are based on measuring the IQ and this is a problem. Many children can have high IQs but still they are unable to learn to write, as the IQ tests may measure only some type of mental capacities. But if the IQ is high, the neurologists cannot issue the certificate necessary for extra teaching assistance. The IQ-based tests sort out the children with dyslexia or disgraphia, those, for instance, who do not have the necessary motor skills to learn how to write. But the capacities of such kids can be improved and they really need help. I always speak out - whenever I can - that testing IQ is not good. But we can't make a thing as this is the system, the nationally assigned methodology. And the teachers are upset because they do not understand why the kids cannot get any assistance even though they are unable to write or read.

Audit culture at the level of teaching staff informs how the state policies overlook aspects of everyday implementations. As the teaching staff points out, implementation, classification (in fact auditing) are not based on efficient programmes (teaching materials, test), while the rewarding and recognition of the professional achievement (work, qualification, performance) takes place outside the system.

## Conclusions

■ The making of a “Gypsy school” – as it may come out from the previous sections – goes back to a series of interrelated factors that make it a multi-faced phenomenon. True, according to the indicators (like school performance, number and ethnicity of the enrolled students, bad fame of the institution), the school chosen as site for this research can be easily labelled as a “Gypsy one”, however this labelling would not let us reveal how educational inequalities occur and operate.

Difficulties begin with the definition itself. Instead of being a stable category, the label of “Gypsy school” is rather contextual. It may be either a resource to obtain certain benefits like renovation of the school building, a solid position on the market of educational institutions but it can also reinforce ethno-racial inequalities, giving a negative connotation to the category Roma and its “bearers”.

A less reflexive account may only see this school as a “receptacle” for Roma children with low educational achievement but a more careful analysis may highlight that the enrolled ones were rejected by other schools and unless accepted here, they would have fallen out from the compulsory and free educational system. To follow this line: one can admit that the elementary class teachers sometimes feel a less prestigious job to teach Roma children still, they intend to do their jobs as well as possible and succeed to transmit basic skills of reading, writing and counting to their students.

But still, as the directors and the teaching staff openly admits: truancy, school abandoning is a persisting problem in the institution.



Applying audit culture may bring into light these sophisticated aspects that obstruct school mobility: understood as a process of implementation, ranking, classification and reward, audit culture makes comprehensible the complexity of interests, plans, policies, agencies that contribute in the phenomenon of auditing. To go further, the notion of audit is capable to reveal the systemic factors that – apparently – have no ethno-racial aspect but unwittingly obstruct school mobility of the Roma.

Although the ministry intends to reduce school costs and works out a low-budget model for educational units, its financing policies may have different outcomes at local level. In order to reach the intake assigned by the authorities – necessary for maintaining the school – the headmasters resort to mass enrolment, endorsing children with low school performance and Roma origin. Although this strategy may be in line with the national policy of seconding Roma school attendance, in lack of carefully planned strategies quality education remains a hard-to-reach goal. It is neither the overwhelming presence of the Roma children nor the low school achievement as such but inconsistency of financing policies, the curriculum, the testing and the system of rewards (that does not recognized performance of teachers) that reinforces school inequalities of the Roma.

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Könczei Csongor: *De la Kodoba la Codoba. Despre schimbarea identității etnice secundare într-o familie de muzicanți romi dintr-un sat din Câmpia Transilvaniei Hogyan lett a Kodobákból Codoba? „Másodlagos” identitásváltások egy mezőségi cigánymuzikus családnál*
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- Nr. 28  
Sarău Gheorghe: *Bibliografie selectivă privind rromii (1990 - 2009)*
- Nr. 29  
Livia Popescu, Cristina Raț, Adina Rebeleanu: *„Nu se face discriminare!”...doar accesul este inegal. Dificultăți în utilizarea serviciilor de sănătate de către populația romă din România/ „No discrimination!” Just unequal access... Barriers in the use of health-care services among the Romanian Roma*
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- Nr. 31  
Sólyom Zsuzsa: *Ancheta sociologică – Coeziune socială și climat interetnic în România, octombrie – noiembrie 2008*
- Nr. 32  
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Veress Ilka: *Strategiile de reproducere culturală ale minorității armenice din România*
- Nr. 34  
Kiss Dénes: *Sistemul instituțional al minorităților etnice din România*
- Nr. 35  
Gidó Attila – Sólyom Zsuzsa: *Kolozsvár, Nagykároly és Nagyvárad zsidó túlélői. A Zsidó Világkongresszus 1946-os észak-erdélyi felmérése The surviving Jewish inhabitants of Cluj, Carei and Oradea. The survey of the World Jewish Congress in 1946*
- Nr. 36  
Marin Timeea Elena: *„We are Gypsies, not Roma”. Ethnic Identity Constructions and Ethnic Stereotypes – an example from a Gypsy Community in Central Romania*
- Nr. 37  
Kiss Dénes: *Romániai magyar nonprofit szervezetek – 2009–2010. A szervezetek adatbázisának bemutatása és a nonprofit szektor szociológiai elemzése*

- Nr. 38  
Lazăr Andreea: *O cartografiere a concepțiilor „populare” despre apartenența națională în statele membre ale Uniunii Europene*
- Nr. 39  
Gidó Attila: *School Market and the Educational Institutions in Transylvania, Partium and Banat between 1919 and 1948*
- Nr. 40  
Horváth István: *Romania and Moldova, Migration mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century to Present, with Special Focus on Minorities Migration/Migrația din România și Republica Moldova de la mijlocul secolului XIX până în prezent, cu accent pe migrația minorităților*
- Nr. 41  
Plainer Zsuzsa: *WHAT TO GIVE IN RETURN? Suspicion in a Roma shantytown from Romania*
- Nr. 42  
Sorbán Angella: *Kisebbség – társadalomszerkezet – kétnyelvűség*
- Nr. 43  
Kiss Tamás – Barna Gergő: *Népszámlálás 2011. Erdélyi magyar népesedés a XXI. század első évtizedében. Demográfiai és statisztikai elemzés*
- Nr. 44  
Plainer Zsuzsa: *Controlul presei locale orădene în primii ani ai sistemului ceaușist. Descriere generală și aspecte minoritare*
- Nr. 45  
Remus Gabriel Anghel: *Migrația croaților din România. Între migrație etnică și migrație de muncă*
- Nr. 46  
Gheorghe Sarău: *Istoricul studiului limbii rromani și al școlarizării rromilor în România (1990–2012)*
- Nr. 47  
Könczei Csongor – Sárkány Mihály – Vincze Enikő: *Etnicitate și economie*
- Nr. 48  
Csósz László – Gidó Attila: *Excluși și exploatați. Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România și Ungaria în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial*
- Nr. 49  
Adriana Cupcea: *Construcția identitară la comunitățile turcă și tătară din Dobrogea*
- Nr. 50  
Kiss Tamás – Barna Gergő: *Erdélyi magyarok a magyarországi és a romániai politikai térben*
- Nr. 51  
Benedek József – Török Ibolya – Máthé Csongor: *Dimensiunea regională a societății, diversitatea etnoculturală și organizarea administrativ-teritorială în România*
- Nr. 52  
Kiss Tamás: *Analysis on Existing Migratory Data Production Systems and Major Data Sources in Romania*
- Nr. 53  
Kiss Tamás – Barna Gergő: *Maghiarii din Transilvania în spațiul politic maghiar și românesc*
- Nr. 54  
Bakk Miklós: *Regionalism asimetric și administrație publică*

