A critical appraisal of policies and practices focusing upon the right to education: The case of the Roma in Ghent

Elias Hemelsoet

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Copromotor: Prof. Dr. David Bridges
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Proefschrift ingediend tot het behalen van de academische graad van
Doctor in de Pedagogische Wetenschappen

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Hogeschool Sint-Lucas Beeldende Kunst Gent

Acknowledgements

At the end of a long journey, an appropriate time has come to thank those who have joined me on the road. Some have done so with their insights and wisdom, others with their beloved proximity and supporting words or by living an inspiring answer to the question 'what needs to be done'. It is only by the grace of their presence that the result at hand has come to existence.

Paul, for being much more than a supervisor. Your honesty, intellectual sincerity, unremitting willingness to keep learning and academic mastery were of great value to find answers to the question how to make sense out of doing research, over and again. Your support to help me develop my own story, rather than copycatting another one or steering me in an already paved road, was beyond all doubt an appealing expression of how humble mastership can be of service to help one develop his proper ideas.

David, though mostly literally far away, your supportive engagement whenever we met and your expertise with this kind of research was very helpful. Besides your inspiring feedback and publications, your unremitting enthusiastic engagement to improve the education of many, was a great example.

Maria, for welcoming me in a new department for the last year of my trip. Although that transition was not always an easy one, the ever returning efforts to find each other are greatly appreciated, and so are your supporting presence and willingness to be of help at any moment. The energetic and dedicated way you run the department elicits admiration.

Nancy and Stefan, for your engaged input in—and in between—each of the meetings of the guiding committee. Your personal perception of educational research stood for a very valuable contribution. Repeatedly, it has warned me not to lean back too easily, and I was challenged by your input to keep searching for how to do things better.

My other companions at the academic scenery: the colleagues both at the *Vakgroep Pedagogiek* and the *Vakgroep Sociale Agogiek*. Foremost Marc, *homo pedagogicus*, whose very personal and obstinate way of teaching and challenging both us and the students was a lot more than a continuous appeal to remain critical: for me and many others, it was the utmost praxis of what it may mean to be a *pedagoog*—beyond theory. A special thanks goes to the pre-eminent witnesses of my writing work, who daily suffered my sighs, struggles, frustrations, and other emotions alike from very nearby: Lieselot, Dries, Tiny, Ine, Eline, Katrien, and all the other job mates. Patrick and Tina, for being a listening sponge and for all your practical support. My colleagues at the *Departament d'Antropologia* at the UAB in Barcelona: Ábel, Silvia, Patrícia, Stefano, Cris, Anna, Alex, Laia and Naila for welcoming me so hospitably and warm-heartedly in their lives in and outside university.

My great examples of what it means to be unselfishly engaged with those in need, and

in particular with Roma in Ghent. You are too many to call by name here, but especially (and not particularly in this order) the people of De Tinten, Opre Roma, Scholenoverleg Roma en Onderwijs, Werkgroep Vluchtelingen, Gastvrij Gent, Hand in Hand, Elk kind telt, De Sloep, KRAS, and elsewhere, as well as the invisible helping hands who personally engage with people and families besides these organisations.

Two of them in particular, I would like to call by name. Ingrid, you are a *brugfiguur* in every sense of the word that far exceeds your professional engagement. Over these years I have learned so much of you, but even more I have admired you for your true commitment and unremitting energy. Lies, although not being officially recognised as such, you are without a doubt the first *brugfiguur* in secondary education. But apart from that, your combative efforts to sensitise and wake up politicians and policymakers as well as other citizens add significantly to the personal engagement of many, including yourself.

Those who have previously struggled with the ones in precarious conditions, and now dedicate so much of their efforts to help those who are worse off: Martin, Helena, Bekim, Tibor, Janetta, Imer and many others who make a big difference. Mostafa, your inexhaustible humour and positivism is infectious and always brings a light in situations where it seems to have gone out for long.

The ones who were willing to collaborate in my research project, and besides that in their turn take on a lot of work to make this world a better place: the people working at 't Klimrek, De Mozaïek, De Toverberg, Brugfigurenproject, Minderhedenforum, Kruispunt Integratie-Migratie, Intercultureel Netwerk Gent, Odicé, Straathoekwerk, Integratiedienst Stad Gent, CAW Artevelde, OCMW Gent and many other places I fear to have forgotten. Pauwel, with whom I collaborated for part of the empirical research and who was very suddenly and much too soon taken away from us.

The irregular migrants, Roma parents and youngsters who were willing to share their often painful, moving and very personal stories with me. These often touching confrontations were not only insightful, but foremost inspired my view on 'how to go on'. It is by the grace of their openness that I was able to take 'what matters to them' into account.

My friends and beloved ones, who were there to motivate me and at least as important: to distract me, cheer me up and help me to relax whenever necessary. Each of you played a unique role hard to describe here: Tim and Kathleen, Fré, Lynn, Philippe, Thomas, An, and many others. The presence of each of you during these years made a big difference to keep going on. Jon and Katleen, my bro and new-born sister: always-present helping hands, food and cocktail suppliers, first aid in case of burglaries, relaxers, and so much more. Your comforting love made a home for me at many points in time.

Didier, my most prominent and faithful *companion de route*. Your patience must be never-ending. Our everlasting conversations and discussions—including my often

heated emotions—on our research, on life in and outside academia and so much more are countless. You were and remain a patient listener, a mirror when necessary, a companion seeking both for answers as well as for the right questions and a front-rank supporter. But most of all, you are a friend that has always been there. I don't know how to thank you for your omnipresent proximity.

Last but not least, my parents. Greetje and Henri, mamsie and paps, you were my guides long before this PhD got started. Each of you fulfilled so many roles: as a caring and loving parent, as a conversation partner, but most of all as a pre-eminent example of how to live life. You initiated me in being sensitive and responsive to those in need. I modestly hope to be able to follow in these footsteps.

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Introduction

General introduction

Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the meaning of the right to education. Although this basic right is warranted through various human rights treaties, interpretations may vary a lot (Reynaert, 2012) and it is only in the practices shaping this right that it can make sense and become meaningful. In this research, the Roma in Ghent are taken as a case that stretches the meaning of this right to its limits. Policies and practices are critically appraised and an educational stance toward this right is developed throughout the study. But before arriving at any conclusions, this introduction successively outlines the central point of interest (the right to education); clarifies the research questions; throws light on the theoretical position and the related conceptual framework; situates the focus on the case of the Roma; elucidates the applied methodology; and offers an overview of the following chapters in relation to the questions at stake.

1.   The right to education: From definition to practice

At least in principle, the right to education is warranted for all children in Western European countries. To the inhabitants of these countries, the provision of education to all may seem a rather self-evident achievement. Most human rights treaties, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (further UDHR; United Nations General Assembly, 1948), the European Convention on Human Rights (further ECHR; Council of Europe, 1950) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (further UNCRC; United Nations General Assembly, 1989), indeed deliver extensive and explicit provisions on this right:

> (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. (UDHR, Article 26)

> No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. (ECHR, Article 2)

> States Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: 1. Make primary education compulsory and available free to all; 2.

> Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need; 3. Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means; 4. Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children; 5. Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates. (UNCRC, Article 28)

The right to education as it is defined in each of these treaties, may be interpreted in various ways. First, this right refers to the formal conditions that should be fulfilled in order to participate in the educational system (de la Vega, 1994). But from an educational perspective, it is necessary to broaden that interpretation. Rather than focusing on legal regulations solely, what matters here is how human and children's rights treaties are translated and shaped into social practices. These are not unambiguous: not only may the legal framework vary over geographical and historical contexts, but also different settings may require distinct approaches and strategies. One might mistakenly assume that this lacking clarity only refers to the question *how* the right to education is best to be realised or implemented in a particular setting (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998). Rather, it also concerns the question *what* the right to education is, or better, how it can *make sense*. The presupposition of this view is that the right to education is to be realised *for every individual child*, which implies that it cannot have a fixed meaning. Individuals dispose of different 'frames of reference' which constitute the horizon against which things become meaningful. In order for the right to education to 'make sense', a connection between these 'frames of reference' and definitions in human rights treaties should be established. These policies and practices are not merely *implementations* of the right to education (with a supposed unequivocal meaning): they *constitute* this right and its particular meaning within a specific context. One way to investigate such practices would be to focus on the application of particular legal conditions (which are in themselves social practices or performative manifestations of the right to education) in specific cases. But other people—*in casu* law researchers—are far better placed to fulfil that task. Rather, this study focuses on educational policy and practices. Before clarifying in more detail how it does, some attention should first be paid to the target group of this research project.

2. Studying the shadow of society: A shifting focus from irregular migrants to Roma

2.1 The shadow of society

The presence of irregular migrants in Western European societies is accompanied by a number of social problems. The coincidence of their urgent humanitarian needs and a lack of recognition of them as citizens creates a political impasse for which no obvious way out is available. Ubiquitous social debates on this complex and ambiguous issue

only continue to gain importance and attention due to expanding globalisation. New migrations evoke new questions and result in adjusted views on the integration issue. The recent influx of Eastern European Roma to Flanders is an example. The 'somehow unique character of these populations and migration streams' repeatedly serves as a justification for a distinct policy (Belgian Federal Government, 2012; Bourgeois, 2010). Sometimes, it even disqualifies strategies and beliefs on integration that previously were widely accepted and taken for granted (for example, the revival of target group oriented approaches). Well-intended initiatives do not always appear to result in the desired outcomes and it seems difficult to get a hold of a society that is changing with an increasing speed.

Surprisingly though, the attention to both irregular migrants and Roma in scientific research is more limited than one might expect regarding the profound social challenges related to the growth of this phenomenon. It concerns groups of people whose position is strongly under discussion in a very politicised debate. As a consequence of these divergent opinions, whichever view one adheres to is subject to strong opposition. From a political perspective, there seems little to gain from a topic that is one-sidedly considered to be a problem for society rather than a source of opportunities unless one adheres to a hostile stance. It literally and metaphorically belongs to the grey zone of society (Devillé, 2008), in which hardly anybody (some NGOs being among the rare examples) has much interest in as far as it does not disturb the daily course of events in mainstream society. The explicit attention of policymakers for the recent influx of Roma into Western Europe is a confirmation rather than a counter argument for the latter. The largely expressed dissatisfaction of other citizens and social problems arising from their immigration is said to disturb the course of events in mainstream society and exactly this explains most of the attention paid to these groups.

Still, from a scientific perspective, there are additional explanatory reasons for the scarcity of research. One important reason is that migrations may very much fluctuate depending on the specific moment in time and the particular geographical context. For example, the problem of irregular migration in Europe strongly differs from the situation in the United States and the integration of Latinos in New York has little connection with the recently arrived Eastern European Roma in Flanders. The contingency of and differences between migration flows and the characteristics of particular groups often complicate comparison and impede the generalisation of conclusions. This brings along large methodological difficulties. The selection of a representative sample is often impossible, because what is representative today may not be so anymore tomorrow. But even if populations are more stable, representativeness may evoke other problems that cannot be overcome. Target groups like 'irregular migrants' are not identifiable or measurable. To a certain extent, the same counts for 'Roma' as in most countries no censuses based on ethnicity are available (McDonald & Negrin, 2010). And there are additional restrictions to comparing and generalising between contexts: laws and regulations may vary from one country to another and are regularly amended. This even has consequences for

the definability of target groups: one residing illegally in country A on the basis of a particular regulation, may be a legal resident in country B because of different legal stipulations.

2.2 Defining the target group of this study: From irregular migrants to Roma people

The preceding part of the introduction may be somewhat confusing to the reader. Whereas the title of this study refers to the case of Roma in Ghent, attention has so far been mainly drawn to irregular migrants. Evidently, these groups do not coincide. Whereas 'irregular migrants' refers to a legal condition (the absence of a legal residence status), 'Roma' refers to an ethnic or cultural group. Consequently, overlap between both may exist: Roma may be irregularly residing in a particular country. But evidently, not all irregular migrants are Roma nor are all Roma residing irregularly in their country of residence. With regard to Belgium, most Roma are intra-European migrants that have quite recently (mainly since the 2004 and 2007 enlargement of the European Union) arrived in the country. They should—at the least in legal terms—be distinguished from domestic groups such as the *Roms*, *Voyageurs* (Travellers), *Manoesjen* and *Sinti* (Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie, 2013) as well as from earlier immigrant groups who hold Belgian nationality. More recently arrived Roma have the same legal status as other intra-European migrants: during the first three months after arrival, they are considered to be tourists. After that, they can stay in the country in as far as they are self-supportive and do not need to rely on social services (which in practice mostly implies they should have found work). If that is not a case, they may receive a document ordering them to leave the country. Only in exceptional cases though (for example, when they incur debts or are involved in criminal activities), intra-European migrants are effectively forced to leave the country or evicted. Although many Roma residing in Belgium do not have a legal residence status in the strict sense of the word, they remain free to travel between the country of origin and European Union member states like Belgium. In principle, going back to their country for only one day suffices to come back as a tourist for another three months.

But this more nuanced clarification of existing overlap between irregular migrants and Roma does not elucidate nor explain the reference to both groups in this study. Underlying the shift within my research, are two evolutions in society. First of all, there was a shift in migration streams over the past few years into Flanders, a region of Belgium. Previously, most irregular migrants were immigrants originating from outside Europe (so-called *derdelanders*). These generally were unsuccessful asylum seekers who were asked to leave the country or who were lodging an appeal against previous decisions. However, after the 2004 and especially the 2007 enlargement of the European Union, the composition of the irregular migrant population changed rather drastically in a short time. An increasing number of intra-European migrants presented themselves in Flanders, and in Ghent in particular (CGKR, 2012; Reynebeau, 2011). Many of them were people of Roma origin, which is the case up to today (Philippeth

& Philips, 2010). This shift drastically altered the composition of 'irregular migrants' as a target group. When talking about irregular migrants, larger numbers of Roma had now become part of that population. Second, and more importantly, this factual change has to some extent moved the attention of policymakers. Whereas previously 'irregular migrants' were regarded as one of the most problematic migrant groups, the recent immigration of Roma stemming from Central and Eastern European countries has now become a new focal point of the migration and integration debate in Flanders (Belgian Federal Government, 2012; Bourgeois, 2010; Philippeth & Philips, 2010).

The previous shift is reflected in this research project, which initially focused upon irregular migrants but later zoomed in on the situation of Roma. Although to a certain extent it concerns similar populations, they are not looked upon and approached as such. As will become clear throughout the thesis, the 'Roma label' has now become the predominant conceptual glasses through which policy views these children. That tendency implies not only a change in the concepts applied to frame initiatives, but it reflects a profoundly altered way to define and approach the problems at stake. When focusing on 'irregular migrants', the lack of particular residence status lies at the basis of restricted rights and societal participation opportunities. It is the legal residence status which may possibly threaten the effectuation of the right to education. When focusing on 'Roma people', a different position is taken. Particular characteristics of this ethnic or cultural group are decisive to opt for a specific approach. For example, it may concern their socio-economic position, a present or historical state of exclusion or divergent cultural practices. What matters is that they are in some way or another considered to be 'different' from the mainstream population. Finally, the focus on irregular migrants and Roma is not only motivated on other grounds; as their concerns are distinct, they also result in different kinds of policies and interventions.

The shift in my own study is not merely an uncritical 'go with the flow' of altering policy discourses and interests in public debates. Quite the reverse, it reflects an interest *in this change of discourse*, as well as in *how target groups are defined and delineated*. The primary interest of this study is not in a particular target group; it concerns a critical appraisal of policies and practices aimed to contribute to the realisation of the right to education. That does not mean these 'target groups' are of no importance, nor that they are chosen randomly. They indeed can be conceived of as 'limit cases' where the realisation of the right to education is the most challenged. For that reason, the shift of focus from irregular migrants to Roma in these policies and practices had in some way or another to form part of my study: it reflects a turn in the view on how the right to education is to be realised. It is present in the study in two ways. First, it is reflected in the structure of the thesis, which chronologically reflects the course of events (*chapters one* and *six* being exceptions for reasons explained later on). A gradually shifting focus from irregular migrants to Roma is expressed over the chapters as it was in public discourse and policymaking. Second, explicit attention is paid to it both with this clarification and in the concluding chapter, where the way target groups are defined is further discussed. But before arriving at any conclusions, the next section will present the research questions.

3.   From problem to research questions

The presupposition of this study is that the right to education has no unequivocal meaning but that its particular meaning is always a situated one. It is produced in the social practices shaping this right within a particular context, and may consequently change over time and place. These social practices as well as policies will be the research subject of the study. More in particular, attention will be drawn to the way various social practices relate to one another and possible tensions between these. Evidently, it involves the practices children are initiated into within our educational system. It is unclear how these relate to the practices with which Roma children are familiar in their own homes. Relevant policies and initiatives with regard to these practices are also taken into account. The characterisation of the mutual relationship between these domains leads to the central research question:

> *How do the social practices children are initiated into within our educational system relate to the social practices of Roma, and what are the implications of the latter for the meaning of the right to education and the way it is conceived of in policy?*

In order to answer this question, three sets of underlying questions need to be answered:

- How is the *policy* directed at realising the right to education conceived of?
  - How does the rights-discourse relate to other policy discourses aiming to contribute to educational justice (e.g. equal educational opportunities)?
  - How do these policies direct themselves towards the people involved and how are target groups defined?
  - Which existing gaps and contradictions can be found in present policies?
- What do the *social practices of Roma* look like, with particular attention to the meaning they ascribe to education and schooling?
  - What in particular characterises the social practices of Roma?
  - What are Roma's views on education and schooling?
- What do the *social practices aiming to realise the right to education* look like?
  - Which prevailing problems with regard to the realisation of the right to education can be discerned?
  - Which practices are developed to meet the problems at stake and to realise the right to education for these children?

The presupposition of these questions is that 'making sense' of the right to education requires that one is informed about the attribution of meanings, valuations and convictions of each of the involved actors. The latter should be mapped, weighted, discussed—in that sense the societal debate is unavoidably entered—to finally come to conclusions. A good (i.e., an 'honest', veracious and nuanced) insight into the beliefs and attributions of meaning of all actors is a necessary prerequisite to create the dialogue required for well-advised policy. Informed by the research therefore required, it is possible to analyse and question the current discourses with regard to

irregular migrants, Roma, and the right to education in the light of the question 'how to go on?'.

4. On the theoretical position: Education as an initiation into practices and 'knowing how to go on'

As follows from the research questions, this study engages with 'meaning'. It thus subscribes to a tradition of authors like Gadamer (2004), Ricoeur (1981), MacIntyre (1981), Taylor (1985), Winch (1958) and Wittgenstein (1953). Notwithstanding their different conceptual frameworks, these authors all agree upon the idea that human lives are to be understood in interpretive and/or narrative terms. In other words, they opt for the *Verstehen* side in the *Erklären-Verstehen* controversy initiated by Dilthey (1883). According to Winch,

> social science should engage itself with understanding human practices and not so much with predictions of social behavior, for the central concepts that belong to our understanding of social life are incompatible with the concepts central to the activity of scientific prediction [...] At the heart of this approach is the question of the nature and intelligibility of reality. In order to grasp how an understanding of reality is possible, it is necessary to show the central role which the concept of understanding plays in the activities which are characteristic of human societies. (Smeyers, 2006, pp. 466 and 468)

The '(social) practice' concept offers an interesting framework to discuss the different ways people 'understand' or 'make sense' of life (MacIntyre, 1981; Taylor, 1980; 1985; Winch, 1958; Wittgenstein, 1953). Wittgenstein for example deals with the question not only how concepts are developed, but as well how we 'apply' them. It is rather about doing than about being instructed, about 'tacit learning' (Polanyi, 1967) rather than explicit representation and explanation, about unarticulated processes of observation and imitation and participation. Building on this conceptual framework and focusing on the way practices are being learned, for example through imitation, doing, instruction, etc., Smeyers and Burbules (2006) develop the idea of understanding education as an initiation into practices. In this perspective, attention is given to the way practices are interwoven with the 'self' (identity), the relations and ways of interacting with each other, how others are involved in what we value most, and to a critical-reflexive attitude towards what is being initiated into.

This conceptual framework offers possibilities to describe, map and compare the practices with regard to education and the everyday life of Roma. Moreover, it is interesting from an educational point of view. Looking at education as an initiation into practices can contribute to a better understanding of the often complex problems connected with Roma within the context of schooling and education. The research interest in how the practices children are initiated into within the context of the school differ radically from the everyday living conditions of those children, may have implications for the discussion how to 'make sense' of the right to education. We

can achieve this by bringing together the different perspectives of the government, professionals, volunteer workers, and Roma.

Nevertheless, educational research can never limit itself to mere description or 'mapping' of an existing situation. Apart from making some continuing practice explicit, theories can extend, challenge, or even criticise our constitutive understandings (Taylor, 1985). Besides the insight that describing educational phenomena (as a way to express things as they are) is never neutral, it invokes the question how things should be. In addition to the descriptive analysis, the focus is on the ethical embeddedness, i.e., on a particular conception of the good. The question what is an 'appropriate' way to realise the right to education is developed here. The concern is not only which practices children *are* initiated into, but also which kind of practices they *should* be initiated into (Smeyers & Burbules, 2006). Apart from the quest to realise the right to education most effectively, the desired result aimed at is questioned. It is about 'what we are trying to attain' while realising the right to education for all, rather than 'how we are trying to achieve it'. The question why we—as a society or even in the name of 'humanity'—consider it so important to offer this right to all, refers to a critical perspective that needs to be brought to the forefront. What foremost matters then, is not 'knowledge of the case' but 'knowing how to go on'.

But the latter is not an either/or issue. Reasoned answers to the question 'how to go on?' require well-founded knowledge of the case. This dual task is expressed in the research question, which seeks both an insight into social practices and answers to the questions 'how to make sense of' and 'how to go on' regarding the right to education. Such duality is not coincidental: both of these aims are closely knit and entangled with each other. As a consequence, neither can a philosophical outlook on education be conceived of independently of an empirical reality. A particular theoretical position provides opportunities to show things (and by definition, it does not show other things). Conversely, particular situations may question the adequacy of theoretical frameworks to frame an empirical reality. For both foregoing reasons, the idea of looking at education as an initiation into practices seems an interesting perspective from which to inquire into the education of Roma. On the one hand, it offers opportunities to explore present differences and to recognise these, as it focuses on the particularity of social practices of people. On the other hand, the 'limit case of differentness' of the Roma puts pressure on the theoretical framework and puts its universal applicability to the test. 'Understanding' these differences is of utmost importance to answering the question 'how to go on?'.

The foregoing stance has important implications for the position of the researcher (discussed at large in *chapter six*). Inevitably, the researcher has to position himself and make sense of his particular involvement in the debate, including the advantages and dangers or restrictions. That voice is not the one of a neutral observer who merely wants to reconstruct or represent reality. It can introduce the voice of others in order to put something in a particular way and shed a light on 'what is possible' besides 'what is': exactly that may be a way to give shape to the 'educational' dimension of

an educational voice. The introduction of the voice of others should not be confused with a ventriloquist 'voice-giving' approach though. Such an outlook would adhere to an aiming-to-be-objective attempt to 'represent' a particular reality 'as it is'. Rather, these voices (that indeed should be implied and listened to) are in their turn subject to interpretation. They can only partially be introduced, and in a particular way. The quality criteria of the stance thus developed is not one of alleged objectivity or truthfulness (in terms of correspondence with a reality open to objectification), but rather of argumentative coherence and consistency as well as the extent to which it stands up as a way to 'go on'. The kinds of conclusions that are drawn from the analysis and arguments are the product of interpretations both of the research and of the place of research within educational theories, policies and practices (see *chapter one*).

5.   Toward a methodological framework: An explorative fieldwork study

The elucidation of the applied methodology can be subdivided in two parts. First, something must be said about the explorative character of the study, which may at first sight appear to be at odds with the choice for a case study. Second, the methodological framework of the empirical part of the study will be described.

5.1   An explorative case study?

As a profound and comprehensive 'understanding of what is going on' is the aimed of this investigation, a case study seems to offer an adequate approach. Whereas research approaches seeking for 'universal laws' (that is, general propositions that have a universal character) focus on commonalities between cases, case studies draw attention to the richness of the situations studied and aim to provide a detailed or 'thick' picture of a situation or series of events (Bridges, 2010). This brings along a comprehensiveness that is required to take the holistic complexity of situations into account. As Smeyers (2008) argues: "It seems that in educational contexts it is not so much factors or elements that have to be studied as such, but the complex relationships between them. Here the presence or absence of something may change the whole picture and, consequently, the conclusions that can be drawn from a particular setting." (p. 79). As this study aims at deeper understanding of the situations, a comprehensive outlook that draws attention to particularities and situational complexities seems indispensable. But if the primary aim of social research becomes 'interpretation in context' rather than 'generalisation' (Cronbach, 1975), does that imply that the relevance of such research is restricted to the strictly local? Mejía (2010) wonders what then would be the point of doing research? Without deciding on the discussion whether what is offered by case studies is some form of generalisation or not, it must indeed at least to some extent be 'recognisable in new and foreign contexts' (Stake, 1980) and transgress the strictly local. Bridges (2010) responds to the question of how a single case can legitimately

inform educational practice or policy and explores three approaches to do so: (i) the single case as a source of conjecture and refutation; (ii) relating the particular to the particular; and (iii) the single case as an extension of experience and as a contribution to practical wisdom.[1]

This study wants to take up the challenge to inform policy and practice by each of these three approaches, which brings me to its explorative character. At first sight, the adjective 'explorative' seems to be at odds with a case study that aims to develop in-depth knowledge. The explorative character of the study is first and foremost prompted by the lack of academic research on the situation of Roma in Flanders to build upon. Some studies are available on Travellers and other like groups (*Woonwagenbewoners*, *Roms*, *Voyageurs* and *Manoesjen*), like those of Deraeck (2001) and Eykens (2006). But these hardly have anything to do with the more recently immigrated Eastern and Central European Roma. The recent character of these migrations is probably the main reason why little research is available for the moment. Only since 2009 have some organisations in the field and academics attempted to come towards this need and started to conduct small-scale research (Decoodt & De Reu, 2009; Geurts, 2010; Geurts, Van den Daele & Naegels, 2010; OCMW Heusden Zolder, 2012; Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2012; Vlaams Minderhedencentrum, 2010). Additionally, the increasing pressure from European authorities on member states of the European Union to develop their own policies prompted the government to commission two limited explorative studies on the current state of affairs of Roma in Flanders over various life domains no earlier than in 2012 (Touquet & Wets, 2013; Wauters, Clycq & Timmerman, 2012). Second, the research question implies more positive motivations for an explorative approach. In order to investigate the right to education, reference is made to social practices that are not restricted to what is happening *within* schools. Understanding the way the right to education is realised presumes an insight into how it is embedded in a broader context. 'Broader context' has multiple meanings. It may refer to the meaning of this right in

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1 First, the idea of the single case as a source of conjecture and refutation builds upon Popper's framing of science in these terms (Popper, 1963). Bridges points at the fact that "it is the refutation side of Popper's twin concept that tends to get more attention, but conjecture is at least as important, and it would be part of my argument that a well-described or narrated single case […] provides a fertile source for such conjecture" (p. 88). Second, the particular can be related to the particular. Although some would call this a form of generalisation (see for example naturalistic generalisation, Stake, 1980), Bridges rather refers to 'forging analogies' as "a way of expressing the processes which are involved in coming to understand one situation through an understanding of another" (p. 89). This relates to what Mejía (2010) calls 'direct case-to-case transfer', whereby "knowledge transfer from the research situation to new ones can occur in a direct way, instead of by means of formal propositional generalisations. The transfer would come about when a practitioner finds elements in the situation researched that trigger new ways of understanding her own particular situation" (p. 94). Third, the case may offer a vicarious experience and as such contribute to practical wisdom or *phronesis*. Bridges argues with Adelman, Kemmis and Jenkins (1980) that "case study research offers a surrogate experience and invites the reader to underwrite the account, by appealing to his tacit knowledge of human situations. The truths contained in a successful case study report, like those in literature, are 'guaranteed' by 'the stock of recognition'" (p. 143). Bridges (2010) continues that "in a sense, the argument rests on a theory about how practitioners and policymakers learn (come to extend their understanding) rather more than an epistemological theory about what authority can be claimed for what they learn" and that a "particular pedagogy is attached to the use of case study 'which teaches by example rather than precept' (Adelman *et al.*, 1980, p. 142)" (p. 90).

the context of other rights and a broader human rights or legal framework; to how this right is embedded not only within education as a social institution or a policy area, but as well to how it is shaped over various domains and in other places; to how it relates to and forms part of a broader integration process; etc. This study draws particular interest to this 'contextual embeddedness' and 'situatedness', which shapes the horizon that renders the right to education meaningful: it is decisive as to what extent it makes sense to the people involved. Consequently, the in-depth character of the case study does not lie in the focus on a very limited and strictly demarcated research context (which could for example be the case when investigating pedagogical practices within one or two schools through fieldwork during an extensive period of time) but rather in the way 'interpretation' is shaped: it concerns the exploration of a broad context to reach in-depth understanding of larger complex, interrelated societal processes.

5.2   The empirical research framework: Document analysis, interviews and fieldwork

In what follows, an account for the chosen location for the study is provided and the use of the applied methods is further clarified. The city of Ghent was identified as an appropriate geographical area to carry out the study for various reasons. First, Ghent has a pre-eminent position with regard to the recent intra-European migrations. It seems to be an important attraction pole for immigrant Roma, being the municipality with the largest Roma population in Flanders when Brussels is not taken into account (Flemish Government, 2012). Moreover, it is at the heart of the public debate on Roma in Flanders. Many news reports focus on the Ghent situation and this city is a rare example in Western Europe of having developed a local policy towards these people (Philippeth & Philips, 2010). Besides these 'structural' reasons adding to the 'richness' of this city as a research context, as researcher I have particular motives to choose Ghent. Previous voluntary work has provided the researcher with a preliminary insight into existing initiatives and familiarity with the larger history of Roma in the city. This 'embeddedness' offered significant advantages of access, a position extensively dealt with in chapter six. Let me now turn to the framework of the empirical part of the study and to how policies and social practices were investigated and 'mapped'.

Relevant policy documents at various levels (the city of Ghent; the Flemish government; the federal Belgian government; and European authorities) were investigated. Rather than a systematic textual analysis and comparison of policies, it concerns an extensive literature study in which relevant documents were processed in various articles to frame discussions, to offer interpretative frameworks for understanding practices and/or to be confronted with the latter. The empirical research consisted of both interviews and extensive fieldwork. In total, 62 relevant stakeholders were questioned in semi-structured interviews. These were irregular migrant and Roma parents and youngsters; school principals, teachers and other school workers; social workers; volunteer workers; and policy officials. Additionally, one focus group with employees of the OCMW (Public Centre of Social Welfare) was carried out, as these respondents preferred an in-group

interview. First, three test interviews were taken from irregular migrant parents in order to optimise and complete the list of questions and the interview scheme (cf. questionnaires for Roma, school actors and welfare actors in attachment). Respondents were selected with snowball sampling. For the professionals and volunteers, this strategy appeared adequate to find people working with Roma in relation to education over multiple organisations and within different policy domains. The search for more respondents was stopped when a large degree of saturation and repetitiveness was observed and additional interviews did not provide a lot of additional information anymore. Access to irregular migrants and Roma people was gained through various paths: a charity organisation distributing food to irregular migrants, a Roma socio-cultural organisation, and professional and volunteering trustees of Roma families. In some cases, these confidential persons were present when the interview was conducted to set people's minds at rest. In the communication with the families, language differences were a major impediment. Some of these interviews were conducted in Dutch, and in case this was not possible, an informal interpreter was called in. No formal interpreters were used for budgetary reasons. Moreover, no interpreters are available for the Romani language, which was the mother tongue of most Roma respondents. Additionally, and as the fieldwork showed, Roma are often reluctant to speak the official language of their countries of origin even when they know it. In general, no rewards were provided to the respondents for the interviews; only the informal interpreters were paid 10 euros for each interview. In case of a few families living in squats or without a home—and as this was usual in other occasions like home visits on behalf of the voluntary organisation—some coffee or food was given. A written informed consent was provided for the interviews with professionals and volunteers (see attachment). During the test interviews with irregular migrants and Roma though, this appeared to be a serious obstacle. Often, it was hard to explain the aim of the document and more problematically, people were reluctant to sign the paper because of association with (traumatising) interviews during asylum procedures, etc. Consequently, after the test interviews it was decided to obtain oral informed consent, explaining that the interviews would not be used for any goals other than the study, that no information would be passed to authorities and that all names would be anonymised. All interviews were audio recorded and literally transcribed afterwards. Their length varied from 17 minutes up to almost three hours. Generally, the interviews with irregular migrants and Roma were substantially shorter than the ones with professionals and volunteers. Interviews were analysed by repetitive reading and were manually coded into topics.

Concerning the fieldwork, many personal contacts that were made during my previous voluntary work proved to be useful. Starting from these, additional contacts were made with city services and schools, as well as with other professional and voluntary organisations. As for the interviews, a snowball approach allowed further development of a broad network of contacts. This finally offered an overview of the initiatives that have been carried out in various contexts. The criterion to include initiatives in the fieldwork was that, in some way or another, they aimed to contribute to the realisation of the right

to education of Roma children within the municipality of Ghent. The fieldwork consisted of diverse activities: participatory observation in a school and in various activities of other organisations; attendance at relevant meetings and consultations of numerous organisations; participation in steering committees and boards; volunteering in various initiatives etc. (for a complete overview, see attachment). Field notes were processed in a fieldwork reflection book, including relevant observations, emotions and personal reflections.

6. The rationale of the study and its constituent parts

This dissertation is divided into two major parts. First, chapters one to five provide more general reflections on the right to education with regard to irregular migrants and Roma. This part treats the research questions focusing upon the policies relevant to the right to education. In particular, *chapter two* relates the right to education to the meaning of equal educational opportunities. Underlying conceptions of justice are identified and the question whether equal opportunities offer a helpful conceptual tool to realise the right to education for all is dealt with. *Chapter three* deals with the way irregular migrants are approached in educational policymaking. A homogenising tendency that reduces the complexity of the situations seems to be at work in present practices. Using the case of Roma people, the chapter explores how group differences may matter for educational policy. *Chapter four* draws attention to the question what exactly we are aiming for when trying to realise the right to education. A traditional interpretation that merely focuses on access is broadened with some suggestions on how to make sense of the right to education differently. *Chapter five* examines the various ways Roma are framed as a problem both in public and political discourse. The inclusive discourse as it is currently conceived of is questioned, and a further radicalised form of inclusion is advocated to deal with social problems. This finally leads to a tentative alternative in terms of a right to self-identification. As is the case for the second half of the thesis, this first part is introduced by a reflective chapter written at the end of the investigation. *Chapter one* thus offers an account of how the problems at hand are dealt with and approached. It goes deeper into the theoretical framework and it 'gives sense' both to the research questions at stake and to how these are framed. As such, it hints at the major conclusions of the entire study and serves as a guide for the reader in order to understand and situate the following chapters. By means of an exploration of difference, it considers what the nature and limits of understanding Roma practices are. It is thereby argued that educational research is prompted to surpass 'what is the case' to 'what needs to be done', thus clarifying the project this study subscribes to.

The second part (*chapters six* to *ten*) presents the empirical research. Although intensive fieldwork was carried out, the thesis cannot be looked upon as a systematic ethnographic study. An apparent discrepancy between the intensity and volume of the fieldwork, on the one hand, and how it is reported, on the other, is mainly due to the particular position of the educational researcher in the field. That position is the focus

of *chapter six*. Although this chapter also concerns an *a posteriori* reflection, it sets the scene for what is to follow. It clarifies the mutual influence of various roles taken up by the researcher and draws attention to the situatedness of the latter in order to elucidate the kind of educational research applied in this study. As such, it guides the reader to the second part of the dissertation, as did chapter one to the first part. *Chapter seven* deals with a Roma 'insider' perspective. It confronts the experiences and self-perceptions of Roma parents and youngsters with constructed discourses in policy. It discusses what an insider perspective may add to the construction of policy and how the latter may gain meaningfulness in relation to (self) identification processes. *Chapter eight* focuses on the way problems concerning the education of Roma are defined. It distinguishes between the perspectives of various stakeholders and argues that an interactionist dialogical approach which seeks for mutual understanding may contribute to finding solutions for the problems at hand. *Chapter nine* moves the attention to possible solutions, and goes deeper into some present practices which shape the right to education for Roma children in the case of Ghent. It distinguishes some success factors and relates these to a rights-based approach to educational justice. *Chapter ten* is an excursus that goes deeper into the debate on the desirability of a social mix at school. The case of the Roma in Ghent schools is taken as a starting point to critically examine the potential added value of this social objective. Finally, in the last chapter, the overall conclusions of this study are clarified and further discussed.

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Chapter 1

On the nature and limits of understanding Roma 'practices'. Prompting educational research to surpass 'what is the case' to 'what needs to be done'. [1]

Abstract

Generally, Roma people are viewed as being very different from those in mainstream society. The aim of this article is twofold. First, it explores these differences and attempts to make sense of the social practices of the Roma. To achieve this, the theoretical framework of meaning and social practices provided by Wittgenstein, Winch and others is applied to this subculture. Secondly, this 'extreme case' stretches the theoretical framework to its limits, but it is argued that it is nevertheless possible to give expression to this far-reaching experience of difference. The Wittgensteinian notion of 'knowing how to go on' prompts educational research to surpass 'what is the case' and get to 'what needs to be done'. By means of empirical examples taken from research into the education of Roma children, we argue for the need to take this further step. Answers are provided as to 'how to go on' with regard to the case investigated, and the feasibilities and constraints of both the theoretical framework and educational research are explored.

It is the logic of our times,
No subject for immortal verse—
That we who lived by honest dreams
Defend the bad against the worse.
(C.D. Lewis, 1943)

1.1   Roma immigrants and education: Can we make sense of their culture and do they want to be part of ours?

The enlargement of the European Union with twelve new, Central and Eastern European countries in 2004 and 2007 led to a significant increase of Roma immigrants to Western Europe. Many of the new EU countries, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania include large Roma populations. Membership of the European Union enabled the free movement of inhabitants to other member states. Many Roma benefited from these new opportunities to seek a better life outside their home countries, and migrated to Western Europe, where they tend to settle in cities. Although their number and proportion should not be overestimated (OSCE, 2010), these migrations do not go unnoticed, and bring about heated public debates (one may for example recall the Roma evictions by French president Sarkozy in 2010 or the 2011 Dale Farm eviction in Essex, UK). News reports generally focus on the Roma's supposed inherent criminality or their poor living conditions, as these are disturbances or possible threats to the social order of the societies they joined. Roma are perceived as bringing along a number of societal problems and their integration into mainstream society does not go smoothly. Schools are also confronted with additional challenges: attendance by children who live in extreme poverty and who inhabit houses in a bad state and with a lack of hygiene. Figures indicate that retention and drop-out rates are high amongst Roma children, their educational achievement is generally low, and they do not easily join in with the school mentality. They often have limited or even no previous experience of schooling, and there are additional language problems. Last but not least, Roma are often said to be reluctant to participate in school and other social institutions, partly because they fear discrimination or being subject to violence, and so Roma schoolchildren often lack parental support in their schooling.

The difficulties that must be addressed go beyond practical issues. An underlying concern is how these challenges can be approached without being insensitive to people's culture or way of life. Neither unilateral assimilation nor segregation are regarded as valid perspectives from which to develop an educational approach. Within an assimilationist view, present differences are cancelled out and the pre-existing order is taken as fixed and something to which newcomers should adapt. Segregation s precludes the possibility of different groups living together, as differences, so it is claimed, are too large to overcome. Rather than living with each other, groups live next to each other.. An educational stance rejects each of these essentialising views

of 'difference', whether such differences are looked upon as undesirable (in the case of an assimilationist view) or as unalterable characteristics leading to insuperable incongruences (in the case of a segregationist view). An alternative proposal involves building on existing social practices, where the practices through which people shape their lives are taken as a starting place for seeking points of similarity in order to reach mutual understanding. Although there may be large differences between social practices, a large number of commonalities which can be built upon can generally be seen. A more nuanced and hopeful approach to addressing differences can therefore be developed.

Roma practices are not always easy to understand. At first sight at least, much of their behaviour may be interpreted as characterised by an unwillingness or reluctance to participate in mainstream society. Irregular school attendance is only one of the numerous examples where granted rights and opportunities are not fully taken up. It is dangerous, however, to jump to such conclusions. *From within our current interpretative framework*, this kind of behaviour may not seem transparent or intelligible, but perhaps our horizon falls short of offering an adequate interpretation. This experience of alterity should not be prematurely considered as absolute; the social practices of the Roma are not by definition completely impenetrable or unintelligible. Without denying the existence of commonalities nor wanting to overstress differences, it may be suggested that the Roma represent a *limit case*. This involves a group of people whose social practices often deviate considerably from those we are used to, including the explicit and implicit social norms and beliefs with which we are familiar. They force us to reflect more deeply upon the nature of beliefs, habits, customs and convictions which motivate both their and our way of being. The following two situations, which are taken from fieldwork conducted with recently immigrated Roma in a Western European city, exemplify this experience of being confronted with social practices which are hard to understand when they are somehow cut off from the day to day Western European interpretive frameworks:

> Tonight the local Roma organisation 'Opre Roma' is organising a benefit, the purpose of which is to collect money to support Roma families in precarious living circumstances in the city who are unable to pay their energy costs. Some of the volunteers working in this organisation are preparing the room for a meal (spaghetti) that will be served to the guests later. One of them, I., a non-Roma woman, is drawing up a pricelist for drinks. A discussion arises when M., the Romani chairman of the organisation, complains that Roma do not feel good about that. I. says: "What is wrong about making a pricelist? People will be given the opportunity to give a free donation for the spaghetti meal that will be served, so let us sell the drinks at democratic prices". M. argues: "The Roma are not like that, we do not fix prices like that, one cannot say how much people have to pay beforehand". And he goes on: "We will see when people get here, and then see who it is". His words remind me of a similar discussion about a band, which during the past few years has become quite well-known and is often asked to perform on stage in

various settings. When I asked one day for the fee for a live performance, the band members refused to answer. They explained that "the price depends on the person, of course" and "these decisions must be made at the moment." One of the band members added: "If we see that people have a lot of money, and we do not know them, we ask a lot of money but if it is for people we know then we can even do it for free. Or we ask them how much they want to offer and then we see."

We are driving to Răcășdia, a small village in the South-West of Rumania. 'We' includes two journalists, a Romani woman (D.) and myself. The two newspaper journalists took the initiative in organising this trip. They are making an in-depth report on a group of Rumanian Roma immigrants who arrived recently in Ghent, Belgium and want to visit these people's region of origin. They are accompanied by a local who can guide them around, as well as by myself to provide background information, and with whom the Roma in Ghent are to some extent familiar. It is silent in the back seat of the car, although I have made a lot of attempts to start a conversation with D. She does not seem to be very talkative. Her answers each time are brief, restricted to the absolutely necessary. But in the late afternoon, after a long drive, all of a sudden she asks me: "Why are all of you so interested in us, and why do you think our houses [i.e., self-built slums] are so special?" The question strikes me. Although I work often with Roma people, it is the first time in my life that a Roma person has posed me a question which is not about asking 'for something'. I am surprised and do not know how to interpret this. Is what she said casual or is she really interested? She makes me reflect upon our position. We are the ones who want to go to Rumania. We are curious about her living circumstances and personal history. We want to know more about the Roma. For her, I guess this trip is merely a job: she was paid by the journalists to join us. Perhaps she is taking advantage of the opportunity to see her children who stayed in Rumania and whom she has not seen for about three months now. Why am I paying so much attention to an apparently 'normal' question which cannot reasonably be regarded as shocking? Still, that probably describes my emotion: I am surprised, maybe indeed shocked, and certainly touched, the kind of feeling you have when things happen when you least expect them. I start to explain to her that I am doing research, and what this implies: that the situation of people should be investigated in order for policymakers to be well-informed and to be able to develop strategies to fight poverty, discrimination and social inequality. "One must know what situations are like in order to be able to do something" I add. But judging from her "oh" reaction, that all sounds too abstract. When I ask her whether my clarification explains some of the expressed interest, she shakes her head. I try to make the story more personal and tell her I had been doing voluntary work with Roma people before I started doing research, and that I was concerned about the living conditions of many of them, about the fact that they were excluded or that their rights were violated, in particular in case of the children who do not always get the same chances at school. But I am not sure whether my attempts were of any

help because she continued to ask me: "But why do you want to know this if you have a good life?"

Obviously, no generalizable conclusions can be drawn from these particular situations but they may not be insignificant, either. It goes without saying that similar reactions are to be found in other subcultures and may even be observed in people from the dominant culture. Yet the manifestation of such very different behaviour suggests to us the need for a theoretical position that can do justice to it. It is our belief that preceding experiences of alterity reveal something about the social practices of many Roma. There are of course other interpretations, referring for example to the often poor living conditions of Roma (cf. the 'culture of poverty'; see Lewis, 1959). In the first example, it could be argued that the event should remain accessible to all, and from that viewpoint, fixed prices put up a barrier which may exclude some. Concerning the second example, much of the 'usual' behaviour may be also be perceived as a consequence of poverty. The reduction of most communication undertaken by Roma to questions for material help will sound familiar to many field workers. Moreover, this woman's acceptance of her invitation to join the journalists seems to have been prompted by the financial reward. Although these arguments seem very convincing on the surface, they are in our view unsatisfactory. They offer only a partial interpretation of what is going on. In the first example, a negative interpretation, that of taking away barriers in order to meet the needs of less fortunate people, could be replaced by a more positive reading of the offered arguments. It could be that a different concept of justice sustains and motivates the way Roma see things. 'Fairness' is not a matter of equal treatment ('everyone should pay the same for obtaining the same goods'), but should take into account particular conditions ('one should contribute in accordance with what one has'). The second case urges us to reflect on our own values. The 'attention given to Roma' is not something these people ask for; rather, it happens to them. They 'simply' move to live somewhere and all of a sudden everybody seems interested in them: welfare professionals, voluntary workers, and all the media come to visit them in the squats they inhabit. To 'us' (researchers, paradigmatic for the Western mind-set), this fascination-with-what-is-happening-around-us, our curiosity, is something that comes naturally to us. It expresses a willingness to know and understand things, combined with a desire to control the world around us. But things *can* be otherwise. The apparent 'disinterest' of Roma, which is often referred to as problematic behavior, may in its turn be interpreted more positively: a kind of surrendering to fate, to trusting each other ('us', as in opposition to 'them', i.e., mainstream society) and the course of events. This is radically different from a worldview grounded in risk management (see Beck, 1992).

Rather than taking our tentative interpretations further and turning them into wild hypotheses, an appreciation of what is involved first requires the understanding of a number of fundamental issues. In the following section, a Wittgensteinian conceptual and epistemological framework is outlined in order to grasp the issues at stake. Key concepts such as 'meaning', '(social) practices' and the 'form of life' are clarified. Subsequently, a stance is developed about where the educational researcher finds

herself including what 'interpretation' amounts to. A further section focuses on the need to make a distinction between 'knowing the case' and 'knowing how to go on'. Finally, the paper returns to the social practices of Roma, and more particularly to the issue of schooling Roma immigrant children.

1.2   Meaning, practices, and the overall framework

Ludwig Wittgenstein discussed acting, speaking and doing in his *Philosophical Investigations* as well as in *On Certainty*. The concept of the 'form of life' indicates what he considers to be the bedrock of our 'language-games'. These unjustified and unjustifiable patterns of human activities can be seen as the complicated network of rules which constitute language and social life. The 'form of life' is 'given': it is 'language-and-the-world' and thus we cannot place ourselves outside it. Examples of this 'bedrock' include Moore's well known statements "I am a human being", or "There are physical objects", to which Wittgenstein refers in sections 4 and 35 of *On Certainty* (1969, henceforth *C*). Sentences saying that one has two hands, and that all human beings have parents (*C*, §§ 157 & 240) are similar. The 'certainty' of the 'form of life' is not a matter of knowledge itself but is *a priori*. These 'propositions' are unmoving foundations (*C*, § 403); exempt from doubt (*C*, § 341); they stand fast (*C*, §§ 151 & 235); and are absolutely solid (*C*, § 151). They 'ground' all activities and thus are wrongly expressed by the words 'I know' (see *C*, § 414). Our acting is embedded in a matrix of certainty that precedes our knowledge (the matrix of knowing-and-doubting and knowing-and-'making a mistake'). These ordinary certainties are the roads on which we walk without hesitation. They are not the only possible roads, and not necessarily the right ones (for example those which have worked in experience). But they are the roads on which we travel, and we have no reasons for leaving them: "I have no grounds for not trusting them. And I trust them" (*C*, § 600). For this reason the 'form of life' cannot be taken as basic grounds or the ultimate foundation for absolute objectivity or truth. What we call objective and true is determined by this 'boundary': "If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false" (*C*, § 205).

In discussing the paradigmatic notion of the language-game Wittgenstein writes: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements" (*Philosophical Investigations*, 1953—henceforth *PI*—*PI*, I, § 242). Only within a 'language-game' will we be able to justify a certain inference, a certain behaviour; within a 'language-game' we can speak of justification and lack of justification, of evidence and proof, of mistakes and groundless opinions, of good and bad reasoning, of correct and incorrect measurements: "What counts as an adequate test for a statement belongs to logic. It belongs to the description of the language-game" (*C*, § 82). And moreover, if we try to doubt everything, Wittgenstein argues, we would not get as far as doubting anything: "The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (*C*, § 115). Thus, within a system of thinking and acting there occur, up to a point, investigations and criticisms of the

reasons and justifications that are employed in that system. We bring this inquiry to an end when we come upon something that we regard as a satisfactory reason, and that we do so can be seen by our actions. The end, Wittgenstein says, "is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language game" (*C*, § 204). It is by our actions that we fix a boundary of the 'language-game'. This is the 'certainty' we are initiated into, and he insists upon the importance of the way the initiation proceeds, and on its relevance to establishing meaning: "…always ask yourself: How did we *learn* the meaning of this word ('good' for instance)? From what sort of examples? in what language-games? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings" (*PI*, I, § 77).

Peter Winch draws our attention to the fact that Wittgenstein's notion of agreement as a condition of being able to communicate does not presuppose that an agreement should be reached about *everything* if communication is to be possible at all. What seems to be important is to try to understand the position of the other party, including the difficulties that go with it. Winch writes: "There is no ground whatsoever *a priori* for expecting the emergence of some position free of difficulties which everyone would be able to accept. But that does not mean at all that there is no difference between someone who accepts and lives by a position with clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, of where it may lead him, of what the alternatives are, and someone who does not understand these things" (Winch, 1987, p. 189). This is closely linked to the meaning of 'following a rule'. One cannot indicate all the cases which possibly belong to the area of application of a certain rule by (the phrasing of) the rule itself. 'To follow a rule' means to be able to go on in a certain way. As Norman Malcolm puts it: "We go on all agreeing, following rules and applying words in new cases—without guidance. Other than past training, there is no explanation. It is an aspect of the form of life of human beings. It is our nature. To try to explain it is like trying to explain why dogs bark" (Malcolm, 1986, p. 181). It is important to recall that this 'going on' is quite obviously socially sanctioned.

Let us focus on the fact that Wittgenstein's 'theory' of meaning advocates neither a position of pure subjectivity nor one of pure objectivity. From the beginning, what could be called an element of risk is present in the way communication is conceived. Though every situation is in some sense new, the different meanings of a concept are linked through family resemblances. In order to be understood, any particular use may not be radically different from previous ones. However, the consistency of meaning Wittgenstein argues for is free of essentialism. It is within the *normal* context that the meaning of a concept is determined. Other people *and* I proceed in this way. There is no absolute point of reference, neither internal nor external, neither for them nor for me. The community of language speakers forms the warrant for the consistency of meaning. Analogously the meaning of an action can be decided from the 'third person perspective'. And in turn 'intention' finds its proper place in the context of action. What is crucial, as indicated already, is the social determination of meaning and understanding.

The meaning of a concept is not the result of what I intend, but is determined and carried by the community to which I belong. To understand a concept means to be able to paraphrase it and to act accordingly. In both meaning and understanding, the 'third person perspective' is predominant. Language is first of all the language of others. It determines the way that I can speak, the alternative is to be unintelligible.

According to Winch (1958) social science has to engage itself in understanding human practices. In suggesting this he draws from the later Wittgenstein such ideas as 'following a rule', 'human shared practices' and 'what it makes sense to say'. Invoking Wittgenstein, Winch draws attention to the fact that one cannot make a sharp distinction between 'the world' and 'the language in which we try to describe the world', and argues that it is therefore wrong to say that the problems of philosophy arise out of language rather than out of the world: "Because in discussing language philosophically we are in fact discussing what counts as belonging to the world. Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use. The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world" (Winch, 1958, p. 15). The relevance of conceptual enquiries into what it makes sense to say should therefore not be underestimated. In this vein he argues that "…the question of what constitutes social behaviour is a demand for an elucidation of the concept of social behaviour… it is a matter of tracing the implications of the concepts we use" (ibid., p. 18). Words are to be understood in terms of their use in the lives of those who deploy them. Having a language, and the notions that go along with that, such as meaning and intelligibility, are logically dependent for their sense on social interaction between people.

That "practice has to speak for itself" (*C,* § 139), points for him not only to the ways in which the unity of our concepts is formed; it also comprises the skills involved in *handling* the conceptualised phenomena, our pre-reflective *familiarity* with them, expressed in the sureness of our behaviour toward them, and the *judgmental power* exercised in applying or withholding a given concept on a particular occasion. These factors are all relevant to the establishment of knowledge, but they cannot themselves be fully and straightforwardly articulated by verbal means. In returning to the ordinary, Wittgenstein stresses the essential groundlessness of the social contexts in which assessments can be made and standards evoked.

Here *training* plays a crucial role in education, but this is importantly different from *conditioning*, in that the association is structured by a practice which for Wittgenstein is rule-governed, that is, normative: not the mere reinforced association of word and object, or behaviour, but an association that is effective in enabling the novice to realise her more basic desires by shaping her behaviour to conform to—or perhaps better, mimic—the activities licensed by practice or custom. Training is successful if it results in the initiated learner eventually becoming a skilled and thereby an autonomous practitioner, and thus performing within, and so adding to, the practice—perhaps even contributing to a further change in it. The structuring provided by a community or practice is a necessary support, both logically and physically, for the novice's actions. It is logically necessary because it provides a system of background beliefs, actions, and

competencies; this complex pattern is necessary for the token utterance or action to have significance. It is physically necessary because the very possibility of learning at all exists in the presence of exemplars and models—*even if* the outcome of the process is to question or modify them. Thus training provides the grounds for the development of the cognitive competencies constitutive of the mastery of language, for Wittgenstein, or for the mastery of any genuinely normative practice with a complex 'form of life'.

It should be noted here that we not only take over certain ways of judging the world, as we experience it, from earlier generations, but that, in this context, judging is also a way of acting. The child's coming to act according to these beliefs cannot be learned simply by rote. (see *C,* §144) This is why the practical aspect of rule-following cannot be taught on the basis of rules alone; it has to be picked up by examples and by training. As Wittgenstein says, we look at a model or template and learn 'to go on' in a similar way. But, as we have stressed, this is not to say that practices are forever fixed: they are always open to new developments. That these standards are embedded within socially constituted bedrock practices is the only view of norms that ends neither in mystery-mongering nor in a regression. According to Wittgenstein these practices are not deliberately chosen conventions, but are constituted by the harmonious 'blind' agreement, in words and activities, of a group of people over a period of time, which stands in the background. It is 'blind' only in the sense that it does not itself result from the self-conscious or explicit application of rules (see *PI,* I, § 219). Hence, he says, to the extent that we are following a rule we are doing so 'unquestioningly', but this does not mean that the act of following a rule brooks no originality or spontaneity: judgment always plays a role, even where there are limits on judgment. In Wittgenstein's account, people are neither unconscious automata 'blindly obeying' rules, nor utterly free agents, *sui generis*; the indispensability of an unquestioned background links the process of learning to the content of what is learned. In this process, regularities that create a space for going on in the same way are both reinforced *and* opened to potential question as they are acted out in actions and reactions shaped by our initial training. Practices are learned foremost by doing rather than by teaching. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein argues that these grounding meanings must always come down, at some point, to a recognition that people simply *do* accept this or that, just *do* agree about what actions count or do not count in following a certain procedure; they may not even be able to articulate how and why this is so. Here the limits of critical reflection are set by the fact that a good deal of practical know-how is *tacit*, learned not though explicit representation and explanation, but through unspoken processes of observation and emulation.

One may distinguish activities, games, practices and rituals. There are 'family resem-blances', to use a Wittgensteinian term, between these; there are cases in which it is not completely clear to which category a particular kind of human doing belongs (as there are possibly more intermediate cases one could distinguish). But they are all one or another kind of 'practice'. A way to think about 'practice' might involve emphasising (1) how they are learned—for instance through imitation, initiation, instruction and so

forth—and (2) how they are enacted. In both cases a person's *relation* to the practices in which they are engaged becomes crucial; how they are brought into them, and how they contribute to them. Practice, viewed in relation to human actors, cannot simply be seen in intrinsic terms. It is about the interrelationship between the nature of an activity and how people think about and act within its practice. For example, practices may be learned, or enacted, in an unreflective, ritualistic way; or as a strategy of conforming; or they may be occupied or enacted ironically; they may be learned, or enacted, as a way of transforming them, or as a way of portraying them as objects of reflection and questioning; or they may be learned, or enacted, as part of a process of perfecting them, excelling at them. To be sure, the particular type of practice has features that tend to promote one or another way of learning or enacting them; there is, as we have said, a *relationship* here—but it is a reciprocal one. There are practices that are in essence conservative (such as folklore activities), and others that are directed at change (such as the conventions of debate over the introduction of a new law); there are more rigid (the performance of a classic piece of medieval music) and more flexible practices (the work of an artist such as Andy Warhol); some practices are more critical, while others do not tolerate any kind of questioning. A further dimension of the relationships that a practice encourages or discourages through different ways of learning or enacting it, is how it is intertwined with our *self* and sense of *identity*, on the one hand, and our *relations* and ways of *interacting* with other people, on the other hand. Here the way we identify with particular practices, and to what extent, is at stake.

For Charles Taylor, social theory rarely consists simply of making some continuing practice explicit. The stronger motive is the sense that our implicit understanding of a practice is in some crucial way inadequate or even wrong. Theories can extend, challenge, or even criticise our constitutive understandings. Theory makes a claim to tell us what is really going on, to show us the real, hitherto unidentified course of events. Of practices he says,

> [those] which make up a society require certain self-descriptions on the part of the participants. These self-descriptions can be called constitutive. And the understanding formulated in these can be called pre-theoretical, not in the sense that it is necessarily uninfluenced by theory, but in that it does not rely on theory. There may be no systematic formulation of the norms, and the conception of man and society which underlies them. The understanding is implicit in our ability to apply the appropriate descriptions to particular situations and actions. (Taylor, 1985, vol. 2, p. 93)

The validation of a social theory is therefore, for Taylor, not how well the theory describes practices as a range of independent entities, but rather a judgment of how practices fare when informed by the theory. The self-descriptions that he considers constitutive presuppose that a human being understands herself against a background of what he calls 'strong evaluations'. Here the desirable is not only defined by what is desired (plus a calculation of consequences) but by a qualitative characterisation of desires as higher and lower, noble and base (see Taylor, 1985, vol. 1, p. 23).

Clearly, interpretation is central to all kinds of educational research and enters into every stage of the process in different ways. The selection of the focus of enquiry depends on a certain reading, an interpretation, of an arena of policy and practice, and of the existing research and other literature, as well as the interests of the researcher. The selection of a mode or method of enquiry, of the location of the research, of participants and of the forms of data or other resources to be assembled depends on an understanding, an interpretation, of the nature of the matter to be investigated and of the evidence and illumination that different forms of enquiry will yield. Some of the data assembled will itself be constituted by participant interpretations of events and experience. Then, and perhaps more obviously, there is all the business of organising data, selecting what will be reported and trying to make sense of it in some form of analysis or argument. Interpretative frameworks are thus (1) brought to a piece of research; (2) embodied in the data we collect through research (3) and generated out of interaction between the theoretical frameworks that the researcher brings to the research and all that they encounter through the research process. Finally, the kinds of conclusions that are drawn from the analysis and argument are themselves the product of interpretations not only of the research but of the place of research within educational theories, policies and practices.

1.3   'Knowing what is the case' and 'knowing how to go on'

In educational research what is at stake is the understanding of a particular reality brought to the fore by language: this presupposes that this reality can be understood and moreover that its intelligibility can at least partially be made explicit. The core of the conception of language, which marks Wittgenstein's later work, is that in the context of social practices any attempt to say something is always partial, is always one-sided. No way of speaking, no doctrine whatsoever can control cultural practices and thus liberate us from the restlessness and uncertainty of human existence, of the search for meaning in our lives. He points to the fact that what we do can never be completely transparent, and that it is always characterised to some extent by arbitrariness. Thus it becomes clear that in what we say we bear witness to what we long for, but also to what we are not certain of, such as how we try to express ourselves or be coherent. In an analogous way, Stanley Cavell argues that we should not try to escape from the existential conditions in which we find ourselves, in order to look for false certainties, but urges us to be reborn continuously and thus to be mortal. In his book *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (1988), he maintains that, among other things, words in philosophy may create a distance. They allow us to start over and over again and thus generate an alliance with others who are also focused on this process. Words may help us escape, but at the same time they create a home. Thus philosophy is engaged in a certain revision of the way one sees particular things and the philosopher may identify herself as someone who '*reviews her vision*', or else '*revises her reviews*', thereby reflecting on what she is conscious of.

The conceptualisation of social (and political) problems therefore demands an ever-renewed rethinking of reality using similar instruments. To think again can only mean to think from a different point of view about what one is trying to understand (and perhaps change). From this philosophical framework it will be clear that an investigation of what exists is only a starting-point. What is at stake shifts to what is at stake for someone (again, for the other and for myself), where the other is recognised in their personal struggle as an emotional being, thus partaking in unstructured justice. Rigid approaches to social (and political) problems will have to be complemented by a more flexible ethical sensibility. Here it is no longer possible to ignore the recognition of emotions as an essential component of a comprehensive social rationality (see Nussbaum, 1997). To see the other is to look for the way in which she expresses herself, gives shape to herself in the struggle with herself. But to touch the other is also to confront the other with one's own struggle by means of the evocative instruments that are at our disposal. That we inevitably 'violate' the other is clear enough. After all, the understanding of the other is at the same time a negation and a constitutive affirmation. We approach the other as an intentional 'object', which we crave to understand. We want to read the story of the other, too often without recognising the illegibility of her story. This does not necessarily imply that we would not be able to understand her or do not want to do justice to her. The reading of the story of the other is however at the same time a reading which is bound up with our own stories. We are called upon to surrender to the intersection of this reading with its reader, and to what this does to us.

One can distinguish between understanding in terms of knowledge, and understanding that directs us towards—to remain in the Wittgensteinian frame of reference—'knowing how to go on'. The ethnographer may or may not know this; the person who is part of a practice is by definition someone who knows how to go on (and obviously, she does go on in a particular way); denying this makes the concept of 'knowing how to go on' empty, evaporating into thin air. Now, if that is the case, relying on the concept of practice in order to claim the superiority of understanding (understood as 'knowledge of') misses the point completely of course – we should keep in mind Wittgenstein's insight that "Interpretations themselves do not determine meaning" (*PI,* I, § 198) and that " . . . 'obeying a rule' is a practice" (ibid., I, § 202). This confusion is the result of there being two concepts of understanding (i.e. knowledge of vs. knowing how to go on). For all kinds of reasons, the ethnographer may not be willing to go on in a particular way (dictated by a practice). In a sense one could say she does not understand it, but it would be clearer to argue that though she may well understand it, she chooses not to take this particular route since route does not make sense for her. This brings us to the issue of entitlement, more generally, to what it means 'to know how to go on'. In the absence of fixed rules which determine what and what does not count as belonging to a practice, it is only they who are on the inside who are entitled to legislate about the application of a rule, in other words, on the basis of belonging to a particular group. This points towards 'being acknowledged' as being entitled and thus to other notions such as conversion and initiation which make sense along these lines. Though knowledge

may necessarily be the beginning, it cannot leave us to indulge ourselves in the feeling of complacency that this is all we, as researchers and philosophers of education, need to acquire or achieve. Indeed, it pushes us in the direction of making it our business to know how to go on.

1.4 Addressing the education of the children of Roma immigrants

As indicated at the beginning of this paper, the education of Roma immigrant children presents us with a number of problems. Rather than taking a stance of practical problem-solving (which would merely be an unreflective way of 'going on') or focusing on the reconstruction of knowledge of 'what is the case' ('knowing that'), the interpretive framework outlined above points at a perspective that aims to develop 'knowing how to go on'. This first of all requires that some form of 'understanding' of Roma social practices is sought, and secondly, that these should be related to the social practices children are initiated into within the educational system, as well as to the way educational policy is conceived. The central research question that must be addressed in this context thus focuses on the mutual relationship between the social practices of Roma immigrant children and the social practices these children are initiated into in the educational system. This requires that further attention is paid to the way these children are looked upon in policy. To answer these questions, ethnographic research and extensive interviews with various stakeholders (policymakers, teachers, principals and other school workers, social workers as well as Roma parents and children) were conducted (see Hemelsoet, 2013a). A clarification of the particular hindrances to participation in schooling was part of that investigation, but at its very heart was an interest in exploring 'difference'. This has important consequences for the way problems are even defined. Different actors have different perspectives, produce distinct discourses, and acknowledge distinct problems, in other words experience different meanings when confronted by the same event, and are differently motivated to act. While for policymakers irregular school participation, truancy, school drop-outs, segregation and the overrepresentation of Roma children in special education are of the highest importance, schools see themselves confronted with welfare problems when these children enter schooling children lacking school skills and attitudes as well as language and communication problems. Beyond the obvious practical barriers resulting from difficult living circumstances (related to both poverty and residence status), Roma people themselves mention a lack of adequate knowledge and information (they are not familiar with the school or the educational system in general), they further say they fear and distrust social institutions (which is a reason to keep children at home: they want to decide and control how their children are being educated themselves), and they also talk about a gap between the family and school culture. The curriculum is not adapted to their way of life: what they learn is not always considered to be practical, there are different habits (with regard to hygiene, mixing boys and girls for activities,

etc.) and sometimes they say they hope and aspire for different ideals. Clearly, to some extent, the perspectives of different stakeholders refer to the same underlying problems. Yet the significance they each attach to these problems seems to vary greatly. Truancy for example, is self-evidently interpreted by policymakers in terms of reluctance and disinterest in the school. For parents or children however, this may be motivated by being unfamiliar with the school, shame, distrust, fear of being discriminated against, a generalisation of anger towards other social institutions, or disagreement with the educational project of the school.

To consider the question 'How different are the Roma, really?' we will first offer some more general conclusions from our own inquiry and relate these to the findings of other research reports. Gómez Alonso and Vargas (2003) found that Romani children and their parents and families are motivated to learn and to go to school, which is affirmed by our study. A general willingness to have their children go to school was found among parents; youngsters in their turn had a surprisingly clear vision of their dreams in life, as well as how school could contribute to the realisation of these. This does not mean that no difference is experienced between the home and the school culture, on the contrary; this is consistent with the ethnographic study by Levinson and Sparkes (2005) which describes the dissonance between a Roma culture characterised by relative freedom and fluidity, and a non-Roma school culture which is more restrictive. In our own research, both parents and school workers refer to a similar gap. To a large extent, this is due to poor living conditions; as previously mentioned, poor people, in general, often refer to a gap between their home culture and social institutions such as a school. Teachers additionally describe disciplinary and attitudinal problems as 'typical' for children of the Roma. Moreover, Roma parents refer to their lack of knowledge and information about the way schools function, and to a fear and distrust of social institutions. They talk about the 'gadje' (the non-Roma) as opposed to themselves the 'Roma'. Though they speak of 'us' and 'them' which signifies their identity, it is not clear to what this comes down to, i.e., what exactly is different in their point of view. We think that some of it could be characterised as a kind of resignation or *Gelassenheit*. With regard to school participation, for example, although most parents affirm the importance of going to school, they are not very active in sending their children, encouraging them or punishing them if they refuse to go. Though lip-service is paid in terms of the expression of the desirability of attending school, their efforts do not seem to match. Such apparent 'disinterest' or 'passivity' should not too easily be interpreted as reluctance. It is, instead, the expression of a feeling that a person can't control her usefulness whatever she does, that she must always hope for the best, or trust that in the end it will be alright. Is this the result of a long history of exclusion, powerlessness and therefore of an intuition that despite their efforts, much will be in vain as they are in the hands of those who are in power, adding to a feeling of inferiority? Roma live foremost in the here and now and generally need to see the urgency and actual relevance of things in order to take action. Schooling, is a long-term project which lacks this feeling of urgency. From that perspective, children waking up late may be as much

a legitimate reason for missing school as being ill. The passivity we see is not necessarily motivated by laziness, although it may seem so. Things that are considered immediately relevant may prompt immediate action. An example of something that resonates with what we observed in a school context is the manner in which the last part of pregnancy is sometimes dealt. It is not exceptional that parents take few preparatory measures for the birth of their child; so that, at the moment of birth, there is no bed for the baby, nor clothes or diapers, etc. What they expect is that, as soon as the baby is born, everybody will swing into action, and all family members will hasten to assist with what must be done. They are not just *awaiting* what could happen (which would result in complete passivity), but they are rather *accepting* or *trusting* (confident in what tomorrow will bring; that the issues they will be confronted with, will be resolved).

We will return to this but will consider first another set of preconceptions about policies concerning Roma. Most (European) policy initiatives involving the Roma are directed at their inclusion by means of strategies which combine *mainstreaming* and *targeting* (see European Commission, 2009; 2011). Although the aim is inclusion, policies also seem to affirm a kind of particularisation, considering Roma as a distinct group. These policies acknowledge to some extent that Roma are different and take this as a starting point for further action, for example, that they are excluded or discriminated in their home country. Insofar as both local authorities and Roma themselves apply for European funds, they are pushed towards initiatives focusing on Roma as a target group, as this is an explicit criterion for funding. Such policies aim to break the opposition between non-Roma and Roma, between us and them—they are directed towards social inclusion. But paradoxically, at least initially, they seem to add to this division. As such, they run the risk of further enlarging social discrepancies and oppositions rather than supporting social inclusion. Finally, focussing on good practice, the importance of taking a comprehensive life-world oriented approach and personal commitment is stressed (Hemelsoet, 2013b). Such a view takes the life world of families as a starting point for further action in which the development of a trusting relationship often makes a difference. Although concepts such as trust, commitment and involvement may sound vague and hard to grasp, professionals who cross the boundaries of what is professionally expected from them and who develop an engaged relationship with families, make headway in getting these families involved in the schooling of their children. For example, some teachers make home visits with families after working time and help them with other issues such as administration. These extra efforts express an engagement which is helpful in gaining trust, and consequently strengthens a mutual interest and involvement.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to offer a conclusive answer to the question of what exactly makes the Roma so different and what distinctive features can be identified. It seems that much, however, can be explained in terms of trust on their behalf, which is lacking in a more radical sense than in other subgroups. While the Roma seem to rely on fortune, and their social practices are structured by 'the here and now' and reliance on other Roma, non-Roma (here referred to as the prototypical Western European citizen)

express a need for control of the reality that surrounds them; to some extent the Roma have not given up on the idea that things can change, they live the American dream, i.e., they see Western Europe as 'the promised land'; their approach is positive (and thus there is room for change). It is not just about running away from exclusion and because of discrimination, yet, perhaps their experience is less characterised by a feeling they can have a lot of influence. The discourse of Western Europe is characterised by a desire for knowledge, by science, structure and the deployment of all kinds of means to avoid risks and consequently people will *plan* what to do and weigh all available options beforehand. In Wittgensteinian terms, the Roma and people from Western Europe play a different language-game; what is real for them is based on a different way of making sense of the inherited human condition. It would be too easy to say that they cannot understand us or the other way around. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, such a stance is problematic, and it is problematic in three ways. First, it is *incorrect*. Although they may have a different language-game, Roma do not have a different form of life. The reality they speak of and the language they use isn't radically different. Second, it is *dangerous*. A stance excluding the possibility of mutual understanding opens opportunities for justifying (more precisely rationalising) racism, as it antagonises the other. Finally, it is *not fruitful*. It leaves little room to answer the question of 'How to go on?', presupposing more than a peaceful coexistence. For both the Roma and for all other people, what will be required is a preparedness to appreciate each other's differences but at the same time to move on in an atmosphere of mutual respect towards living together and taking up joint responsibilities. Obviously, 'appreciating each other's differences' implies that we get to know each other, at least to some extent. In order to comprehend the social practices of Roma, it is crucial to understand their history. As is extensively documented, the history of the Roma people is mainly characterised by continuous social marginalisation (including legally embedded slavery until the late 19th century), exclusion and discrimination (see Fraser, 1992; Liégois, 2007; Lucassen *et al.*, 1998). This is not only something from the past but exists in the present as well; it is the everyday experience of many Roma living in Central and Eastern European countries (see Bancroft, 2005; Guy, 2001; Ladányi & Szelényi, 2003). It is this story these people bring when they move to the West: it has been the story of their lives as well as the history of the group to which they belong. What is carried from the past is a narrative of unhappiness, hence it is no surprise that these people do not tend to expect a lot from the future. From that perspective, it is not at all unreasonable for them to bracket the future and live in the 'here and now'. They were *not* part of a society, they are *not* really Europeans (yet); it follows that is almost impossible for them to appreciate an apparently sudden well-intended inclusion. There are good arguments to suggest that the state of being excluded has come to structure their lives, given their history in Europe, and that it is the binding principle underlying many of their social practices. The experience of 'not belonging to mainstream society' has repeatedly been passed on to new generations, and it has led to a lack of trust in non-Roma, in the surrounding world, and in what the future may bring. It has fixed them to see themselves as outsiders (they

cannot belong to the society they have arrived in, nor do they have anywhere else to go, i.e., a homeland); and sometimes, this socially ascribed inferiority seems to have been internalised and turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Clearly, this has important consequences for 'how to go on'. How can we move to an atmosphere of mutual respect, to living together and taking up responsibilities against the background of these painful insights? It seems to us that the first step in initiating change has to be taken by the non-Roma. Regaining trust that has been lost for such a long time is a difficult challenge both for Roma and non-Roma. In spite of much counterevidence from the past as well as from the present, Roma should recuperate their trust in mainstream society. Similarly, and notwithstanding repetitive unfavourable experiences of non-conformism and social maladjustment, non-Roma should open up and give the Roma a chance. As the observed success factors of good practices have shown, regaining trust and confidence is of the utmost importance in achieving progress. This has partially been achieved among the younger generation, as demonstrated in several inquiries (see Hemelsoet & Van Pelt, 2013; Van der Straeten, 2013). Some Roma youngsters who have grown up in Ghent, have learned to believe again, and are able to hope for a better future in a society they start to call theirs and in which they can experience people's appreciation of the way they participate: not *because*, but *notwithstanding* or *while* they are somewhat different. This implies vast challenges for policy. There is a tension present in current policies, between targeting on the one hand, to take into account particularities of Roma, and on the other hand to include them. It requires a difficult balance in order to cope with the danger of identifying Roma with the problems they experience (whether it be poverty, housing, criminality, unemployment, etc.); issues which must be addressed independently of particular ethnic groups (see Hemelsoet, 2013c). Yet at the same time, given the present conditions, a targeted approach may be regarded as the only alternative for change.

It goes without saying that given their long history of exclusion and discrimination, it will take a long time before Roma self-esteem and consequently acceptance of responsibility may change. It is to this that the educational researcher can contribute to some extent when addressing 'how to go on'. However, we believe that this is not enough and that the theoretical insights we have developed above can complement these insights in order to make sense of the situation that confronts us. Knowing the case is the first step. Empirical research which compares the social practices of Roma with the social practices children are initiated into within schools, and what is targeted and implied in certain policies, has certainly yielded relevant knowledge. From this, suggestions can be made about 'how to go on'. Theoretical insights need to be integrated with empirical knowledge, in view of a better understanding. The case of the Roma stretches the Wittgensteinian framework to its limits, but it seems that it can give expression to a far-reaching experience of difference. It provides a language that allows us to see how understanding is possible and thus creates opportunities to consider 'how to go on'. Conversely, the social practices studied deepen the theoretical stance by making it clear

what is involved at different levels. The theoretical stance is humanising: it makes points of contact and helps to make explicit what we share as Roma and non-Roma. The inquiry does not limit itself to seeing opportunities 'to go on', but also points to some of the necessary 'tools' and ingredients to do so (see Hemelsoet, 2013b). The specific findings of this research are not merely theoretical: they concern a particular comprehension of the situations at stake and express an informed responsiveness towards these. This implies a redefinition of the problems. Problem definitions reflect a particular view and have come into existence in a specific way. This process does not take place outside power constraints, outside of what is politically desirable. But as clarified above, and in order to 'go on', attention must be drawn to various problem definitions made by stakeholders. In other words: everybody should be heard and needs to have a say in how the problems are defined. Eliciting these differences does not only contribute to the production of more knowledge; it also engenders a democratic move. All must be involved as partners in that dialogue. Further, these problem definitions shed a light on the challenges to be tackled and offer arguments to deal with 'what needs to be done' in the eyes of policymakers, practice workers, Roma, and in fact of all citizens. 'Altering the situation' is something to be distinguished from 'solving present problems', as it takes a step beyond, by focusing upon the interpretive framework which signifies the meaning of the ongoing course of events. In order to solve present problems in an immediate way, knowledge about the case could possibly suffice. Within an interpretative stance, what is real (relevant, important) surpasses the means to tackle problems.

Turning back to the example of truancy, Roma parents will also, in the first instance, refer to practical issues related to poor living conditions such as food, hygiene or having the means to pay for travel to school as 'causes' of truancy. But underlying these 'self-evident' answers (which may for parents be an easy way out of having to explain what is really at stake), there may be other reasons for keeping their children at home. *Knowing* these, will not be enough: in order to 'go on', more is needed to make a difference: it requires involvement with these families, a life-world oriented approach and a true engagement and expression of willingness to 'go on' together. This allows people to take part not only in the definition of problems, but also in dealing with them. 'Solutions' are then valued not for their immediate effects, but for how they connect meanings and social practices. What needs to be done is to make sense of education for Roma, which implies that the meaning attributed to school by society is clarified for them; the educational system needs to take the attributed meanings and social practices of these people into account. That this requires, to some extent, that Roma adapt and reshape some of their own conceptions goes without saying. At the same time, it requires that teachers, schools and the educational system as a whole are ready to reconsider the education that is supplied, in order for the right to education to become meaningful for everyone. An interesting example is the situation where a parent refused to let his daughter participate in a swimming class. In the discussion that followed, between the school principal, a mediator and the parent, the principal on the one hand clarified that swimming class is not just 'having a bit of fun' or some time off school: it is a class, just

like the teaching of other subjects, for which learning plans are developed and aims should be attained. On the other hand, the father explained his worries about the 'sexual character' of these activities (because of the scanty clothing of a bathing suit), and also pointed to hygiene (as children were all in the same water in which some may urinate) and explained he was convinced that not participating would not do any harm; for him, this was not a learning situation as it took place outside the class. Moreover, he believed that the school should not be involved with this sort of activity where time for study is wasted; instead children 'should be educated'. At such a moment, different meanings are communicated, and a space is created to conceive of different ways to shape the meaning of a situation that 'does justice' to both perspectives. Rather than 'solving the problem', the 'situation was altered' here and a forum was created 'to go on'. Although disagreement may persist, a situation was shaped in which both parties may come to mutual understanding. Shared communication was established and expectations became explicit and meaningful to each other. Similar examples could be provided at the policy level. Policymakers are generally concerned with social problems such as social exclusion, poverty, and the like, but what is often not taken into account when developing well-intended 'Roma inclusion' initiatives, is the interpretive background of the Roma's history. A focus which is too limited to particular problems takes attention away from what is going on: that (supportive) target-group oriented initiatives add to separation and thus to opposing 'us' and 'them'. These negative consequences of a target-group oriented approach may in the long run override the expected immediate positive results (incidentally, often quite limited, see for example McDonald & Negrin, 2010; Rorke, 2013).

Raised awareness of the 'state of exclusion' of Roma is of central importance to *non-discrimination policies* as well as for *socio-cultural initiatives* which aim to offer opportunities for people to highlight their identity and culture in self-defined ways. In the foregoing, arguments were developed in order to take a particular direction; a stance was taken with regard to what is desirable at the level of practice, policy and theory, thus indicating possible ways 'to go on'. This may be a rather modest view of what research can offer. Yet it should suggest—at least to policymakers—to refrain from all too many ambitions, from expecting too much; it asks for time and harms against disappointment and disillusion. It also shows the limits of research, as it points at the same time to the need to invoke a kind of theory that makes sense not just of problems, means and ends, but of the human condition itself. In a climate where performativity rules, it thus defends, as in the evocative language of the poet C.D. Lewis, 'the bad against the worse'.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 2

A right to education for all:
The meaning of equal educational opportunities [1]

Abstract

The debate on the social function of schooling is as old as the idea of schooling itself. In those discussions, the concept of equal opportunities is often referred to as a means or a strategy to pursue social equality. This article discusses four conceptions of equality, each referring to different notions of justice. In *meritocratic, distributive* and *social* equality of opportunities, the conceptualisation of equality is deduced from a particular societal order. The *subject-oriented* equality position, as an alternative, focuses on the consequences of these approaches at an individual level. A closer look at the everyday social practices of minority groups (in this case irregular migrants), is very useful in order to gain insight in these consequences. Are equal opportunities as a conceptual tool for educational policymaking helpful to realise the 'universal right to education' that we are willing to offer to all? Conclusions will be drawn on how this universal right can be turned from merely a legal provision into a vivid practice in an educationally more promising way.

'By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give.' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973)

2.1   Introduction

The concept of 'equal opportunities' has a long tradition as a tool for educational policymaking, mainly since the 1960s. In that period, school education came to be widely regarded primarily as an instrument of social engineering and as the most appropriate way to deal with social ills (Warnock, 1991). As a standard term in the sociology of education for over half a century, it has been used in a variety of ways. A brief analysis of the debates on the meaning and provision of equal educational opportunity would add to our understanding (for a broader historical overview, see Westen, 1997; Nash, 2004). In this paper, I will discuss four different conceptions of equality that are relevant within education. Each is referring to a different notion of justice: the *meritocratic*, the *distributive*, the *social* and the *subject-oriented* stance. While the first three approaches start from the desirability of a particular societal order, the latter takes the consequences of these initiatives for the subject as the point of departure[1]. Here, equal opportunities serve above all exigencies of a particular context and individual needs. The notion of 'the public' is no longer defined in terms of what we find valuable to aim for. Instead, it is about realising the conditions to develop one's individuality. Equal opportunities thus appear to comprehend a competitive principle: opportunities and rights are offered to all, but the responsibility to realise these is up to the subject. This 'privatisation of equal opportunities' goes hand in hand with a kind of globalisation in which equal opportunities are the leverage to realise the right to education for all. This paper focuses on the relation between 'equal opportunities' and the 'right to education' (and in a broader sense children's rights in general). Independently of one another, both concepts provoke large scientific discussions, but as they find their homes in different discourses, they are hardly seen in connection. This brings us to the main question of this paper: How can theorising about equal opportunities contribute to an educationally meaningful interpretation of the right to education?

2.2   Four ways to understand equal educational opportunities

Dubet (2005) distinguishes four dominant conceptions of equality that are relevant to

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1 Obviously, the first three interpretations and the fourth cannot be placed in a dichotomy to one another, as if the earlier were interpreted from merely societal values and the latter from individual needs. Society and the subject presuppose each other: a conceptualisation of what the society should look like can thus never be contemplated in independence of a conceptualisation of who the subject is. The difference between society-oriented approaches and subject-oriented approaches concerns the starting point and main focus of each. The danger of the society-oriented approaches which is criticised by advocates of the subject-oriented approach, lays in the fact that a particular societal order may tend to become a goal in itself without taking into account what this implies for individual subjects.

education: *meritocratic*, *distributive*, *social* and *subject-oriented* equality. Each of these forms of equality refer to a different underlying idea of what is (most) 'just' for all, i.e., a particular theory of justice and a notion of what is 'good'.

2.2.1 Meritocratic equality of opportunities

Meritocratic equality of opportunities still appears to be the principal figure of educational justice. This model allows everybody to participate with the same competence, thus safeguarding the outcomes and the access to educational qualifications without immediate interference from inequalities due to contingencies or descent. If the evaluation of students is only based on merit, equality of opportunities will eliminate social, gender, ethnic and other kinds of inequalities. Meritocratic equality is the central model for educational justice in most democratic societies, i.e., societies that consider individuals to be free and equal in principle, but which accept as well that these individuals have unequal social positions. Article VI of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen formulates this approach as following: "*All the citizens, being equal in [the eyes of the law], are equally admissible to all public dignities, places and employments, according to their capacity and without distinction other than that of their virtues and of their talents.*"[2] Within this view, the only inequalities that can be tolerated are those which result from merit. In that sense, merit 'justifies' differences concerning income, prestige, power, etc. (Dubet, 2005). Equal starting chances constitute the firm basis of a 'fair situation' where each has equal opportunities to develop her own talents. Notwithstanding the 'fair undertone' of these ideals, there appear to be some problems. At an empirical level, there is no evidence for an educational system that succeeds to take away social inequalities. The introduction of compulsory education, free primary education, open access to higher education and many other initiatives, certainly induce a broader participation of girls and to a certain extent of pupils from different ethnic groups and social classes. Nevertheless, this massification of education should not be confused with democratisation (Hirtt *et al.*, 2007), as we can still observe significant differences in terms of outcome between social categories (see Duru-Bellat, 2002; Hirtt, 2005; Dubet, 2005; Duquet *et al.*, 2006; OECD, 2006a, 2006b; Jacobs *et al.*, 2007).

At a more profound level, the idea of meritocracy itself can be questioned. Is an unequal treatment of individuals based on their merits really as legitimate and fair as it sounds? Goldthorpe (1996) denounces the contradiction which is present within the meritocratic view. Ethical justification for this image of society slips away as innate talents are not a merit at all. In his opinion, it makes no sense to reward people for being gifted by nature. In his 1958 *The Rise of Meritocracy*, Young even goes one step further, saying that in the long run the *IQ + Effort = Merit* formula will lead to a new kind of class society, in which the new elite will be selected on the basis of intelligence and other talents. Although the meritocratic view opens possibilities for social mobility between

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2 With reference to the original Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, I want to indicate that this declaration is not directed towards education in particular. This article is only introduced to illustrate the wide presence of the meritocratic view in (the foundations of) Western civilisations.

generations, it establishes a new form of social Darwinism by giving advantage to the talented (Young, 1996). To be successful means: to be gifted and use those gifts.

The requirement for one to 'use her gifts' refers to the neoliberal expectation to be entrepreneurial. Talents should be used and exploited after which reward follows. Duties and responsibilities come along with equal rights and starting chances. The meritocratic view on equality serves a particular societal order (i.e. a neoliberal one) in as far as it succeeds to create a situation where people have equal starting chances and are subsequently responsible for the 'production' of their own well-being.

2.2.2 Distributive equality of opportunities

Questioning the desirability of the latter brings us to different perspectives on what equal opportunities may mean. *Distributive* equality of opportunities starts from the insight that if so far we did not succeed to create equal opportunities for all, this is not only so because society is unequal. As Rawls (1971) states:

> The natural distribution [of talents] is neither just nor unjust; nor is it unjust that persons are born into society at some particular position. These are simply natural facts. What is just and unjust is the way that institutions deal with these facts. (p. 87)

The scholar system initiates a Matthew effect, as the way we conceive of equal opportunities benefits most the ones who need it less. Equal starting chances benefit those who have a lot of talents, as they dispose of more abilities to 'make sense' of the opportunities. For a talented person, a broader spectrum of possibilities is opened through equal starting chances. The idea that 'to those who have, will be given' (in the sense that the one who disposes of most talents, has as well most facilities to perform) is implicit in the meritocratic rhetoric that rewards talents and efforts, i.e., merit. From an economic perspective, it justifies a higher investment of society in those who are talented, not because they deserve it more but because they are considered to contribute more to social welfare in the future (Hirtt *et al.*, 2007). The distributive logic deals with this problem, as it justifies preferential treatment of the less favoured. It is based on the difference principle which states that inequalities can be just as long as they are to the benefit of the least well off (Rawls, 1971). A well-known example are the politics of *affirmative action* that are usually achieved through recruitment programs targeted at applicants from socio-politically disadvantaged groups (such as minority groups or women). In some cases it involves furthermore preferential treatment of these groups (Curry, 1996).

The argument for this position rests on the claim that morally arbitrary factors like the context in which we are born should not determine our life chances or opportunities. To realise 'fairness of opportunity' does not merely require that positions are distributed on the basis of merit, but moreover that all have the right kind of opportunities to acquire the necessary skills on the basis of which merit is assessed. Creating opportunities and possibilities for children and their parents makes no sense if they do not know how to use them. With regard to the latter, the distinction between *bare* and *real* opportunities (Dennett, 1984) is interesting. The concept of bare opportunities is used to indicate those circumstances when persons do not have the necessary information to exercise

opportunities at their disposal. Real opportunities on the contrary, require not only knowledge of the opportunity's existence, but moreover of how to make opportunities useful in one's own life (Howe, 1997). The realisation of a 'just' school thus implies a more transparent school organisation (Dubet, 2005). This does not only require formal and structural adaptations but as well changes in the socio-cultural dimension of education[3]. Papastephanou (2005) criticises Rawls' statement that his distributive 'justice as fairness' is part of a political liberalism that 'can be formulated independently of any particular comprehensive doctrine, religious, philosophical or moral' (Rawls, 1995). She argues that the principles of justice in Rawlsian theory rely in one way or another on contestable epistemological and anthropological cultural assumptions of Western societies. In his difference principle, 'good performance' is interpreted in a biological essentialist way through metaphors such as 'native talents' or 'giftedness'. By seeing existential dissimilarity as a natural fact rather than a social construction and qualitative appraisal of difference, Rawls ends up in justifying inequality on naturalistic grounds (in a way deriving the 'ought' from what 'is').

2.2.3   Social equality of opportunities

Social equality of opportunities focuses on the question what should be warranted for all, in particular for those who are poor or otherwise excluded. Here, equal opportunities are weighted on the basis of the way they treat the weakest. What all members of society can enjoy is at stake. To offer everybody opportunities to build up a school career is not enough. A risk remains that some will not succeed to follow the pace and fulfil the requirements of school competition. Everyone has the right of acquisition to the common culture, and for that reason, the plea is one in defence of a broad common curriculum for all. As school attendance is obligatory, it is necessary to define what the school must warrant for all. Emphasis is on equal outcomes rather than on starting opportunities. In the egalitarian view, 'outcomes' should of course not be considered in a strict sense (saying that every individual should reach the same level and skills). Rather, it accepts a certain degree of variance between individual's outcomes. What is aimed for is an equal participation of different social groups at all educational levels (Roemer, 1998). Critics of social equality fear that the proposed *minimum in common* will soon reverse into the majority's maximum by installing the reign of mediocrity. They argue that the level of the *minimum in common* will decrease and threaten the performances of the best pupils. Advocates of the social understanding of equality of opportunities on the contrary, point at the central importance of the selective function of education in meritocratic thinking and argue that this is an implicit presupposition in all these criticisms (Dubet, 2005).

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3 The distinction between the structural and the socio-cultural dimension is often made in literature on *integration*; e.g. the difference between formal and informal participation (Veenman, 1994), system integration and social integration (considering relations between the parts of a social system and the actors in a social system) (Esser, 2004) and the structural, the socio-cultural and the political dimension of integration (Choenni, 1992). Concerning equal educational opportunities, Burbules & Sherman (1979) similarly distinguish two interpretations: a 'formalist' and an 'actualist' one.

It should be remarked that the three approaches of equal opportunities mentioned above all refer to an idea of a 'just' society. Whether it is a meritocratic one that offers equal starting chances to all, or a more egalitarian stance that prefers to redistribute opportunities through different treatment or to realise equal participation of different social groups at all educational levels; all of them reflect possible social functions of education and presuppose a particular social order. The conceptualisation of equality starts from this social order and delivers the means to determine an order of preference. This does not imply that nothing is said about the subject, but it *does* mean that the individual's best interests are understood in terms of a particular social order when the concept of equality is constructed.

2.2.4 Subject-oriented equality of opportunities

It might be wondered what the consequences of these initiatives are at an individual level, which brings us to the *subject-oriented* equality of opportunities position. The question at stake here is what the effects of unequal school outcomes are on social inequalities, i.e. inequalities that stem from the hierarchy of diplomas. The observation that diplomas strongly determine access to and participation in the labour market, shows that educational failure is the prelude of social exclusion. In spite of all efforts to create a minimum in common and to warrant equal opportunities for all to obtain maximal advantage from schooling, equality of opportunities contains a competitive principle. By definition it distinguishes between those who take more and those who take less advantage of their rights. The paradox of equal opportunities lays in the constraint for subjects to see themselves as equal, free, and for that reason, responsible for their outcomes whether being successful or failing. The government provides participations rights to all citizens through the pursuit and realisation of equal opportunities (Hammarberg, 1990). What stays implicit, is the expectation towards the individual student to take up her rights. Active agency of rights is not solely a prerequisite of the meritocratic stand. In the general discourse on equal opportunities it is held that the latter are offered to all through government initiatives, but it is up to the subject to take on her responsibility and make those opportunities meaningful in her own life. Individuals who do not succeed to do so, are soon labelled with the stigma of incapacity. As everyone has equal opportunities and rights, there is no space left to blame the system nor the circumstances: one has only herself to blame for.

The latter implies that the provision of equal opportunities for all does not necessarily lead to a 'just' school. It is assumed as a premise that offered rights bring along responsibilities. This does not concern explicit duties, but rather an implicit requirement to make use of what is offered. A just school should not limit itself in creating an equitable competition; it should moreover treat the excluded in a way not leaving them fighting between the fold. This can be effected by offering care and support on the basis of individual needs. Education both inside and outside schooling is not only a matter of giving instruction or helping to learn, but moreover a *modus* of acting with people and treating them. This ethical nature of education requires us to recognise every student as such, and to treat

her as a singular subject that is equal to all, independent from her achievements or results. This approach to equal opportunities explicitly starts from the (needs of the) subject and differs as such from the above approaches. Within our society it enjoys approval under the name of 'inclusive education', 'tailor-made education', *et al.* All these initiatives take shape under the flag of an ethically inspired commitment to the other. This revaluation of the ethical character of education is valuable, but does not guarantee 'justice'. First of all it may be wondered whether there can no longer be expected anything at all from the subject. Can rights be conceived of in abstraction of duties and responsibilities? In other words: how can those who do not participate because they are forced into exclusion and those who do not participate because they consciously choose to be passive ('I don't feel like doing this'), because they are lazy ('I do not have the energy to do this') or because they do not agree ('I refuse to do this') be distinguished? The danger of the subject-oriented approach is to end up with a plea for the solitary individual who refuses to bear the consequences of her own acting. In a situation of complete arbitrariness 'the public' gets out of sight. The significance and the problematic character of the latter becomes clear in the light of a second point of critique: 'justice' requires a transcendence of the particular context of private interhuman interactions. There is a tension between what is desirable in a particular situation or for an individual on the one hand and the interest of third parties on the other hand. In Levinasian terms: in the unique relation with 'the Other', 'the others' are (albeit non-manifest) always present in the background. More concrete, available resources are always limited and require choices in terms of distribution. Efforts cannot be delivered infinitely for the benefit of individual interests at the cost of others and their needs. In that sense, the critical perspective of the subject-oriented approach of equal opportunities walks a thin line. It goes with the danger to bend over to the other i.e. individualistic extreme rather than refining the subtle tension between particular/private contexts and the public interest. In what follows, the focus will be on this tension.

2.3   Public or private concern?

The latter findings lead to the question what it exactly is that policymakers aim at when employing the widespread discourse of 'equal opportunities'. It was mentioned earlier that the concept has a long history. Initially, it was explicitly used as a tool to shape society into a particular direction. In the context of expanding migrations, globalisation and privatisation, an exclusive and unambiguous societal meaning for public educational institutions is no longer evident. Nowadays, the design of institutionalised education is regularised by very general principles (e.g. the UDHR and the UNCRC[4]) meanwhile serving the subject and her needs. Discussions about equal opportunities likewise occur against the background of the universal 'right to education'. They no longer primarily serve a particular societal order, but aim at individual well-being. This contrast

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4   UDHR and UNCRC respectively stand for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. In what follows both will be referred to by the mentioned abbreviations.

is illustrated in the move from a school 'in the name of society' which has to make way for a school 'in the name of the child'. Commitment to society becomes synonymous with contributing to the individual well-being of all, through the realisation of equal opportunities and rights. The whole is no longer more than the sum of the parts, or with the very poignant words of Margaret Thatcher: 'There is no such thing as society, there are just individuals'. Concern for the common good corresponds to the sum of all individual interests and needs. Talk about 'the common' or 'the public' only makes sense in as far as it is about realising equal opportunities.

The question at stake is whether educational reflection and action can confine themselves to warranting developmental opportunities by defining rights. Is the *debate* about 'just education' not exactly what is at stake in educational theory and practice? This question once again refers to the unavoidable normative character of educational reflection and action. Attention for these elements is a prerequisite in order to grant 'the educational' a public meaning that goes beyond the boundaries of the private.

To do so, the situation as it presents itself can be taken as a starting point. The context of growing migration and globalisation processes which coincide with various kinds of privatisation, cannot be denied. The equal opportunities discourse occurs against the background of the Children's Rights Movement which argues for a universal right to education from the perspective of the best interests of the child (Kinderrechtencommissariaat, 2007). Moreover, this 'background' bestows meaning and significance to the discourse. Nowadays, it is no longer evident to define the goals of equal opportunities in terms of a societal ideal. Rather, equal educational opportunities have become a goal in themselves. As a policy strategy, they are deployed as an instrument to realise the right to education for all.

But how can the latter be interpreted? Is a universal right to education more than a formal, (whether it is enforceable or not) necessary condition for self-development which serves private interests? In search for the public meaning of educational thinking, I now halt at the outstanding example of a group of people which derives its actual significance from current changes in Western societies: irregular migrants[5]. What does the right to education mean to those people and how is it concretely brought into practice?

2.4 Equal opportunities and the right to education: the example of children without legal residence (CWLR) in the context of Flanders, Belgium

Flemish policy has attention for the particular group of children without legal residence in a circular letter with the title 'The right to education for children without legal

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5 The group of irregular migrants is being referred to with a whole range of different names. Illegal/irregular/undocumented/unauthorised migrants or refugees are only the most well-known examples from a long list. In this paper, the term 'irregular migrants' is preferred, as it does not suffer from pejorative emotive connotations. Further in the article the concept 'people without legal residence' is used as well, when reference is made to Belgian policy texts which use this formulation. For a broader discussion on terminology and concepts surrounding the phenomenon of irregular migration, see e.g. IPPR, 2006; Vogel & Jandl, 2008; Hemelsoet, 2008.

residence' (Flemish Government, 2003). As the letter states, 'concrete guidelines to warrant the right to education for these children in primary and secondary education' are given, in answer to the large amount of questions raised by schools for this target group. The starting point of the letter is the general Flemish policy towards ethnic and cultural minorities which finds its legitimisation in a range of international agreements (Flemish Government, 1998). Apart from that, reference is made to two sources which serve as a 'legal base' for the circular letter and which 'translate' the right to education into an applicable form and practical instructions. It concerns the 'Decree concerning Equal Educational Opportunites I' (Flemish Government, 2002) and the 'Law on compulsory education' (Federal Government, 1983).

The principal right to enrol in a school of preference as well as regulations concerning funding and financial support, rely on the Equal Educational Opportunities Decree. The right to enrol remains in full force for children without legal residence. As is the case for other children, they are fundable or financially supportable[6]. To put it briefly: the right to education is put on a par with a formal (legally enforceable) right to participate within education with equal starting opportunities[7]. It is remarkable that the right to education takes shape as *compulsory* education. Not only is the possibility to participate in education provided, but "it makes that parents or the persons who wield parental power over children of minors with a foreign nationality are obliged [...] to subscribe their children who are subject to compulsory education and to see that they attend school frequently" (Flemish Government, 2003) (author's translation). It should be noted that the right to education is thus not free of obligations and has on the contrary a compelling character. This is rather surprising towards people who are not even recognised as citizens of the country of residence and who are as such denied full participation in societal life.

A tension between the juridical discourse and concrete practices remains present. Policy provides the formal conditions and structures required to offer equal (starting) opportunities to all and is thus – from a juridical stand – considered to be 'just'. From an educational perspective, this framework functions as a necessary but insufficient condition to realise justice. The following example aims to demonstrate the tension between both approaches more sharply.

Zlatica Moser is a woman with Serbian roots, living in Austria since 1991. Initially she was a legal resident, but since 1999 her status became illegal. One day after her son Luca was born on June 8th, 2000, the Vienna Council for Child Protection gave the order to separate mother and child and to place the child in a foster home. This decision was

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6 This funding refers to means that are provided to schools. Children without legal residence cannot claim a scholarship (as is the case for other children) nor apply for funding to compensate for individual costs that come with school participation. This very relevant finding is not even mentioned in the circular letter. As a matter of fact, it is an infringement on the State's duty to offer free primary education (see UNCRC and Flemish legislation). The latter is the more striking within the context of compulsory education; children who are denied residence in the country, whose parents are not allowed to participate in the labour market and who cannot rely on any kind of financial support, are obliged to participate in education which necessarily implies extra costs.

7 Whether the latter is indeed the case can even be questioned, see footnote 5 and Hemelsoet, 2008.

motivated by the uncertain personal and financial situation of the mother, partially because of her illegal status. Few time later, parental authority over the child was taken from her and contact with the child was strongly restricted (NJB, 2006). In similar decisions, there is always reference to the 'interest of the child', for which the parents are responsible in first instance. The government allows itself to intervene in cases where parents harm the interests of the child. Surprisingly, children may be taken from 'illegal' parents although there is a positive and healthy educational relationship, while other parents have to abuse, neglect or threaten their children's development before children are placed into custody (Unicef the Netherlands, 2008)[8].

In this example, it is striking that defenders of children's interests decide for custody on material grounds, as if offering an accommodation for living is not a political or an educational choice but an unquestionable fact. The child's best interests are synonymous with its physical well-being, to be cared for through the provision of favourable material accommodations. Other arguments in favour of the child's well-being (e.g. the emotional repercussions of being taken into care, the need for a warm and loving environment to grow up, etc.) are not taken into account. Without going deeper into possible shortcomings in legislation related to this concrete problem, reference must be made to the—until a certain extent unavoidable—decontextualising character of rules and laws[9]. To understand justice in a juridical way thus implies a kind of generalisation which is exactly what is at stake in using rules. Questioning the desirability or necessity of these rules is not the primary aim of this article[10]. More important here, is the distinction with educational forms of justice. These take the particularity of the given situation and the normativity that is generated through this unique context as a starting point to make choices and to think about what might be 'good'. It speaks for itself that this is not evident. It takes away possibilities to call upon universal or fixed rules with an univocal meaning. That it brings along dangers is likewise clear: in the absence of transparent guidelines there is a risk implied to be reproached for relativism or arbitrariness. Things should not be confused, though. The insight that univocal interpretations are not possible (anymore), does not contradict with the remaining need for rules. It only means that there is no fixed meaning which can unambiguously be deduced from the given rules. But neither are interpretations completely arbitrary: they are open *within certain boundaries*. Normativity arises from

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8 In the end, the court decided in the mother's favour arguing that authorities did not make sufficient efforts to investigate how the mother and the child could possibly have stayed together (e.g. by placement in a refugee centre). So, it was concluded that the 8th article of the European Convention on Human Rights was violated ('Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life') (Council of Europe, 1950).

9 Not all nation states have codified constitutions as is the case in Belgium, though all such states have a *jus commune*, or law of the land, that may consist of a variety of imperative and consensual rules. These may include customary law, conventions, statutory law, judge-made law or international rules and norms, and so on.

10 This decision reflects the importance given to laws, rules and policy on migration and asylum that can influence (possibly prevent) problems to a large extent. But going deeper into the technical details of this discussion would lead too far away from the educational solicitude that is at stake here and is less relevant for the international discussion.

social practices. It leaves room for interpretation. 'Reasons' have to be given over and over again, and cannot limit themselves to reference to a fixed norm. From within such a perspective, it is impossible to make a univocal choice in the given example: it presupposes detailed investigation of the particular context and a dialogue of reasons to take either one decision or rather another.

2.5   The right to education as an educational practice

The latter is not an either/or story. A plea for an educational understanding of justice does not necessarily imply that one has to condemn common rules or laws. Rather, it is something complementary, that can be understood twofold. First, it implies an educational reading of (children's) rights. Rights do not only refer to something that can lawfully be claimed. The example of the Serbian mother in Austria is very explanatory: in a situation like this, it is shown that (universal) rights leave an open space for interpretation which makes it possible to go along with the particular context. Both the UDHR and the UNCRC start with a preamble and a declaration of intentions. These outline a framework to understand 'rights'. An educational reading stresses the discretionary space to deal with laws and the importance to take the context into account. Secondly, it has something to do with the content of these universal rights. Equal access or starting chances are an insufficient condition to talk about an 'educationally meaningful' right to education. In that case (see *meritocratic* approach to equality) equal opportunities are realised, but the possibility of injustices in a further stage remains open. The other extreme, which aims for equal outcomes (see *egalitarian* approach to equality) is just as little 'educationally meaningful', as this alternative cuts across personal freedom of choice. The position 'in between' (see *distributive* approach to equality) seems a good compromise between both extremes, but neither does it stay free from critique with its compensatory measures[11].

How then can the right to education be conceived of in an 'educationally meaningful' way? The concept stays too abstract to discharge myself from answering this question. The latter shows that it is neither about equal starting positions nor is it about equal outcomes. Attention for the process in between the starting and end point of schooling will be crucial. Educational action is not only directed towards a public ideal (see first three approaches to equality), nor is it restricted to private interests (see subject-oriented approach to equality). What is at stake is the relationship and interaction between the private and the public. An educational perspective wants to offer opportunities to the subject meanwhile it contributes to a more liveable society. This takes shape through a continuous dialogue which does not take the 'interest of the child' nor 'the interest of the common good' as a starting point, but unremittingly reflects on what these respective interests (can) mean,

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11 For the Flemish context, reference could for example be made to corrective measures to the initial Equal Opportunities Decree, more in particular in relation to the right to enrolment. Through amendments, a preference policy for brothers and sisters within the same school was approved. Moreover, schools in Flanders now dispose of the right to draw up a preference policy for children from socially vulnerable groups.

how they relate to one another and how they can be dealt with in concrete practices.
The latter intends to be more than a theoretical abstraction or an enforced crossbreeding of two positions. This will be demonstrated by turning back to the case of children without legal residence. Formal starting chances to participate in the educational system are insufficient to talk about a meaningful realisation of equality. As defenders of the distributive position indicate, it is necessary that people are as well informed about their rights and the possibilities they dispose of to utilise them. Still, this does not say anything about the meaningfulness of the curriculum and about how education is designed. In Flanders, Belgium, scrupulous research led to a list of relevant study content and goals that have to be aimed for or reached: the developmental goals and the final attainment levels[12]. For most pupils, the curriculum meets the requirement to offer developmental opportunities to an acceptable degree. But once again, the danger of this argumentation is in 'most': what about the children of irregular migrants for example? Does it make sense to learn Dutch (and be obliged to do so) when there is a big chance of being deported on the short or medium long term? Does it make sense to be prepared for the labour market through obtaining competences, if one has no right to participate in that labour market[13]? In as far as we are talking about cultural beliefs concerning education and schooling, the arguments apply as well to the broader group of immigrants. But the 'meaningfulness' of education can every bit as good depend on the lawful status of the persons involved (see the first question mentioned before). This does not mean that policymakers have to come towards the needs and desires of whoever walks around without limitations. Education very much *has* a public meaning: as the most widespread educational institutions in Western societies, schools should contribute to a liveable society for all. In that sense, the dialogue between societal demands and private and/or group interests of the diverse stakeholders who populate schools should be entered into. Only so, a mediated policy can be pursued. It concerns a dialogue which by definition cannot lead to everlasting answers or outcomes, as the social state of affairs is continuously changing and new groups of pupils appear in schools over and over again. The presence of a readiness to enter into dialogue, the recognition of the particularity of private needs and contexts and the commitment which presupposes all of this, constitute the preconditions to turn 'equal opportunities' into an educationally meaningful concept. Then, educational thought and speech is neither mobilised to represent a social ideal ('the public'), nor the interest of the child ('the private'), but they situate themselves in the complex dialogue between both.

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12 In Flanders, Belgium, 'developmental goals' [ontwikkelingsdoelen] are defined for kindergarten/infant school (3 to 5 years old); these are goals that have to be aimed for by schools. For primary schools, 'final attainment levels' [eindtermen] with a more binding character are defined, as they have to be reached by all pupils.

13 Here, the significance of the curriculum *an sich* for these children is not so much questioned. Reference is rather made to the complexity of tensions between different rights (e.g. the present right to education versus the absent right to work) and between different policy domains (e.g. education and migration or welfare). In Belgium, the latter tension is even more complicated as education is a matter of the Flemish government and migration is a matter of the federal government. The idea that these complex tensions can be solved by merely adapting the curriculum, is not only unrealistic; it moreover implies the danger of affirming the current political conditions concerning irregular migration and as such to become uncritical.

This dialogue does not aim at final and universal answers, but always keeps searching for the most desirable and liveable choices in view of the given situation. Meanwhile it aims at a transformation and thus a change of that given situation, by questioning the social context. This dialogical approach of educational practices has profound implications for the tasks of the educator, which will be the focus of the closing section of this article.

2.6   The educator as *phronimos*

The work of educators is no longer limited to the provision of a universal right to education to all, but focuses at offering each child an education that is valuable for her own life[14]. Crucial here, is the insight that judgements and decisions necessarily imply a form of 'practical judgement' or Aristotelian *phronesis*, which is opposed to technical reasoning or *technè*. Technical reasoning is concerned with the valuable aim to find the best means towards specific ends. The danger related to this lays in the fact that the dominance of technical reasoning threatens to eliminate the idea of judgement. Data can be extremely helpful, but they always require interpretation which implies judgement (Smith, 2006). They do not exist *ex nihilo* but are embedded in a context of social practices. As Smith writes:

> *Phronesis* is marked by attentiveness to the particular case and by flexibility. Aristotle talks of the need for *aesthesis*, which many modern commentators (e.g. Dunne, 1993) call 'situational appreciation' but which can also be called alertness. The central ideas in aesthesis are those of sensitivity and a kind of attunement to the subject, instead of the 'mastery' which is characteristic of instrumental/technical reason. Whereas *techne* is marked by a high degree of preplanning it is more typical of *phronesis* that it is exercised in the course of what is sometimes called 'hot action'. It also involves being open to further experience, rather than resting content once it has achieved a satisfactory set of procedures. *Phronesis*, or *practical judgement,* has an ethical side to it which technical rationality lacks. Questions of character, of what kind of person the individual exercising judgement is, are at issue here: it does not simply come down to what 'skills' he or she is exercising (ibid., p. 165).

Education is *praxis*: the professionalism of educators is inherently connected with values and ethical norms and as such goes beyond technical skills. Educators cannot

14 'An education that is valuable to one's own life' cannot have a fixed filling-in (as was explained above)—something that is often happening when '*the* interest of *the* child' is mentioned. The particular meaning of this abstract concept is construed in the confrontation of proper desires and needs with the societal constellation one finds herself in. The task of the educator is to initiate children into this dialogical process of confrontations. Similar conflicts provoke reflection on differences: both within as well as between the private and the public, between ourselves and others and even between different points of view within one's own thinking. Education and learning can thus be understood as 'transformative practices of initiation', or as Heidegger says it in his search for an answer to the question 'What is philosophy?': "…es ist kein Bruch mit der Geschichte, keine Verleugnung der Geschichte, sondern eine Aneignung und Verwandlung des Überlieferten" […it is not a break with history, no repudiation of history, but it is an adoption and transformation of what has been handed down to us] (Heidegger, 1970, p. 71). Education amounts to a process of enculturation, in which the pupil becomes part of a culture by participating in it—a concept which implies both initiation within an existing order as well as the transformation of it (for an elaboration of this idea, see Wardekker, 2001).

merely be regarded as operators of techniques, but they are *phronimoi*: persons of practical judgement, in which wisdom and feeling are held together and inform each other. The importance of *experience* (rejecting the idea that ethics is based solely in theory), of *reflection on experience* (to warrant the 'situatedness' of the *aesthesis* in practical judgement), of *character* (practical judgement is bound up with the kind of person one is), of *alertness* (our feeling helps us to pick out what is salient in a given situation), and of *sensitivity* and *flexibility* (not imposing rigid categories or principles on the subject matter but being responsive to it) are at stake here. The individual who displays practical wisdom, must be a particular sort of person rather than simply one who exercises certain skills (ibid., 2006, pp. 166-167).

The question which remains is how we might move from a fascination with technical reason, oblivious of all its damaging consequences (including the reductive move to 'what works'), to a mode of rationality which makes proper room for judgement. Looking at reality as consisting of social practices seems a good start to take the situatedness of what we do into account. Considering the topic of this article, reflection on what the right to education may mean should be the guiding principle of our actions. If we want rights to be more than static instruments to defend the child's best interests, the exercise of looking at them as living practices seems an educational task in itself. Children's rights could then truly serve as a leverage for 'doing justice to children' and the context they live in.

By showing that 'doing justice' to children is not the same as 'giving rights' to children, this article intends to contribute to a more 'educational' approach of equal educational opportunities. It thus tries to be part of the educational practice it is talking about and starts from the belief that educational research is by definition rule-governed and should, albeit without giving clear-cut answers, pose the question 'what education is all about' again and again. Doing so, a contribution is provided to the construction of educational practice, and new perspectives are opened to look in a different way at the everyday problems we are dealing with.

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Chapter 3

Questioning the homogenisation of irregular migrants in educational policy: From (il)legal residence to inclusive education. [1]

1 Hemelsoet, E. (2011). Questioning the homogenization of irregular migrants in educational policy: From (il)legal residence to inclusive education. *Educational Theory, 61(6)*, 659-669.

Abstract

This article questions the way irregular migrants are approached in educational policymaking. In most cases, estimations of the number of irregular migrants serve—despite large methodological problems—as a starting point for policymaking. Given the very diverse composition of this group of people, the question is whether residence status is an appropriate benchmark to deal with the social problems related to these people. There seems to be a homogenising tendency at work which reduces the complexity of irregular migration. Preferable distinctions are overlooked or even denied. Inclusive education seems to bring in an alternative that does not reduce individuals to a group they belong to. Thus it is claimed that differences only matter at the individual level. The question is, whether there is no new form of homogenisation at work here. Using the case of Roma people, this paper claims that (apart from an ethical concern with the unique individual) group differences *do* matter for educational practice, theory and policy. Qualitative data on the social practices people are living in can help to get an insight in the particularity of situations. This 'insight' or 'understanding' in its turn is a requirement for policymakers to make well-considered choices.

3.1   Irregular migrants: A conceptual mess

For various reasons, irregular migration has become a much debated issue during the last decades. Until recently, there was only a limited amount of scientific studies on this topic (mainly with a focus on clandestine activities such as human trafficking and smuggling). Nowadays however, humanitarian and social problems related to this phenomenon gave a boost to political discussions and subsequently to scientific research on this topic. Both politicians and scientists want to 'grab' what is happening and request an overview of the state of affairs. As a result, government funded research, mostly conducted on a short term, is flourishing.

In this type of research, a number of definitions are used to define the group of people under investigation. Adjectives such as 'illegal', 'irregular', 'unauthorised', 'undocumented' or 'clandestine' are often interchangeably combined with nouns as '(im)migrants', 'aliens' or 'refugees'. There is a debate over the appropriateness and applicability of these various definitions. Typically, the (often emotive) connotations associated with different terms are discussed. Some authors mention 'refugees' (Hamilton & Moore, 2004), referring to the definition of the 1951 United Nations Geneva Refugee Convention. This term applies to migrants who have been found to 'qualify' for official refugee status (Watts & Bridges, 2005). In many countries, people who do not meet the criteria set by the government to be 'legal' refugees, are called 'undocumented migrants' (or *sans-papiers*). This term is preferred—among others—by Paspalanova (2006), although it has neither official nor legal force. Lately, the term 'irregular migrants' (Broeders & Engbersen, 2007; Jandl, 2007; Laubenthal, 2007) has come to replace the previously used 'illegal aliens' (Martiniello, 2005; Ommundsen & Larsen, 1999; Van Dijck, 1996) in scientific literature, as the later term was too closely associated with criminal behaviour. In front of this, human rights advocates have argued that 'no human being is illegal'.

Therefore, the term 'irregular migrants' will be used here. It should be recalled that the conceptualisation of the phenomenon at issue is due to the chosen definitions; different terminologies as well as different ways of defining the used concepts will modify the outcomes—and thus the conclusions and recommendations—to a large extent. It is of crucial importance that research reports clearly indicate to which definitions they subscribe, who is included or excluded in the target group and why this is so. That is not as self-evident as it may seem: definitions of irregular migration always include negative elements (people *without* papers, who have *no* legal residence status, who *cannot* rely on particular kinds of support). Policy changes towards migration can lead to substantial changes in the size of the irregular migrants population, which is most obvious the case when regularisation programs take place. Furthermore, assigning certain forms of support such as working permits or medical cards to particular groups may temporarily or permanently change their legal status. Definitions are constructed in relation to practices of reference, which may differ historically and locally to a large extent. Clearly, concepts cannot simply be derived from data, they are required to generate data – an insight which clarifies why a lot of

research (and therefore its conclusions) are incomparable.

3.2   Counting the uncountable

It might be fruitful to have a closer look at some examples of the (mainly policy-driven) research mentioned before. An interesting case is the Clandestino project that is funded by the European Union. Among other things, this project tries to estimate the 'stock' of irregular migrants in different countries. The total number of irregular migrants in Europe is estimated between 2.8 and 6 million (Picum, 2009). The margin of this interval is extensive. Apart from that, one may question the reliability of these estimations. In international comparisons, moreover, there are added difficulties when comparing the different datasets as they measure different things, using different systems, at different times and by different authorities (Clarke, 2000).

The latter does not keep researchers from drawing far-reaching conclusions. It is recognised that "the review of efforts to estimate the size of irregular migration on a European level has shown that the numbers indicated are based on very rough estimates" because "often we do not know which groups of irregular migrants are included in a stock estimate and older studies are often quoted in newer studies, so that estimates appear to apply to the present, although they were made some years ago" (Iglicka, 2008, p. 17). Nevertheless, researchers say that "approximate comparability is better than no data at all in a situation where a high degree of comparability may never be achieved" (Vogel & Kovacheva, 2008, p. 19) or that "these estimates will greatly aid policymaking" (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006, p. 9). Reference is made to policy: "In the public sphere, there is a general need to gather reliable information on important social phenomena, to determine whether or not the situation warrants any political action. […] For governments, the perceived size of the phenomenon will have an important bearing on the justification for the expenditure of public resources on alternative uses" (Jandl, 2004, p. 152).

Given the far-reaching consequences at policy level, the large—and to a great extent insurmountable—problems that are related to estimating irregular migrant numbers cannot be glossed over. Or as Clarke (2000) states:

> Whichever method of assessment is used, estimated numbers of irregular migrants are based on assumptions, many of which are either untested or maybe even untestable. The fact remains that unrecorded and irregular migration is, by its very definition, unquantified and, indeed, unquantifiable. Any figure generated is at best an educated guess. (p. 21)

Such a critique goes beyond specific problems related to particular methods. From a scientific perspective, the level of reliability of the obtained estimations is low. To a certain extent, the phenomenon of irregular migration indeed *is* unquantifiable and the best that can be expected from these estimations *is* an educated guess. But the impact of these methodological arguments is limited in the politicised context of policymaking. Some of the arguments in defence of estimates should at least be taken seriously. For political action to be effective, at least a certain level of insight into the

state of affairs is indispensable. In order to cope with the challenges the phenomenon of irregular migration pose us, it may be necessary to get at least an idea of the scope of the phenomenon, which is done by 'measuring' the 'size' of it. As such, the easily criticised 'love for numbers' of policymakers may reflect a sincere concern with the problems involved, rather than a fast solution to legitimise decisions.

3.3   Illegal residence as a benchmark: The homogenisation of complexity?

Following what has been argued above, I will now focus on what may be expected when engaging in an estimation of irregular migration numbers. In general, the people involved are predominantly approached from a legal point of view that focuses on residence status. Their ethnicity, nationality, religion, native language, cultural background etc. is barely considered. Policy documents on regularisation or inclusion initiatives for example talk about 'irregular migrants'. Thus they treat them as if it were a monolithic group that is characterised by the illegal residence status. An important exception is the group of asylum seekers. In their case, on arrival attention is given to political or personal reasons for taking refuge. Nationality is used as a very decisive element to grant or withhold refugee status. Yet, once they are categorised as 'irregular migrants,' they are again treated as a homogeneous group. Contextual elements slide to the background and are to a large extent ignored.

In general, the residence status serves as the qualifying benchmark to be included or excluded from (citizen) rights, provisions and initiatives. Everything depends on the documents one has, or does not have. Trying to acquire these documents unites those categorised by the label 'irregular migrants'. This shared experience is what all of them have in common. They come across each other e.g. in charity organisations or when queuing for public services. There remains however what differentiates them, an aspect that often goes unnoticed. The various cultural backgrounds, motivations to take refuge and personal histories that lead to irregularity, are often distinctive. An Eastern European girl kidnapped and smuggled into Western Europe by human traffickers for prostitution is confronted with problems that have little in common with those faced by her immigrant worker compatriots who seek a job for a couple of months in order to send home as much money as they can (more often than not in a circuit where employers don't pay social security and workers ignore income tax). Nor has the unaccompanied child soldier much in common with the South-East-Asian refugee seeking safety after suffering persecution because of dissensus with the political or religious state of affairs in her homeland. An interesting group are Roma gypsies; they deviate from most other irregular migrants in that they often seem to have developed particular strategies to adapt to living in irregular conditions. 'Being irregular' in a lot of senses seems to have become a part of their cultural identity so that in many cases, they are not even interested in regularisation. Of course, also within this group of people there are large differences. The preceding examples are not intended to homogenise

them once again trough these stereotypes. What is emphasised are the very divergent perspectives and (previous and current) living conditions of these people (at a cultural or ethnic but likewise at a personal level). This is not only the case from these people's viewpoint. For the government too, these incomparable situations refer to different problems that are not necessarily related to the residence status. Human trafficking, war traumas of unaccompanied minors, moonlighting, clandestine (drugs) trade, etc. are problems that cannot be addressed in the context of a specific policy for 'irregular migration'.

Unfortunately, lumping all of these people with their particular problems together is exactly what is being done when numbers of irregular migrants are estimated. In none of the above mentioned studies attention is given to these differences. What is troublesome is that this may lead to serious injustices for the people involved, as they are (independently of the particular term used to define irregular migrants) linked to social problems that are extraneous to their particular conditions. It should be clarified though that grouping people together is not necessarily wrong. It may even be a requirement or at least desirable for a particular policy. When talking about human trafficking or unaccompanied minors, the focus is as well on 'groups' of people. There is a dissimilarity though; in the current state of affairs relevant differences have vanished to the background under the label of an irregular legal status. It is clear now that treating these people as a monolithic group carries with it the danger to take away the possibility of making distinctions preferable from the point of view of policymakers. Ignore this, and one is left with broad intervals and numbers that hardly contain any relevant information.

Some theorists similarly refer to a homogenising tendency in the discourse that is used when talking about migrants. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) for example elaborate largely on the thesis that "the 'migrant debate' rests on *the idea that the ideal society should be as uniform or homogeneous as possible.* Homogeneity is not only seen as desirable, but also as the *norm*, i.e. as the most *normal* manifestation of a human society" (p. 117). Using linguistic discourse analysis of policy and public media texts (such as newspaper articles), these authors observe a homogenisation tendency. They moreover claim that homogeneity is not only a recognisable process on a descriptive level, but functions as a norm or even *the* norm for what is perceived as a 'normal society' in the public discourse.

> 'Homogeneism' is seen as the dominant ideology that directs our thinking about foreigners. Through the abnormalisation of the foreigner, it contains an *a priori* rejection or problematisation of diversity. […] Foreigners disturb the existing order, they threaten the *status quo*, their presence alone already turns them into a problem. (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998, p. 147)

The attempts to homogenise the group of migrants – which seems to hold for irregular migrants as well – thus emanate from a defensive reflex. This attitude expresses a fear towards the unexpected, the new and the unknown; towards whatever may change or possibly damage what has been established.

This 'homogenisation critique' adds a different perspective to the question of 'how many irregular migrants are there?'. The contribution of estimations to bring about 'reliable information' (cf. supra) for dealing with problems related to irregular migration seems to be limited. The repeated search for numbers hardly reveals anything about the particular living circumstances and social practices. The importance of looking at these was already stressed above. Estimations are, by definition, an expression of the homogenisation tendency mentioned earlier. What is at stake concerns attempts to 'grab' the current state of affairs concerning irregular migration and possible changes. Numbers help to 'get an overview' and in that sense to 'control' what is happening. Does the apparent 'love for numbers' in Western societies not refer to the dominant presence of a rationale that divides the world into *us* and *them* and continuously seeks for 'ownership'? Numbers become the tools to realise that ownership: quantifying reality becomes synonymous with objectifying reality i.e. gaining control over the world surrounding us.

3.4   The educational solution beyond demarcations: Inclusive education for the sake of whom? The Roma case

In the foregoing, the homogenisation tendency that is present in policy regarding irregular migrants was outlined. In what follows, the focus will be on education. At first sight, things seem to be somewhat different within the area of education. Educational policymaking is nowadays characterised by a growing tendency towards inclusion. The division between *us* and *them* that is still present in initiatives focusing on integration gives way to an inclusive approach that – as the word expresses it – includes all (Booth & Ainscow, 1998). Divisions are avoided, as they may give cause to different treatments and subsequently to discrimination and/or ethnocentrism. In the current discourse, inclusion heralds a new era in which all are fundamentally equal. Or, as it is defined on the UNESCO website:

> Inclusive education is based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives. Focusing particularly on *vulnerable and marginalized groups*, it seeks to develop the full potential of every individual. The ultimate goal of inclusive quality education is *to end all forms of discrimination* and *foster social cohesion*. (own italics) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009)

The conceptualisation of 'discrimination' is very interesting here. In the past it referred to 'giving a distinguishing judgement' in an esthetical, moral or intellectual respect. An 'undiscriminating' person lacked the power of discernment. Nowadays, the power of discernment is still valued. Yet, in a positive sense it is rather related to the concept 'critical (power)' (cf. the Greek κρίνω: to separate, decide). 'Discrimination,' on the other hand, still requires an ability to make distinctions, but is foremost presented as something

undesirable, as it is associated with racism, unequal treatment and injustice (Dalrymple, 2007). The meaning of this concept has not only shifted, moreover it is put in an ethical context: 'discrimination' implies a position of desirability towards the distinctions that are made and as such it has acquired a negative connotation. Inclusion explicitly breaks with all forms of discrimination, encompassing the distinction between us and them. All are to be included and thus social cohesion is fostered. This view expresses a universal right to education. All children have the right to participate in the educational system, whatever their ethnicity, nationality or residence status. Without going deeper into the discussion to what extent this goal is realised in different European countries so far, the inclusive approach clearly aims at removing distinctions and aims to provide opportunities for all.

The question that remains now, is whether and in what sense homogenisation is still at work in the inclusive view once the distinction between *us* and *them* has disappeared. Above, attempts to homogenise people were explained as expressions of fear towards the unexpected and the unknown, i.e. towards what may change the current state of affairs. That makes this question extremely interesting for education, as (possible) 'change' plays an important role in educational practices, whatever the perspective one takes. In what follows, the leading question will be whether and how 'homogenisation' is or should be still at work in inclusive education initiatives.

Going back to the UNESCO definition of inclusive education, the focus on vulnerable and marginalised groups is very remarkable. It seems to express the opinion that starting from 'all are equal' does not take away the need to define groups when adopting an inclusive policy. UNESCO defines seven 'target groups' considering inclusive education: street children, child workers, child soldiers, children with disabilities, indigenous people, Roma children and rural people (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009). I will now focus on the Roma children. The case of Roma people seems to be particularly interesting for the earlier mentioned reasons: living in an irregular status has to some extent become part of their cultural identity and their willingness to become part ('to be included') of other local communities is often far from evident. Starting from the finding that as many as 50 per cent of Roma children in Europe fail to complete primary education, UNESCO suggests some areas of intervention. The intentions are laudable: Roma children should be able to exercise the right to participate in the school system just like other children. Potential barriers should be taken away. This implies initiatives such as changing the legislation, developing a positive attitude towards Roma people in the schools, creating participation possibilities in decision-making processes, and moreover the empowerment of Roma people to advocate themselves (e.g. through training programmes). Summarising, one could say that everything has to be done to 'include' Roma children in the educational systems that are present in different European countries. An enabling policy that offers opportunities to empower and emancipate oneself is developed. Focusing on particular target groups is only necessary up to the extent that the ideal of inclusion is not yet realised.

Although the proposed initiatives may sound like humble pie, it might be interesting

to have a look at the presuppositions of this view. Divisions are no longer made on the basis of their legal status. Moreover, the distinction between *us* and *them* in any (other) sense seems to be abolished. Homogenisation seems to be absent. 'All children are considered to be fundamentally equal' and that is the starting point of inclusive education. But is this so? And moreover: is it desirable?

A starting point to answer the latter question (that might go against the grain with many, as 'equality' is often considered univocally positive) are brought forward by Roma people themselves in concrete situations. Maybe, the profound disinterest that many social workers encounter when trying to convince Roma to send their children to school should be taken more seriously. The observation that school often 'does not make sense' to Roma, is easily explained in terms of a lacking information and insight in how the school system works or in terms of discrimination. But the latter may be more than an expression of possible barriers in a current state of affairs. To some people, the idea of schooling itself may not make any sense at all. That possibility forces the inclusive idea to show its true face. The sense and importance of schooling for all children is not questioned fundamentally in the current discourse about inclusive education. The distinction between *us* and *them* is overcome under the guise that it is up to 'us' to search our own heart and take the responsibility to 'include' the other. Still, the basic idea is one of in-cluding, i.e. to make the 'other' become part of 'us.' Moreover, the conception of quality that is implicit in talking about a 'quality education for all' seems to be self-evident.

What is at stake in the discussion is not whether schooling makes sense or not. Rather, it is about the self-evidence of the desirability of 'schooling as it is' for all. This becomes very clear in the areas of intervention formulated by UNESCO: all is done to offer (participation) opportunities for Roma people, on the assumption and the expectation that these people are *willing* to participate. Opening up the possibility that this might not be the case shows how homogenisation is still at work within the inclusive view, albeit in a different way than it was before. The 'us vs. them' has made place for a 'we are all one.' The 'them' seems to have disappeared at the cost of an 'us' that exceeds all boundaries. We are willing to include all, but not to accept another perspective. Inclusive education *should* not only include all, it *must* include all – in the child's best interest. The next step might then be to blame the parents who do not take up their responsibility (i.e. their duty) to make use of what is offered. To some extent, this is quite understandable: parents cannot keep their children from enjoying the rights that are attributed to them. Yet, there is more at stake here. Who is not willing to participate in inclusive education, is regarded as obstructive to the realisation of the right to education for all. Thus, the right to education is equated with subscribing to the paradigm of inclusive education. Coming back to the question whether homogenisation is still at work in inclusive education, the answer seems to be a clear 'yes'. The definition of Blommaert en Verschueren of "homogeneism as the abnormalisation of the foreigner as the problematisation of diversity" (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998, p. 147) is no longer tenable though. The current homogenisation in inclusive education works through the *normalisation* of the foreigner. Diversity (e.g. on the cultural or ethnic level) is no longer

seen as a problem, but rather denied to avoid possible forms of discrimination. The discourse on diversity no longer focuses on differences between groups. Differences only matter at the individual level, when the aim is to realise a qualitative education for all, i.e. an education that fits individual needs. This tailor-made education is shaped through an extensive amount of initiatives: from personalisable digital learning environments to 'care coordinators', everything is put in force nowadays to address personal needs in the learning process.

The inclusive paradigm reminds us that individuals are not reducible to a group (e.g. culture, ethnicity, residence status,...) they belong to. These 'groups' are value-loaded categorisations that are socially constructed, which indeed implies risks of undesirable forms of discrimination. What is left after deconstructing these (social) groups, is the particularity of the individual. In the end we are all unique and irreducible to any social category that is 'benchmarking' us. Without wanting to question the truth value of this view, it may be a concern whether one finds fertile soil for education in such an image solely. The factual reality that we indeed *are* all different from one another is crucial for thinking about education. But of equal importance is the insight that educational practice is by definition normative and value-loaded, as a conception of what is more or less desirable is implied in every human interaction. That does not justify former practices, nor does it refute the discrimination critique that is formulated by inclusion advocates. But it does imply that the (factual) uniqueness of every individual may be necessary but is clearly insufficient for educational practice.

Individuals live in communities and they share common beliefs and practices. And apart from the ethical concern with the individual, education is about the initiation in these social beliefs and practices too. Then, the homogenisation in 'we are all the same in that we are all different' becomes problematic again. Individuals cannot be reduced to a group they belong to, but neither can they be reduced to their unicity as an individual. From an educational perspective, shared practices with other people within a community *do* matter. Roma people are a pre-eminent example here. These children cannot just be 'included' in an educational system that is unfamiliar to their social practices and which does not make any sense to them. 'Empowering' the Roma may be a step beyond integration, it does not express a readiness to doubt the (universal) rightness of *us* and our social practices.

The limits of the inclusive paradigm come to light in this contradictory situation. To include everyone paradoxically implies that one imposes her opinion to the other. This is to a certain extent unavoidable: escaping from this paradox is impossible as one cannot apply other criteria than her own. The possibility to do justice to the other appears to be limited. If one is willing to question herself and to come as much as possible towards the other, the consciousness of these criteria is a first step. An openness towards (new) concepts, criteria and categorisations is moreover required. Qualitative data on the social practices of other people may be helpful to achieve this consciousness and to broaden one's own perspective, which may finally lead to a certain level of 'understanding' the other (Smeyers, 2007).

3.5   Conclusion

This article focused on the question whether and how a homogenisation tendency is at work in (educational) policymaking towards irregular migrants. These people are mostly defined in negative terms: people who do *not* have legal documents, who are *not* granted a refugee status, who *cannot* rely on different kinds of social support. They seem to be the remnants of all kind of minorities that fall between the gazes of the social welfare state. The focus on numbers and estimations in research expresses the need of policymakers to get a hold over the state of affairs. Although it concerns people who differ in many senses and who are dealing with very divergent problems and living circumstances, they are all homogenised under the same denominator: 'irregular migrants.' It was argued that the situation is somewhat more complicated within the area of education, where inclusion initiatives are growing. In the inclusive discourse homogenisation is still at work, yet in a less obvious and more subtle way than it was before. The case of Roma proved to be helpful in understanding that homogenisation; as people with a very particular cultural identity they frequently oppose to 'being included' and give expression to the impossibility of an outside position with respect to the inclusive paradigm. But what is left now? Does this imply that inclusion is by definition undesirable or that we should put educational systems as they are conceived of between brackets?

At least some suggestions can be put forward to help policymakers in their attempts to 'do justice' to irregular migrants. First of all, homogenisation is not by definition bad or wrong. Sometimes people want to belong to a group as a means to confirm their own identity. Again, reference can be made to Roma people who often seem to confirm the distinction between 'us' (the *Roma* people) and 'them' (the *gadje* or non-Roma people) rather than blurring it. From the perspective of policymakers, 'grouping' people cannot be avoided, it is often desirable or even required to deal with particular problems. Earlier, reference was made to the danger that this kind of relevant differences may vanish to the background when focussing on the irregular legal status. The remaining question is what is 'relevant' in the latter and what is not. That brings us to a second suggestion. To answer the question which distinctions are relevant for what purpose, different kinds of research are required. Estimating numbers is certainly not a meaningless activity. Yet, to be able to make proper judgements on what problems, characteristics or resemblances are 'relevant', at least a certain level of 'understanding' of social situations has to be achieved. Qualitative research—i.e. research that is looking for 'meaning'—may then be of great help. The size of a problem or phenomenon can be measured and that is relevant to gain an insight in the scope of the required initiatives. But besides this, 'understanding' problems or phenomena implies looking for how those are socially constructed, what meaning people give to them and how they relate to different social practices. This 'understanding' forms a necessary condition to make well-considered choices on which 'groups' are desirable to be distinguished for a purposive and conscious policy.

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Chapter 4

How to make sense of the right to education?
Issues from the case of Roma people [1]

Abstract

In most cases, discussions on the right to education focus on the way access to education can be warranted for all and which aims should be pursued in rather abstract terms. This article approaches the topic starting from the case of Roma people. The particularity of their living circumstances raises the question what it is that we are aiming at when trying to realise a universal right to education for them. After confronting their social practices with the education system, three suggestions are made how to make sense of a right to education. First, the need for a holistic approach towards human rights is expressed. Second, the right to education is thought of in terms of a right to qualification. Finally, an open dialogue of social practices is proposed, as a fixed idea of what the school should look like is not desirable in a multicultural society.

4.1   The right to education

During the last fifty years, a tremendous amount of research has been written on the right to education. Discussions on this topic started with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) which provides a right to education for all (article 26):

> Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

The importance of education is underlined, as it is considered to be a fundamental human right that should be warranted for all. Concerning the basis level it is characterised as free and compulsory and its the goals are defined:

> Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

The right to education is not only an aim of the UDHR, it serves as a means to realise human rights. This is affirmed in the preamble of the Declaration, where it is said that respect for these rights and freedoms shall be strived for by teaching and education. The UDHR has no legal force, but 'should be protected by the rule of law' (ibid., 1948).

This right is affirmed in many other international declarations, agreements and conventions e.g. the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). The UNCRC elaborates the right to education and focuses on the responsibility of the state in realising it (article 28):

> States Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) make primary education compulsory and available free to all; (b) encourage the development of different forms of secondary education [...]; (c) make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means; (d) make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children; (e) take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

This definition of the right to education is already a little more specific. It takes the stance that its realisation should be based on equal opportunity, though it does not further specify the meaning of 'equal opportunities'. Whether this concept refers to a meritocratic stance that focuses on equal starting chances, or rather an egalitarian position that stresses the importance of equal outcomes is not defined and remains open for discussion. The strong focus on the compulsory character of primary education reveals a central focus on

participation. This is reaffirmed in the last task assigned to the States: to take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates. I will return to the issue of the compulsory character of this right later on.

In another article of the UNCRC, the aims of education are specified. The right to education is not only a matter of access (article 28), but also of content (article 29). Education is defined as something that goes 'far beyond formal school to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes of children' (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001). Education should be directed to:

> (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own; (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin; (e) The development of respect for the natural environment. (United Nations General Assembly, 1989)

This article emphasises the indispensable interconnected nature of the Convention's provisions through a broader ethical framework. A quality of education for all is implied in the message of child-centred education: 'the key goal of education is the development of the individual child's personality, talents and abilities, in recognition of the fact that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs' (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994).

These examples highlight the importance international agreements attach to education as what should be warranted for all. Though they are no tailor-made tools for policymaking, these agreements moreover suggest guidelines to be taken into account when giving shape to education. As argued above, the answer to the question what a universal right to education may encompass remains to a large extent open. Various interpretations give sometimes occasion to the debate what a 'just' education may look like. In the following, a contribution to that debate will be made by looking at the social practices of Roma people. Focussing on the consequences of universal rights for particular groups or in specific contexts can be helpful to see those rights in a different perspective and on a less abstract level. The case of Roma seems to be particularly interesting as their willingness to become part of other local communities is often limited and their norms, values and appreciations vary in many aspects from the dominant culture. The meanings attached to education by many of these people may thus generate interesting and fundamental questions that can be helpful to identify how 'sense is made of' the right to education.

4.2   The case of Roma people

The Roma people, often referred to as gypsies, are a heterogeneous ethnic group who live in many countries all over the world but primarily in Europe. Their history has been one of continued persecution and difficulty as they have always been identified as 'outsiders' to the societal norms of the areas they migrated to. Despite this, their culture has remained nearly unchanged for centuries. Roma people have their own language that does not exist in a written form (the Romani language) and maintain traditional beliefs and customs (Liégois, 2007; Roma, 2008).

Recently, policymakers have a growing attention for Roma people. An interesting example is the EU platform for Roma inclusion that was founded on April 24, 2009 in Prague. The goal of this platform is 'to develop an overall strategic approach towards Roma inclusion at the community level' that starts from 'a need for policies which facilitate access of Roma people to mainstream education, employment and housing'. The platform starts from a research report that describes the current situation of Roma as 'characterised by persistent discrimination – both at individual and institutional level – and far-reaching social exclusion'. There is recognition for the complexity of this problem for which 'there is no quick-fix solution' (European Commission, 2009).

Concerning education, the UNESCO initiatives towards inclusive education are interesting to take a closer look at.[1] These initiatives once more affirm the idea that an inclusive approach is the key to realise granted rights: inclusive education is presented as a means to realise the universal right to education for all. The concept is defined by UNESCO (2009) as follows:

> Inclusive education is based on the right of all learners to a quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives. Focusing particularly on vulnerable and marginalized groups, it seeks to develop the full potential of every individual. The ultimate goal of inclusive quality education is to end all forms of discrimination and foster social cohesion.

With a particular focus on Roma children and starting from the finding that as many as 50 per cent of these children in Europe fail to complete primary education, UNESCO presents some areas of interventions for this group of people:

- developing personal trust with parents and influential Roma members; working actively on the positive attitude of schools and employers: training of Roma teaching assistants, teachers and school administrators;
- providing institutional support and training to Roma NGOs capable of effective advocacy, linking those NGOs to wider regional and national activities and campaigns and strengthening networking across borders to impact on policy processes at the national and EU levels;

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1 UNESCO distinguishes seven 'target groups' considering inclusive education: street children, child workers, child soldiers, children with disabilities, indigenous people, Roma children and rural people. As was mentioned before, the focus in this article will be on Roma children.

- developing a network with other institutions to ensure integrated care;
- creating training, development, internship and funding opportunities for the generation of Roma women and men who will be the future leaders of national and international Roma movements;
- ensuring the fair application of legislation;
- promoting Roma women's access to public institutions and participation in the decision-making processes.

Summarising, one could say that everything has to be done to 'include' Roma children in the quality education that is provided in different European countries. The intentions are laudable: Roma children should be able to exercise the right to participate in the school system just like other children. Potential barriers should be taken away. This implies a proper application of legislation, a positive attitude towards Roma people in the schools, participation possibilities in decision-making processes, and the empowerment of Roma people to advocate for themselves (e.g. through training programmes). Thus it is argued that the right to education for every child should apply for Roma children as well.

4.3   The right to education revisited: some major questions

Although the foregoing may be pretty much straightforward, it is relevant to outline the presuppositions that characterise the various initiatives to 'include' Roma people. The UNESCO definition that was mentioned before states that 'all children are considered to be fundamentally equal', which is the starting point of inclusive education. But it can be questioned whether this is really the case? Moreover, the desirability itself of such a position may be interrogated. In particular practices, Roma people bring forward an interesting perspective on this question. Further ammunition can be found in the profound disinterest many social workers encounter when trying to convince Roma to send their children to school. In the next section, a light will be thrown on three fundamental questions considering (the right to) education. First of all, Roma seem to be obliged to participate in an educational system that is in many cases not meaningful to them. For the sake of whom are we organising and moreover obliging children to participate in education then? The latter leads to another question. To some extent, it is self-evident that rights come with obligations. But does this answer why the right to education gets shape in a particular compulsory practice? How is this compulsory character of education to be justified? Finally, the right to education will be looked at in relation to other rights. The particular living circumstances of irregular migrants raise a more general question: how to deal with situations of discordance between different rights?

4.3.1   Education for the sake of whom?
It is often observed that school is not valued by Roma. This can be explained in various ways such as: a lack of information and insight in how the school system works, that they are subject to discrimination, or that they are confronted with obstacles (cf. supra).

But the foregoing may refer to something more than an indication of possible barriers in the current state of affairs. To some, the idea of schooling itself may not make sense at all. It should at least be understandable that people do not feel very motivated to send their children to school when the degree or certificate one obtains is not helpful to find a job, given an absent legal residence status. And is it not even cynical to encourage children to go to school, if at home they could alternatively be trained into practices that are a lot more useful to survive as Roma (e.g. learning how to build a barrack or how to communicate with welfare workers) or if they could do their bit to get money to survive (e.g. by begging in the street)? This may all too easily seem 'unreasonable' for most of us not familiar with the living conditions of these people, yet at the same time their particular predicament is often pushed aside when talking about a right to education or the child's best interest in more general and abstract terms. The idea that parents should observe children's interests not just for now but for the long run only holds true to some extent. The point I want to make here is not primarily that the worry of bare survival has priority over thinking what is important in a more distant future, but that a closer look on the living circumstances of Roma people and what matters to them in life reveals that 'what is meaningful' is not as universal as it may seem at first sight. Social practices, norms, values and appreciations may differ to a large extent.

This insight indicates that the discussion at stake is not whether schooling as such makes sense or not. Rather, it is about the desirability of the way 'schooling *is conceived of*'. The question 'which *kind of* schooling makes sense?' then comes to the fore. This becomes very clear in the areas of interventions formulated by UNESCO: all is done to offer (participation) opportunities for Roma people, on the assumption and the expectation that these people are *willing* to participate. I will not refer to empirical evidence that supports the argument whether this is the case or not; it goes without saying that there are a number of people—though very well-informed about what education may offer—who are reluctant to send their children to school because they cannot see the point of it. Opening up the possibility that people are not willing to participate in schooling forces the inclusive idea as an approach to realise the universal right to education to show its true face. The sense and importance of schooling for all children is not questioned fundamentally in the current discourse about inclusive education. The classical distinction between *us* and *them* is overcome as it is up to 'us' to search our own heart and take the responsibility to 'include' the other. Still, the basic idea is one of including i.e. to let the 'other' become part of 'us'. The sense and importance of schooling for all children is not questioned in any way when talking about inclusive education. Moreover, the conception of quality that is implicit in talking about a 'quality education for all' seems to be self-evident.

4.3.2 Compulsory rights?

A second fundamental question refers to the compulsory character that goes with the right to education. That children have to attend (primary) school is not only defined in the legislation of different countries, but is also part of international agreements like

the UDHR and the UNCRC (cf. *supra*). To a certain extent, it is self-evident that rights come with duties; realising a right to freedom, for example, implies that individuals do not infringe on other people's freedom. But that does not straightforwardly answer the question why the right to education is translated into a compulsory practice. If one is being willing to participate in the education schools offer, in themselves the realisation of the right to education, it may be expected that one is required to obey certain rules and respect its organisational structure. But the obligation to participate in an institutional translation of a right and the lack of freedom not to 'enjoy' such a right are on a different layer. It implies that one *must* 'consume' or take up the right that is offered. This clarifies that the compulsory character of education needs other forms of justification than merely the idea that 'all rights come with duties'.

It is interesting to relate this discussion to the educational paradox of freedom (or emancipation) vs. control. Whereas the right to education is predominantly put forward as a lever for personal development and emancipation, there seems to be some kind of 'control' at work via its compulsory character. The common argument that education is compulsory 'in the child's best interest' changes the meaning of this interest fundamentally. Apparently, it is decided beforehand that participating in (elementary) schooling will serve the child's interest better than any other initiative, even if the content of that schooling is not further defined and justified. This implies that parents do not have an exclusive right to decide what is best for their children (into what and how their children should be educated) but that the government allows itself to intervene when it judges this to be necessary. Most people will agree with the idea that this is indeed desirable in problematic cases, although what is 'problematic' remains open for discussion. But again, one may question whether this justification holds as well for an educational system that is 'imposed' to *all* children. Compulsory education does not only state that school is good for the child; moreover, it seems to claim that the parents cannot provide an alternative education themselves, let alone decide which educational aims are desirable for their children.[2]

Things are not so straightforward though. The compulsory character of primary education indeed *is* conceived as a way to protect the child and warrant its right to education even if parents do not agree with it. Moreover, the school represents society as it is a tool to initiate children in social practices, customs and beliefs. The argument that there is a societal demand to participate in education in the interest of society may be reasonable. What is taught at school coincides with what is by the majority regarded as important for children. The school then is a place where children get educated to become responsible citizens. The curriculum can be considered as an intersubjective

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2 An important distinction should be made here between compulsory education and compulsory school attendance. The complex but very relevant topic of home education comes into the discussion here. This possible alternative for schooling shows that in most countries, school attendance is not necessarily implied in compulsory education. Parents have the right to teach their children at home. Nevertheless, people doing this are still participating in an educational system: although 'schooling' takes place at home, the aims and contents of the educational process are in most cases defined in the curriculum. As such, the freedom of parents to educate their children in accordance with their own views is limited.

agreement on what should be educated to the child and is based on the social practices of a community. The child's and the society's best interests are not necessarily opposed to each other. Bringing these two interests together and serving both is an important task for curriculum theorists and educationalists that bear the responsibility to 'design' education.

Again, Roma people pose the question whether this is a sufficient argument. Is what is 'commonly' considered to be important for all children as universal as it seems? Or is this just another example of an 'agreement' by a dominant culture that is imposed on minority groups for whom the given 'design' fits less? Is the child's best interest damaged in the case of a Roma family where the parents are not willing to send the child to school? The answer to this question is not so self-evident anymore. Although these people are living in the same environment as many of us (in geographical terms), their way of living is often very different. The right to education is an open opportunity that is offered to people. But compulsory education is an obligation in that it always implies participation in *a particular educational system* – even if freedom of choice between alternatives is offered within that system. If compulsory education is justified on the basis of the argument that the particularity of this educational system reflects an intersubjective agreement, it is required that the discussion of such agreement should remain open and that all can participate in it.

4.3.3   And what about our other rights?

The third question can be summarised in terms of a clash between those rights that are disposed and those which are not. Human and children's rights are presented in coherence with one another (cf. the earlier mentioned 'indispensable interconnected nature' of the CRC), but they are not always provided for. For some rights, the legal residence status is required. Moreover there are often discrepancies between children's and parental rights. This inevitably has a significant influence on the status and meaning of the right to education. In most European countries for example, irregular migrants (Roma people often have an irregular residence status) dispose of basic rights like the right to education and the right to urgent medical care. But as they do not have citizenship, they generally do not dispose of a right to housing nor can they participate in the labour market. This specific situation influences the scope of the right to education. Training for participation in the job market is one of the main goals of education. This shows that rights derive their meaningfulness to a large extent from the coherence with other (human) rights.

The apparent 'gap' between rights is often even more visible when comparing children's rights and parental rights. Children are protected by the UNCRC and get more opportunities than their parents to participate in the society independent of their legal status. The situation is very different for adults, where citizenship is crucial. These sometimes divergent or even conflicting rights may have serious consequences for the family as an autonomous unity for childrearing. A good example is the case of Zlatica Moser, a woman with Serbian roots that was living in Austria since 1991. Initially on a

legal basis, but since 1999 illegally. One day after her son Luca was born in 2000, the Vienna Council for Child Protection gave the order to place the child in a foster home. This decision was motivated by the uncertain financial situation of the mother, partially because of her illegal status. Few time later, parental authority over the child was taken from her and contact was strongly restricted (NJB, 2006). In similar decisions, there is always reference to the 'interest of the child', for which the parents are responsible in first instance. The government intervenes when this interest is harmed. It is remarkable in this example that children can be taken from 'illegal' parents although there is talk of a positive and healthy educational relationship (Defence for Children International, 2008). The rights of the child are protected in every possible way, sometimes at the cost of the parent lacking some of them. Once more, the right to education loses its sense for many of these people. As a lonesome flag in a land of absent rights, it induces distrust rather than being conceived as an opportunity for a different life.

4.4   In search of making sense of the right to education

Three fundamental questions that may be helpful to reconsider the meaning of the right to education have now been outlined. They are strongly interrelated. In the end they all refer to the underlying question whether a (universal) right to education 'makes sense' (to Roma people). Rather than judging this right or its universal pretensions, the task we are faced with is to make sense of the questions that are put forward. The open character of human and children's rights does not only give cause to fuzziness. More positively, it creates opportunities to rethink their meaning over and over again in relation to the particularity of the historically contingent context. The question *whether* a universal right to education makes sense turns into the question *how* to make sense of that right. Based on the Roma case, three suggestions will now be outlined.

4.4.1   A holistic approach towards human/children's rights.
The preceding examples clarified that basic rights cannot be separated from one another. Different articles of international declarations are strongly interrelated within concrete practices. One could say that the human rights framework operates as a horizon that lends meaning to particular rights and their translations into policies. Making sense of universal rights requires seeing these rights in coherence with one another. Thus a holistic approach towards human (and children's) rights is desirable. The aim of human rights is 'to recognise the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family' by 'the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world' (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). This general aim stays quite abstract in these terms. Particular cases such as Roma people or irregular migrants shed another light on the situation and on the broader debate how to realise a worthy life for all. If the right to education is supposed to make sense to all, efforts to meet basic needs have to be made first. To make sense of this right entails more than removing practical obstacles, though they remain important. The struggle for survival will always have

priority over education, whether it be in a developing country or in Western Europe. Research indicates that irregular migrant families face economic difficulties which pose an overwhelming obstacle to participation in education (PICUM, 2008). Schools are confronted with these problems: children attend school irregularly because parents cannot pay the bus, and sometimes they have not washed themselves neither enjoyed breakfast (e.g. Stedelijke Integratiedienst Gent, 2007). Clearly, rights are not entities that can be realised without taking needs into account.

On a policy level, intensive cooperation between different departments is an indispensable prerequisite of this holistic approach. Human or children's rights do not start or stop at the gates of the school. The need for housing, food, clothing and health care enter the school at the moment these children walk into it. Welfare and education are two examples of strongly entangled policy matters. Leaving to carry the can to each other is of not much use in realising basic rights for all. Rights cannot be strictly demarcated. The same holds for policy areas, which stresses the need for cooperation once again.

4.4.2   The right to education as the right to qualification?

The second suggestion concerns a reconsideration of the right to education. In most countries, the right to education is translated into policies that focus on school participation. Access to schooling is held legally enforceable by most countries. Equal opportunities are thus aimed for in terms of starting chances. In Flanders (Belgium) for example the 'Equal Educational Opportunities Decree' [Decreet Gelijke Onderwijskansen] ensures the right to enrol one's child in a school of one's choice: the child cannot be denied access but for practical reasons (such as that there are no longer places available). Schools cannot refuse pupils, and a Commission on Pupils' Rights [Commissie Leerlingenrechten] is established to ensure the legal protection of pupils' rights (Vlaamse Overheid, 2002). The focus in policy is mainly on the protection of the right to have *access* to education (cf. article 28 of the UNCRC), rather than concerning the content of that education (defined in article 29 of the UNCRC).

An interesting example of the gap between both focal points can be found in the relation of education with the right to work. Schools do many things, amongst which preparing children to participate in the labour market. Nowadays, attention for the preparative function of schooling is growing. For the most part, that is a positive observation: school is expected to prepare children for life as an adult, which is one of its major aims. Unfortunately, the course of this preparation is not always without problems. The strong focus on degrees or certificates in the adult life and on the labour market is very striking. The latter implies problems for some people. Irregular migrant children for example can be kicked out of school when they reach the age of 18 because the (children's) right to education no longer applies to them. In some cases, they do not receive an official degree or certificate because of their illegal residence status. And if they do so, they can often not assert this qualification in the labour market for similar reasons. In as far as the right to education is defined in terms of a preparation

for working life, there seem to be some restrictions for these people on the level of applying the obtained certificates.

Given the circumstances, this implies that the right to education should comprise a degree or certificate (that can be asserted later on) if equal opportunities are to be realised. Only if the opportunity to obtain a degree is present, schooling can offer the same emancipation chances to irregular migrant children as it does to other children. Conceptualising the right to education in terms of a right to qualification seems a helpful step in bridging the gap between this present right and the absent right to work for these people. However, there is a further complication. Many critics argue that schooling should be more than merely a preparation for being a professional, let alone for participation in the job market. They refer to the danger of affirming a market-driven thinking in the area of education which is not desirable. The primary focus of education should be the personal development of individual pupils and students, it is argued. Notwithstanding this very pertinent and well-defendable criticism, one cannot escape from the paradoxical situation that this tendency indeed *takes* place and that consequently these children *are* disadvantaged. The danger of supporting a market-driven approach to education is real, but so is the danger to forget about the particular situation of the children at stake. These children and their parents themselves pronounce the expectation towards the school to be a preparation place for working life. Whether this 'voice' should be supported or not, is another question. Final answers with a clear direction will not be given here. On the contrary, it should be stressed that looking for univocal 'answers' to paradoxical situations is not desirable, as this closes a space for dialogue that is required to make sense of the right to education in particular contexts. Although the question whether this right should be redefined in terms of a 'right to qualification' or not remains unanswered, the question in itself contributes to bringing presuppositions and aims of educational policies to the surface which otherwise often remain implicit.

4.4.3   An open dialogue of social practices

Individual (human) rights can never be dispersed or abstracted from the social context in which they are exercised. Every social practice is by definition normative i.e. value-loaded, given that a conception of what is more or less desirable is implied in every human interaction. This insight is crucial for education. The (factual) uniqueness of every individual with her personal needs, beliefs and rights is an important but insufficient component of educational practice (and by extension of educational theory). Individuals live in communities and share common beliefs and practices. Besides the ethical concern with the individual, education is engaged in introducing children into these social beliefs and practices. One cannot be reduced to a group one belongs to, but neither does one coincide with one's uniqueness as an individual. Shared practices with other people within a community are at the heart of education. The case of Roma people is very exemplary here. These children cannot just be 'included' in an educational system that is strange to their own social practices and that does not make any sense

to them. 'Empowering' Roma people may well be a step beyond integration, but it does not express a readiness to doubt the rightness of 'us' and our social practices.

In a multicultural environment that is continuously changing, a fixed idea of what the school should look like is no longer tenable or desirable. Nor can all just be 'included' in the school as it is currently conceived (as is proposed in many inclusive education initiatives towards Roma people, cf. supra). Looking at the social practices of minority groups and trying to understand their (educational) beliefs is a necessary condition to aim at realising the shared practices of a particular society. An interesting example is the ubiquitous resistance to schooling by Roma people because they doubt or disagree with moral values that are being educated in the schools, in particular with respect to sex education (Hasdeu, 2009). If policymakers want to take up the challenge of aiming at a 'shared practice', they will have to acknowledge that the school (being a major social institution) cannot function as a tool for subordination of her participants. Nor can it merely serve individual needs and desires. Rather, an open dialogue between differing social and cultural practices would be a first step in building a school that makes sense to all. To a large extent, this has always been the case. Both the contents of the curriculum and the way education is organised, are largely based on present social practices within the local community. What matters now, is that the discussion concerning both the content and organisational structures remains open and that differences are taken into account. The readiness to learn from the other and a willingness to enter into a dialogue about the things that matter to us, seem to be necessary conditions to provide meaning to the right to education in a multicultural environment.

4.5   Conclusion

This article focussed on possible meanings of a right of education for all. Although international declarations such as the UDHR and the UNCRC give indications how to understand this universal right, the concept remains to a large extent open to different interpretations (Reynaert, Bouverne-De Bie & Vandevelde, 2010). First, the formulation of this right was explored. Subsequently, the case of Roma people was used as a starting point to question both the presuppositions and the obviousness of the dominant interpretation. The finding that well-intended initiatives often do not make sense to these people brings the question on the agenda what we are exactly aiming at when trying to realize a universal right to education. 'Inclusive' initiatives in some way or another always try to 'in-clude' the other, which implies a process of normalisation of the 'other' that becomes part of 'us'. Rights are paradoxically provided through compulsory education: the obligation to participate in an educational system is supposed to be emancipatory. Moreover, this right is often looked at in isolation from other rights. Children dispose of a right to education meanwhile they do not enjoy proper living conditions; they are not citizens in the true sense of the word due to an irregular residence status; or they have rights that are sometimes opposed to (lacking) parental rights.

Finally, three suggestions were made in an attempt to 'make sense' of a universal right to education. First, a holistic approach towards human rights was proposed as basic rights are strongly entangled with one another in particular practices. Secondly, the thesis that it would make sense to understand this right in terms of a right to qualification was brought to the fore. There are no clear-cut answers to this complicated question. Nevertheless it proved to be helpful in bringing at light the—often implicit—aims of educational systems en policies. To conclude, the importance of an open dialogue of practices was underlined. To be conscious of the normative character of whichever social practice is a prerequisite of a critical look in the mirror and the readiness to go into dialogue with practices that are foreign to one's own. An attempt to build a school that 'makes sense' to all requires an open mind towards the idea that minority groups have something to offer to the dominant culture too. What is at stake is a willingness to learn from the other and a readiness to change instead of holding on unreservedly to one's own beliefs. In a rapidly globalising society, this step beyond homogenisation seems a desirable one to take. Then, the ideal of a universal right to education can be reconsidered too: in dialogue with one another.

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Chapter 5

The Roma people: Problem or mirror for Western European societies?
An exploration of educational possibilities [1]

5.1   Introduction: a changing societal context

The presence of the Roma in Europe is not a recent phenomenon. However, since 2000, Western European countries have been faced with a significant increase of Roma newcomers. This is primarily due to the annexation of twelve new, Central European and Eastern European countries to the European Union in 2004 and 2007, some of which have large Roma populations (Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania). These annexes established Western Europe's economic influence in Eastern Europe and also offered more freedom of movement between citizens of member states within the expanded Union. Like other migrants, the Roma have benefited from new opportunities to travel freely from Eastern European countries of origin towards Western Europe, where they tend to settle in the cities.

The present migration streams of Roma bring about quite a public debate. Despite the fact that the actual numbers are low[1] if one compares Romani migrants with that of other migrant groups, discussions are heated. Media coverage primarily focuses on Roma's supposed inherent criminality or their poor living conditions. In almost every case, the Roma are considered to be a problem: from a societal perspective, the Roma are hard to understand and their integration into mainstream society does not go smoothly. Although European policymakers continuously commit themselves to action, they seem incapable of determining what action should look like.

In this chapter, three dominant perspectives on the construction of the Roma image will first be addressed. The Roma are typically presented as a criminal, cultural, and poverty problem (Lucassen *et al.*, 1998; Vermeersch, 2007). The attention then shifts to European policy strategies developed to deal with the 'Roma problem(s)'. The predominance of an inclusive discourse directed at Roma as a particular target group raises some questions of how this group can be defined and identified. Moreover, this approach reflects a tension between a wish to work inclusively while considering the need for target group-oriented measures. Thus, the way Western Europe deals with the Roma serves as a mirror for European societies and may be a helpful step-up to reflect on what is to be achieved when developing a Roma-specific social policy. Possible meanings of 'inclusion' are discussed, which finally leads to an exploration of more desirable ways to address differences.

5.2   Roma: a 'problem' for our societies

The exact number of Romani people migrating to Western Europe is unknown. Particular groups and populations move to specific places, and although the causes for movement can be retrospectively understood, they are almost impossible to predict. It is not only the unpredictability of migrations that cause many policymakers in Western Europe to act defensively: the Roma themselves are often perceived as a threat. Too often

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1 According to the 2010 data, the average estimate of Roma in the EU is 5,907,800 or 1.18 per cent. See OSCE (2010). *Recent Migration of Roma in Europe*. Available at: http://www.osce.org/hcnm/78034.

the assumed problematic character of the group is the starting point for much of the discourse on the Roma. Social problems, however, are not neutral facts: a phenomenon or a group is defined and treated as a problem, while it actually only appears as such within a particular discursive configuration and is therefore socially constructed[2]. In the next section I will clarify and exemplify the three predominant discourses on Roma as mentioned above.

5.2.1   The Roma: a criminality 'problem'

European mainstream media frequently report on the Roma. Often, news flashes on television or in newspapers refer to the involvement of Roma in criminal activities such as theft, robbery, burglary, squatting in abandoned houses, irregular and illegal work, and prostitution. Neighbours are interviewed and nearly always present complaints about noise and litter. In some places, those practices are almost systematically linked with the Roma. Begging is another practice which increasingly is becoming criminalised. Although in most countries begging is legally allowed (albeit under certain restrictions, e.g. not for children; without approaching people offensively; not when participating in organised criminal networks), beggars are criminalised and accused of delinquent activities.

News coverage plays right into the hands of (extreme) right wing politicians and their grassroots support who plead for a more repressive approach to deal with the problems at stake, and who castigate the Roma who are identified with those problems. However, (official) data on criminality amongst Roma is lacking. Of course, illegal employment, abuse of women and children and other criminal activities should be denounced and require police action, but other groups of people also are involved in these practices both as victims and offenders. Despite their relatively high proportion in the population, it is erroneous to identify the Roma with particular criminal activities. Some Roma are involved in criminal activities in some way or another, but they as such *are not* a criminality problem.

5.2.2   The Roma: a cultural 'problem'

A recognition of the complexities of 'Romani culture'[3] problematises the stereotyping of the entire group, which often slips into references to the presumed gap between the values and norms of the Roma and (Western) civil societies. Statements made by Belgian lawyer Vic Van Aelst while defending a 34-year-old Roma who was charged with

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2 For a more elaborate discussion on how social problems are constructed and come to existence see Fuller, R. (1941). The natural history of a social problem. *American Sociological Review, 6,* 320-328; Fuller, R. & Myers, R. (1941). Some aspects of a theory of social problems. *American Sociological Review, 6,* 24-32; Truman, D.B. (1951). *The Governmental Process*. New York: Alfred Knopf; Rubington, E. & Weinberg, M.S. (Eds.) (1995). *The Study of Social Problems. Seven Perspectives*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Jamrozik, A. & Nocella, L. (1998). *The Sociology of Social Problems: Theoretical Perspectives and Methods of Intervention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3 Although the heterogeneity of 'Romani culture' is increasingly recognised by scholars (e.g. Willems, 1995; Liégois, 2007; Tremlett, 2009) and it would in that sense be more appropriate to talk of 'Romani cultures', this influence remains largely absent in popular discourse where 'the Roma' are mostly defined as a homogeneous ethnic or cultural group with proper characteristics.

repeated thefts exemplify this point: 'My client comes from a culture where stealing is learned at the mother's knee' and 'he was educated with different principles than us'. Van Aelst continued that 'it is an educational problem which has become rooted in their culture; the only way to help those people is by taking them away from this criminal structure'. Finally, he added that 'I am not opposed to gypsies, because if that be the case then why would I defend them?' (Desloover, 2011, p. 7). The cultural prejudices against Roma are so engrained that even a lawyer who was defending a Romani client offered a cultural explanation for his client's alleged criminal activity.

The example above sounds rather extreme. Still, there is a large public support for the idea that the Roma do not fit in society's accepted norms and habits. There is often the talk of unbridgeable differences between Romani culture and dominant societies or even a complete absence of values and norms in Roma culture. Characteristics like laziness, social maladjustment, non-conformism, and asocial behaviour are generalised as cultural features. This cultural fatalism may lead to a defeatist attitude in at least two ways: the Roma integration into mainstream society is deemed impossible, while simultaneously marking them as 'victims' of their own culture.

But it is not only critics who name cultural differences as a possible cause for 'the Roma problem.' Even social advocates note with concern that Roma youth often are not provided with guidance and structure that would be deemed appropriate for their age. For example, youth centres in Ghent, Belgium are inundated with children ages 6 to 12 who come knocking on the door at night to participate in activities organised for older children and youngsters. Youth workers welcome the children, but recognise possible objections to including them with older children. Research shows that small children copy the behaviour of older youngsters, which may be considered undesirable at their age: they may use make up, dress provocatively or flirt with each other[4]. An underlying cause for this phenomenon is the fact that many young children are walking the streets unaccompanied late at night, a practice that is not uncommon amongst local Roma communities. The task of youth centres 'to get children off the streets' then is in tension with the perspective that, as a matter of fact, these children should be at home and should go to bed on time. The question remains though whether this example proves the Roma to be a problem or rather a mirror for the assumptions taken for granted in Western societies (e.g. children are not supposed to be on the streets late at night).

5.2.3 The Roma: a poverty 'problem'

A third dominant discourse relates to the miserable circumstances that many Roma live in. This discourse is mainly developed by Roma advocates. The claim holds that social problems related to the Roma stem from structural poverty and discrimination. This perspective is also present in the media. Reference is mostly made to bad housing conditions. For example, in the city of Ghent, the Roma gained attention when constructing, previously non-existent, slums (Van Keymeulen, 2009), squatting abandoned houses and university buildings (Van Keymeulen, 2010a) or living in

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4 Personal communication with staff of vzw Habbekrats, Ghent, Belgium on 13 June, 2011.

improvised tents next to the highway (Van Keymeulen, 2010b). But even when the circumstances are not that dire, housing for the Roma often is problematised[5].

The multi-faceted character of poverty affects all life domains. Problematic dimensions are structurally interwoven: poor housing conditions lie at the basis of health problems, which in turn affect school participation, and as such limit opportunities for academic success. The evident consequence is that chances for viable employment are also restricted, which perpetuates poverty once again. Without simplifying the complex connections between these aspects and while recognising the presence of other elements and excluding mechanisms, it is important to emphasise that poverty is not just a matter of lacking financial means. In this regard, the situation of the Roma is highly comparable to other groups living in poverty. Within this approach, 'the Roma problem' can only be solved by tackling the broader societal poverty problem (Ladányi & Szelényi, 2006; Ringold *et al.*, 2004). But does this line of thought hold water? It is a reality that the Roma often live in poverty and that many of the problems they are dealing with stem from this condition. The latter does not imply that fighting poverty will cancel out all social problems the Roma are faced with. A focus on poverty clarifies many present problems that can run parallel with other (im)migrant groups, but nevertheless offers neither a convincing nor an exhaustive frame for the social construction of 'the Roma problem.' The next section will draw attention to policy strategies that are developed to deal with the problems at stake.

5.3   Policy strategies to confront the Roma problem

In recent years there has been a lot of attention in Europe for the Roma. *The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015*, for example, was initiated in order to bring European and national authorities, NGOs and the Roma together (Open Society Roma Initiatives, 2011). The aim of the initiative is to improve the socio-economic status and living circumstances of Roma in Europe through inclusion. The starting point for the initiative is based on the fact that the current situation for the Roma in Europe is characterised by social exclusion and persistent discrimination on the individual and institutional level (European Commission, 2009). One of the first and major steps in this regard was the formulation of *The ten common basic principles on Roma inclusion* at the first meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion in Prague in April 2009. These principles serve as common ground for the policy towards Roma in each of the member states: policies must be constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory, starting from 'explicit but not exclusive targeting', and shaped from an intercultural approach with attention to active participation (European Commission, 2011).

More recently, the attention shifted towards the responsibility of the member states. The *EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020* (European Commission, 2011) focuses on target-oriented actions in four areas: education, the labour market, health care, and housing. European institutions investigate whether

5 See, for example, the large discussions on the Dale Farm eviction in Essex, UK, October 2011.

member states fulfil their obligation to develop a targeted policy in accordance with the ten common basic principles of Roma inclusion, provide an optimisation of the use of European funds, and develop a proper monitoring system. The *European Platform for Roma Inclusion* has a more central role too. It is expected to create opportunities for deliberation between different stakeholders and Roma representatives in particular. Simultaneous with the preceding initiatives, an expanding range of Roma NGOs, such as The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and the European Roma Information Office (ERIO), are gaining importance, and in various Western European countries authorities call upon their expertise to shape national policy.

Belgium missed the January 2012 deadline set by the European Council for establishing the national strategy for Roma inclusion. Still, an initiative was taken at the regional levels: the Flemish government outlined the *Coordinated, Local, Inclusive Flemish Policy towards Central and Eastern European (Roma) Immigrants* in December, 2010 (Bourgeois, 2010). This policy document focuses on 'the Roma problem', defined in terms of uncertain residence status, social marginalisation and a difficult integration process. Emphasis is on the local level, since the immigration of Roma in Flanders is mainly visible in certain cities and municipalities that experience a large influx of people.

The foregoing could suggest a harmony between different policy levels. The EU shapes the format in which national governments can develop a Roma policy. Those policies in turn leave a lot of space for local authorities to respond to specificities in the local context. In this narrative, 'specific but not exclusive targeting' is the starting point for the realisation of Roma social inclusion. This guiding principle, which is repeatedly referred to in multiple policy texts at different levels, is rather ambiguous. Mostly, it remains unclear what 'specific' is referring to. The title of the Flemish policy exemplifies this matter and explicitly expresses the reluctance to call its target group by name. Is this policy directed towards Central and Eastern European immigrants in general or the Roma in particular? Does 'European' refer to the EU or are Roma from, say, Kosovo or Serbia also included? These questions bring us back to a fundamental issue: who exactly are policymakers talking about when using the word 'Roma'?

5.4   'The Roma': fact or fiction?

There is a lot of confusion in the discussion of who is and who is not covered under the term 'Roma' (Liégois, 2007; Willems, 1995), and while the question itself may appear baffling, its answer has major implications on how a social policy in relation to a large migration flux from Eastern and Central to Western Europe *could* and *should* be developed[6]. Terms with varying connotations such as Gypsies, Travellers, Sinti, Voyageurs, and Manuches are mixed up and used interchangeably. Recently

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6   It must be stressed that this chapter focuses on the Western European context, where nation states see themselves confronted with large groups of newcomers stemming from Eastern and Central Europe. European policy levels are in general directed towards the European Union as a whole; a possible critique thus does not necessarily hold true for Eastern European countries, which struggle with different and not always comparable situations and circumstances.

arriving groups of Eastern European immigrants who squat in many Western European cities barely have any connections with 'traditional' Travellers who have been living for several generations in caravans within a limited geographical space (e.g. communities in England and Ireland, as well as France and the Netherlands). As researchers, policymakers, and advocacy groups acknowledge, the umbrella term 'Roma' incorporates significant differences. The question of what is still common in 'being Roma' is less and less clear. Historians generally agree on the Indian roots of 'the Roma' (e.g. Fraser, 1992; Guy, 2001). Although linguistic connections prove a link for many groups, applying this criterion would be exclusive as this is not the case for *all* groups of people who are being identified or identify themselves as 'Roma'. As Matras (2004, p. 53) states, 'the connection between the Romani language and the languages of India has no bearing at all on the history and origin of Irish Travellers, and probably little and only indirect significance for an understanding of the culture of the German or Swiss Yenish, to name but two examples out of many.'[7] Genetic research also stresses the heterogeneity of Roma populations (Kalaydjieva *et al.*, 2010)[8]. Another line of argument understands the Roma as a particular culture. Defining factors that are often mentioned are an alleged nomadic lifestyle and a proper language (*Rromani* or *Romanès*). However, both of these arguments are widely criticised. For example, it is said that 'a vast majority' of European Roma live more or less sedentary (Lee, 1998)[9] and although *Rromani* is the mother tongue of many, there still is a large proportion of Roma who do not speak or even know this language (Bakker *et al.*, 2000).

The old 'Roma schema' we have in mind does not make sense anymore. Cultural similarities, a nomadic lifestyle, and a proper language are all characterising properties for distinctive groups. But none of them (still) is a binding factor for the broader group of people called Roma. Some researchers recognise this and shift their focus to socio-economic arguments (e.g. Ladányi & Szelényi, 2006; Ringold, Orenstein & Wilkens, 2004) that hold that what binds the Roma are no longer cultural characteristics but specific— in this case dire—living circumstances. From a policy perspective, this approach offers more opportunities, although it does not hold for all the Roma. More importantly, it is questionable whether the distinction between the Roma and the broader group of people living in poverty is not completely redundant and irrelevant.

In my role both as a researcher and a volunteer in the field, I recognise differences between some Roma groups and other migrants or the autochthonous population: those are not fictitious. From a policy perspective, the question though is whether it is viable to identify those groups with the general term 'Roma'. The example of Ghent, Belgium clarifies the point. A few thousand Roma live in this city. Almost all of them

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7 Concerning this discussion, I agree with the view developed by Annabel Tremlett (2009) who distinguishes between hybridity and heterogeneity.

8 Luba Kalaydjieva and colleagues (2010) describes the Roma who live in Europe 'as a conglomerate of genetically isolated founder populations', highlighting the internal diversity of the Roma.

9 Hemetek (2001) estimates that about 95 per cent of the Roma in Europe live sedentary, which is a frequently used number in popular discourse. Liégois (2007) provides an estimation of 20 per cent 'nomads' and a similar percentage of 'semi-nomads'.

come from Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania. Clear dividing lines can be drawn between the groups originating from these countries. Their motives of migration are to a certain extent different, and so are their living circumstances, habits, integration patterns, and survival strategies. Remarkably, there is hardly any communication between the three groups. The Bulgarians, for example, seek alliance with the large Turkish (non-Roma) community, which has been present in the city since the 1970s. Generally, these are Turkish-speaking Bulgarians who are employed and housed by Turkish immigrants. Their working and living conditions are in many cases abominable, but compared with other Roma they use social services far less. Slovaks (mostly coming from Košice and the surrounding area) have more difficulty finding jobs and depend more on the social security system. They generally have big families (up to ten or twelve children) and often live in miserable circumstances in squats. The Romanians live in a smaller, rather close-knit community where travelling back and forth between their place of origin (the city of Oravița and its surroundings), Ghent, and other European cities is common. Their major source of income is begging in the streets. Most of the money collected is sent to their home country in order to financially support their families and children who mostly stay there. They generally have no ambitions to build up a life in Belgium or to integrate into mainstream society.

Certainly, what is said above at a group level does not account for every individual Bulgarian, Slovak or Romanian Roma living in Ghent. Neither is it suggested that dividing people by their nationality or country of origin is more desirable than ethnic or cultural categorisation. While I am not arguing that there is no such entity as 'Roma', it is clear that defining the concept or the group it is supposed to identify is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Still, this identifying marker seems to be the starting point of most policies. A univocal answer to the question of who exactly is the 'target group' of the earlier mentioned 'explicit but not exclusive targeting' is unavailable. As a consequence, the Roma appear as a social construct through those policy texts: Roma *are* what and how they are defined. It is in these documents and forthcoming initiatives that the Roma are called *as such*, that is, a unifying term applied to many groups who do not identify themselves with one another, and in many cases—even within local spatial contexts—hardly communicate with each other. It is questionable, then, why policymakers have decided to name particular groups of people 'Roma' and, more importantly, whether making this target group a focus for policy initiatives is opposed to the inclusive approach they are promoting. The question emerging here is, who defines whether someone is 'Roma' or not? And what is the legitimacy of those rather arbitrary decisions? Certainly, this conceptualisation explains something about the social position attributed to the Roma by those using this concept (i.e. policymakers in the first instance, but scientists, journalists and opinion makers as well). Unavoidably, it implies a form of particularisation: the term 'Roma' suggests the existence of 'non-Roma' and as such distinguishes characteristics to mark boundaries between both. Apart from the question of whether Roma *can* be distinguished as such, it is more questionable

whether it is *desirable* to do so. The Roma thus hold up a mirror for societies and confront them with how they deal with differences.

5.5   The Roma: A mirror for our societies

5.5.1   Inclusion as an aim or a starting point?

As argued in the foregoing, a first reason not to particularise Roma in policy is of a pragmatic nature. It concerns the finding that this group has hardly any identifiable characteristics and no longer seems to refer to a form of homogeneity[10], let alone a relevant one for policy. But there is a second, more fundamental reason of a political nature. The realisation of inclusion is supposed to establish a change of mind and mentality. At stake are complex problems of coexistence permeated by an 'us vs. them' discourse. It is exactly this opposition between Roma and the civil society that should be combatted when pursuing social inclusion[11]. This cannot be realised if Roma are identified with order maintenance, or with cultural problems, or with unworthy living conditions, whatever may be the good intentions of the people doing so. Nor can it be realised by the Roma who are stressing the irreconcilable differences between themselves and civil society. It is moreover highly doubtful whether a policy focusing specifically on this target group may fulfil the promise of breaking through this opposition. As long as policymakers keep looking at the Roma as a distinct group requiring a particular policy, they will contribute to the social particularisation and separation of the Roma. The status of the Roma as 'different' then risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Under such conditions, discrimination and racism will not only survive but will gain solid soil and legitimacy.

From the social and educational policymaking perspective, it seems more fruitful to contribute to social inclusion by no longer naming Roma as such (i.e. taking inclusion as a starting point rather than an aim to strive for), but by making the choice to appeal to their citizenship. Citizenship involves a mutual engagement: citizens dispose of rights, which authorities are expected to provide and warrant. Meanwhile, citizens are supposed to respect democracy and forthcoming legislation. The latter does not exclude an openness for people to live their own culture. Still, I do argue that cultural features should not be the departure point of a social policy if 'inclusion' is decisively chosen for. Yet, that is exactly what is happening in initiatives to promote inclusive education for Roma children. In its position paper on the topic, UNICEF states that 'Roma children' require a specific approach, based on 'the disadvantage Roma children suffer in every aspect of schooling'. Reference is subsequently made to low enrolment

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10 Still, and as Tremlett (2009) strikingly points out, even renowned academics from Romani studies seeking to highlight the heterogeneity of Roma minorities are guilty of homogenising 'the Roma' through the discourse they develop.

11   For a more detailed discussion on inclusion see, for example, Hemelsoet, E. (2011). Questioning the Homogenization of Irregular Migrants in Educational Policy: From (Il)Legal Residence to Inclusive Education, *Educational Theory, 61*(6), 659-669 and Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (1998). *From Them to Us: An International Study of Inclusion in Education*. London: Routledge.

and retention, high drop-out rates, poor educational achievement and gender-based differences. Ensuring access to quality education and respect for rights within the learning environment are expected to alleviate those shortcomings (UNICEF, 2011). The mobilisation of Roma mediators, specialised Roma culture courses for teachers, Romani lessons within schools, and information sessions to involve parents are only some of the many practices employed to reach those goals. But *who* is exactly including who in this story? And *what* exactly are children being included in?

As a response to these questions, the 'us vs. them' tendency against which advocates and policymakers are willing to fight surprisingly seems to be present *within* the inclusive discourse[12]. Clearly, it is major stakeholders who define 'the Roma' as a target group of their initiatives, therefore installing (or at least affirming) a homogenising category to name heterogeneous groups of people. Consequently, *they* say 'the Roma' require specific action in order to be included—or should I say incorporated?—in the educational systems of mainstream society. Without being too negative about the positive intentions and initiatives taken in order to warrant basic rights such as the right to education for Roma children, questions should be asked about the purpose of Roma inclusion and how the underlying ideal can be best promoted.

The major concern of the EU in relation to education is to 'ensure that all Roma children complete at least primary school' (European Commission, 2011). This statement suggests an interest in the presence of Roma children in schools, rather than a willingness to reflect on how education can become possible for children for whom education is inaccessible. A look in the mirror and the forthcoming self-reflection—which does not imply an opposition with this or any other identifiable group!—may offer opportunities to further explore how differently to conceive of inclusion.

5.5.2   An exploration of educational possibilities: the right for self-identification

Within the framework of this chapter it is impossible to develop a comprehensive theory on more desirable ways to deal with differences, but some possibilities could be explored preliminarily. First, from a social policy perspective, it does not seem fruitful or desirable to approach Roma as a distinct group. Current classifications based on ethnicity or culture are not satisfying, and each of the present societal views implies the dangers of stereotyping and homogenisation. If in the end what most clearly defines the Roma is their distinctiveness (the us vs. them thinking), there are good reasons to counterbalance that opposition rather than feeding it. Some critics (e.g. Acton, 2004) will argue there is a trap here: one may run the danger of failing to recognise Roma identity or culture and the problems with which the Roma struggle. Whilst I do not want to deny (the possibility of) the existence of a Roma identity, I contend that within local contexts and with all due caution, a social policy confronting problems of criminality and poverty should focus on the structural factors contributing to criminality and poverty.

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12 For an elaboration of this point and the idea that there is a homogenising tendency in current policymaking towards Roma and irregular migrants, see Hemelsoet , E. (2011).

This may imply an engagement with a clearly demarcated group of people struggling with a very particular problem, but identifying large groups with those problems in a generalising way has far-reaching consequences, which in turn give reason to different forms of discrimination. In the end, the fact that the Roma are historically and structurally subjected to discrimination and racism may appear to be their most defining characteristic from which the multiple social problems flow. But this is not a profound base for recognition, as stressing this inevitably leads to a 'problematisation' of Roma (culture) and fuels further discrimination. On the other hand, recognition is of great value and approaching people from an inclusive view should not imply a denial of its importance. This brings me to Roma identity and Roma culture. At a sociocultural level, support should be provided for groups of people who identify themselves as being part of a particular (cultural) community. If that is the case for local Roma groups, which may indeed appear to be very close-knit communities, recognition is appropriate as it is for other groups. The claim for recognition is thus translatable to a right for self-identification. In the latter case, recognition signals more than merely stereotyping, labelling or a construction of self-fulfilling prophecies.

This applies to education as well. If inclusive education is an aim, present differences amongst children should be taken as a starting point. The primary question then becomes whether 'what we include in' makes sense to the people to whom it is directed. What meaning is attributed to education by those who do not participate in the educational system, whether Roma or some other group? How can education bridge the gap between non-participating groups and the educational system? This is not merely a particular story: as an answer to these questions, reference may be made to a Roma (or any other) culture. Community certainly does matter as people share common beliefs and practices. But once again, it is up to people to decide who and what values they identify with while also respecting the legal conditions of the society in which they live. From an educational perspective, researching those practices, beliefs and attributed meanings is of major importance for a proper understanding of the situations at stake. Policymakers can and should take the forthcoming insights from such research as a starting point to develop a (inclusive educational) policy based on the 'right to self-identification'. This is the question emerging from the mirror 'the Roma'[13] hold up to mainstream society: who is to define the Roma and to decide what is in their best interests? Some modesty seems necessary if one is willing to grant 'recognition' to the people who are at stake and grapple with the meaning such recognition deserves.

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13 I apply here the term 'Roma' with reference to the social construct which is to a great extent constructed by Gadje or non-Roma.

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Chapter 6

Positioning the educational researcher through an autoethnographical account: On the edge of scientific research, political action and personal engagement [1]

Abstract

Ethnographic fieldwork is subject to a number of tensions regarding the position of the researcher. Traditionally, these are discussed from a methodological perspective, and draw attention to the consequences of various degrees of involvement in the process of knowledge-building. Approaching the issue from a different angle, this article provides a reflection on the positionality of the researcher through an autoethnographical account based on fieldwork with socially excluded groups. Rather than reflecting on (dis)advantages of proximity for the research process, it explores from a personal stance how this role interacts with other roles in the researcher's life (e.g. being a volunteer, a citizen, an advocate, a moral being, etc.). Raised awareness about this intrinsic positionality of the researcher calls for a situated conceptualisation of professionalism and science. The author furthermore explores how an autoethnographical approach relates to educational research, and substantiates the educational meaning of autoethnography for science in general.

6.1   Introduction

> […] I cannot drop the feeling that this matters. It seems so important, what we are
> doing here for these people: to give them what they need most, to provide them
> what is most indispensable for their bare survival. This is what makes a difference in
> people's lives, and isn't that what it is all about: to make a difference? But still, I feel
> uncomfortable and I am wondering what I am doing here. This is supposed to be
> my work. Am I not the researcher, who is not merely the volunteer he was before?
> And are the things we are doing here not against the grain of everything I have
> learned as an educator and social worker: that this kind of 'help' is not helpful at
> all…? It only further affirms people's dependence of what is supplied to them free
> of obligations and thus restricts their emancipation rather than supporting it. That
> is not just theory, it is as well what I have painfully come to recognise by my own
> experience throughout the past few years: that in the end, for many of them, not
> much of their situation changes. Maybe I am just too involved, and I lose some of
> the distance that is required for the researcher to get a clear and nuanced overview
> of things. Was that not also what it was all about? (Field notes of voluntary work in
> the weekly food distribution for irregular migrants in a local charity organisation)

Doing ethnographic research and participatory fieldwork is unavoidably bound up with
questions on the position of the researcher (e.g. Gobo, 2008; Hastrup, 2001; Okely, 2001;
Salzman, 2002). Discussions related to this situatedness may vary in form and occupy
a broad range of discursive manifestations, but are omnipresent in the history of both
ethnography and qualitative inquiry at large. Recently, postmodernist approaches by, for
example, feminist (e.g. Lather, 2007), anti-racist (e.g. Dei & Gurpreet, 2005), postcolonial
(e.g. McLeod, 2000) and indigenous scholars (e.g. Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) have gained
influence. These express an increasing awareness of the untenability of the myth of
the positivistic, invisible researcher-narrator (Hastrup, 1995), as "the notion of a neutral,
objective researcher was destabilised and deconstructed decades ago," and it must
be recognised that "knowledge and understanding are historically and contextually
grounded" (De Graeve, 2012, p. 16). In other terms, and with distinct focuses, related
discussions on the position of the researcher are carried on with regard to the relation
between researchers, practitioners and/or research subjects (e.g. Boog, Coenen, Keune,
& Lammerts, 1998; Brinkmann, 2007; Gitlin, 1990; Wagner, 1997). Opinions vary on
how these relationships should be conceived of within particular research settings
and who will benefit from which kind of research. Depending on the answer to this
question, close, almost intimate cooperation or more limited forms of engagement will
be preferred. This includes discussions on the desirability of various forms and degrees
of participation based on efficiency arguments (participation as a tool for achieving
better outcomes), and equity and empowerment arguments (participation as a
process that enhances the capacity of individuals to improve or change their own lives)
respectively (Cleaver, 2001). Other studies reflect upon power dynamics, which are an

unavoidable and essential part of social research (e.g. Nader, 1995; Priyadharshini, 2003; Sassen, 2000). Questions with regard to both the extent to which and how participants should be involved remain in abeyance, and continue to cause a lot of disagreement among scholars. There is growing consensus though that "science is no longer seen as disinterested and value-free," and that it "reveals itself as a performative intervention" (Smeyers, 2006, p. 483). The insight that "research projects are interventions in the lives of researchers and practitioners" (Wagner, 1997, p. 14) deserves attention in the research process. Within various action research traditions, this is further radicalised (e.g. Day, Elliot, Somekh, & Winter, 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Action research not only recognises the idea of interventionism, but moreover intends it. Action and reflection are brought together "in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4).

This article provides a reflection on the positionality of the researcher throughout an autoethnographical account based on a fieldwork study with socially excluded groups. It thus subscribes to a tradition that decidedly and deliberately places autobiographical reflections at the heart of the research process (Ellis, 2004, 2007; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ellis, Holman Jones, & Adams, 2013; Holt, 2003; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Spry, 2001). "Central to this process is coming to terms with our own ambivalence regarding our status as academics" (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012, p. 289) in the field. That implies that reflections not only concern our work but also our personal life, in such a way that who we are as a person is also scrutinised and critiqued (Ellis, 2004). In that sense, it implies a particular openness and it involves the exploration of moments of 'vulnerability' in which we expose ourselves to the intimate process of establishing and negotiating relationships in the field (Behar, 1997; Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012).

Two occasions in particular appealed when deciding on an autoethnographical approach. First, there was the personal trajectory of my PhD research project, in which charity, advocacy and scientific work were closely knit, but were nonetheless often in tension with each other. That experience strengthened the belief that dealing with the often complicated confrontation between personal engagements and theoretical insights would have to form an indispensable part of the research project itself in order to give it a place both in scientific knowledge-building and in my personal life. Second, the Ellis *et al.* (2008) edited transcript of a special conference session that was published in *Qualitative Inquiry* provided a particular direction to do so. In that contribution, leading scholars in the field reveal the relevance of such personal narratives for research. Throughout their apparently trivial stories, it is shown that there is something very unsatisfying about just making a rational case, as this "takes away the experience" (Ellis *et al.*, 2008, p. 257). The suggestion that the question "What will qualitative inquiry become?" is in fact a political question—which is moreover in the hands of young researchers (see Ellis *et al.*, 2008, p. 279)—closely links to my own research experiences. The challenge of giving an answer to that question, and to the evocation directed to

young interpretive/participatory/activist qualitative researchers, is the gauntlet I want to take up in this contribution.

Obviously, my ambition is not only to find answers to the personal struggle I am dealing with when trying to position myself in a 'field' that in the end appears to be my own life world. As Denzin (1997) writes, "these texts are not just subjective accounts of experience, they attempt to reflexively map multiple discourses that occur in a given space" (p. xvii). With this autoethnographical account, I also hope to contribute to the scientific discussion on the position of the researcher. In particular, I will focus on the way an autoethnographical approach is closely linked with my own background as an educational scientist, as neither put the research subject or the researcher at the heart of inquiry, but rather their mutual interrelation. In so far as autoethnography is only involved with the self, it runs the danger of being overly narcissistic and self-indulgent (Coffey, 1999). But as Spry (2001) puts it, this approach is not situated in a social vacuum: "autoethnographical texts express more fully the interactional textures occurring between self, other and contexts in ethnographic research" (p. 708). I will thus further explore how an autoethnographical approach relates to educational research. Finally, I will argue that autoethnography also has an educational meaning for science in general. Its mirroring function provides opportunities for a down-to-earth move within social sciences. It forces academia to reflect continuously about its proper social embeddedness in relation to ethical concerns (e.g. Etherington, 2007), matters of social justice (e.g. Beck & Maida, 2013; Elliott, 2006; Marullo & Edwards, 2000) and human emotions (e.g. Behar, 1997). For social sciences, the move towards a social reality that it is willing to understand is a desirable one. I will now turn to the story of my own study as a first step to accomplish that challenge.

6.2   The study and occurring tensions

My PhD study was conducted in the period 2007–13 and gives an interpretive account of the meaning of the right to education for Roma children in Ghent, Belgium. This explorative inquiry of present practices consists of intensive fieldwork and aims to contribute to the realisation of this right within a demarcated geographical area. Its explorative character is explained by the fact that there is hardly (if any) previous scientific research available on the topic in Flanders, mainly due to the recent arrival of most Roma residing there. For that reason, the scope of the fieldwork was rather broad in order to gain an integrated overview of practices with regard to the topic of interest, rather than in-depth knowledge of specific practices. In a later stage, some of these practices were further explored. The fieldwork includes a large number of qualitative interviews with relevant stakeholders in the education, integration and welfare sector; participatory observation in a school and in the various activities of other organisations; attendance of relevant meetings and consultations; participation in steering committees and boards; and finally, volunteering in various initiatives. The latter is not merely the consequence of doing research. Quite the reverse: four years

of voluntary work in a local charity organisation that preceded my research project (in combination with my background as an MA in educational sciences) led me to choose this research topic once I started working at the university. This voluntary organisation provides support to refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants by means of social service consultations, weekly food distributions, home visits, and second-hand shops with furniture, clothes, antiques and books. It forms part of an umbrella organisation, which proved to be of great help to build up a network of relevant stakeholders in the fields involved with this "target group." As such, "obtaining an overview of relevant initiatives in the field" occurred rather spontaneously, and "gaining access" to these did not require any added strategies to the voluntary work I had been doing before I began my study. But my pre-existing position in the field was not only accompanied by access advantages; it also incurred some complex tensions that had to be dealt with, both from and between a *professional* and a *personal* perspective.

First and foremost, much of the charitable work does not match, not to say conflicts, with the educational ideals I was initiated into during my university studies. From an educational and social work perspective, charitable work does not contribute to the emancipation of the people involved in a structural way (Marullo & Edwards, 2000), as it is based on voluntariness and it is consequently not enforceable (cf. Buchanan, 1987). Rather than making people autonomous, it is said to run the risk of reaffirming their dependent position and it "typically ends up reproducing the status quo" (Marullo & Edwards, 2000, p. 896). On the principle that "it is better to teach people how to fish than to give them fish," self-leadership, autonomy, empowerment, emancipation and other similar concepts are put to the fore as educational ideals worth pursuing. As such, charity is often contrasted with social justice (for a comparative analysis of these concepts, see Buchanan, 1987). While charity is said to "refer to the provision of help or relief to those in need," social justice "attempts to alter the structural or institutional practices that produce excessive or unjustified inequalities" (Marullo & Edwards, 2000, p. 899); while charity concerns moral acts and private contributions, social justice requires political acts directed at a redistribution of resources and social change. For that reason, a shift from the earlier to the latter is argued for (Marullo & Edwards, 2000), or even said to be an already-achieved attainment of the welfare state throughout its history (Maeseele, 2012). But as expressed in the introductory quote of this article taken from my fieldwork notes, though such a view may be theoretically sound, it is not evidently so in lived, day-to-day experience. Does the desirability of an emancipatory approach seeking structural ameliorations exonerate us from the duty to help those in need in an educationally imperfect, i.e. possibly paternalistic, dependency-affirming way by providing them food, clothes or shelter? Without further turning this issue into an or-or question to be decided upon, it is obvious that the encounter with homeless irregular migrants in a particular situation poses not only methodological and deontological questions, but may moreover confront the researcher with ethical issues that touch upon him or her as a person. There are problems with both involvement and detachment in such situations (cf. Elias, 1956), which require attention and reflection for

researchers. Moreover, professional requirements may be at odds with personal beliefs and emotions. At this point, I will not go deeper into the analysis of interacting tensions at work here, but limit myself to saying that dealing with these tensions may imply paradoxical situations in which clear answers are not ready to hand. In the case of my own research, I decided to continue both my work as a researcher and as a volunteer, although obviously the mutual influence of both roles is undeniable and not neutral.

A second set of tensions relates to the situatedness of the researcher in various social contexts. While in the foregoing the researcher's personal conflicts were referred to, I now turn to consequences at the *interpersonal* level. The tensions at stake are not only personal challenges for the researcher, they also bring about different positions in the field. Being a (charity) volunteer, a researcher or a human rights activist—to give but three examples relevant to this case—may seem very different things, but may not be as clearly distinguishable into categories when lived by the same person. At many points, it may be unclear to other stakeholders, such as involved Roma people, professionals or volunteers, as well as policymakers and academics, which particular role has been taken by the researcher/volunteer/activist at a given moment. This was, for example, the case during the preparation of a policy document on the education of Roma in the city of Ghent. Representatives of various relevant stakeholders in the field (schools, city services, welfare organisations, Roma organisations, etc.) were invited by the city's integration service to participate in the work group that would prepare the document. Initially, I participated in the work group as a member of a Roma organisation I co-founded. Still, I considered my input in this work group to be based on my experience as a researcher rather than of an advocate of the Roma. Moreover, meetings of the work group took place during working time, which made it deontologically "incorrect" towards my employer to participate on behalf of another organisation, although I was never reprimanded for doing so. But the decisive argument to request my participation *as a researcher* in the work group, was that it gave me a different authority to speak on topics exceeding the scope of the activities of the Roma organisation. From that moment on, somebody else was seated in the work group to represent this organisation, which enabled me to introduce experiences taken from my scientific work. This clarified my role, as previously many participants repeatedly asked me to take their position during discussions due to the fact I had gotten familiar with their opinions throughout the fieldwork I had been doing with most of them previously.

Another example relates to an interview I did with a Roma family. I had known these people for a few years at that moment as they regularly came to the food distribution where I volunteered. One day I asked them whether they would consent to an interview. They did not really seem to understand what I wanted, but continued to stress that I was very welcome at their home. Such home visits of people living in squats or bad living conditions are not uncommon amongst volunteers of the charity organisation, but once I got there they were not only surprised to see my audio recording material, they moreover did not seem to grasp what I was looking for. This was only partially due to language problems: throughout the interview, I was repeatedly asked why I was

interested in the things I was asking—which did not really seem to fit our previously held relationship. Although I had extensively explained that I was doing research, and that this was part of my job in university, the idea of (scientific) research itself, in some way or another, seemed unfamiliar to them. That problematised the idea of informed consent (they did not know what they consented to, but agreed to do so based on a relationship of trust) but also blurred our relationship. To some, these interferences may foremost be an expression of unprofessionalism. To others adhering to postmodernist research approaches, it may be an example of a personal quest for knowledge. Some action researchers may finally state that a less strict division of different positions and partisanship can be supportive for research seeking social change (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Greenwood & Levin, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Obviously, a surplus number of both methodological questions and tensions to be dealt with are added to the former personal ones and further complicate the discussion. In what follows, it is impossible to discuss each of these tensions (on which many are very well-documented already in existing literature) extensively. Rather than doing so, what matters to me is the complexity related to the position of the researcher, which is never neutral. I will argue that this situatedness necessarily requires explicit attention in interpretive research. In order to answer the question of how to deal with the tensions at stake as a researcher, I will first attempt to identify the particular *positionalities of the researcher* that are at work in this case.

6.3   Clarifying the problem: Identifying different positionalities of the researcher

A large set of interrelated tensions constitute a highly complex situation with a continuously altering position of the researcher: it involves tensions between volunteering and professionalism; personal engagement and professional distance; insider and outsider perspectives; the private and the public sphere; abstract ideals and practical demands; objectivity and a need for change; and several others. These are not dichotomies, nor are the factual and desirable positions of the researcher on any of them definitive; they all depend upon each other and the context may change over time too. Their mutual interactions constitute the 'positionality of the researcher.' The researcher is not only a researcher though. He or she is a person with various roles, of which 'being a researcher' is but one. Like the tensions, these roles cannot be strictly separated and continuously influence each other. Too often, discussions on the insider/outsider tension and degrees of involvement, for example, are carried on as if they merely involve a methodological choice to be decided upon. Academia is thereby presented as a 'professional' sphere independent of other life domains. In these debates, the role of the researcher is evidently separated from other roles. Discussions focus on the most desirable way to 'shape professionalism,' and opinions vary as to which degree the researcher should be involved in or detached from their research subjects and context. But neither the 'private identity' of researchers, nor their 'public identity' as

a citizen should be disregarded here. These roles too are attended by different forms of accountability that may conflict with outcomes of the professionalism debate. On the one hand, a researcher has a position in academia, and evidently has to account to scientific exigencies including methodological requirements and deontological codes (see *procedural ethics*; Ellis, 2007); other roles may not be pleaded as an excuse for scientific deficiencies. On the other hand, a (private) moral person has to account for his/her own acts, choices and way of 'being in the world.' Depending on personal beliefs, this may be seen in an accountability towards one's self, ethical ideals, God, etc. Yet, a citizen is positioned in the public sphere and society as a whole. Evidently, this implies compliance with the law and social rules and values. Moreover, this comes with a political positionality in the broad sense of the word: one takes up his/her actorship as a citizen in a particular way that is never neutral. All of these roles merge together in the person of the researcher, and should in some way be geared to one another. As a pedagogue/researcher/stakeholder/advocate/volunteer/citizen/human being, it is my task to make sense out of these distinct but strongly entangled roles, and to do so in all life domains.

Let me now turn back to my own study. As mentioned before, I consider my work as a volunteer in a charity organisation to a certain extent to be in tension with my scientific work as an educational researcher. These distinct roles serve various ideals which may interfere, or at worst even discord, with one another. An experience of uneasiness is exemplified in one of the very early reflections of my field notes:

> And still I feel uncomfortable, almost perverted. Today, my involvement with these people—which motivated me to come and work here as a volunteer three years ago and subsequently to make the professional choice to do research on this topic—got in a strained relation with a different way to relate to them for the very first time. To my personal experience, 'the volunteer' and 'the researcher' seemed to be diametrically opposed to each other: the one who is disinterestedly committed to those in need and the one who 'exploits' respondents to gather research data. Building a relationship of trust may be a methodological condition for the researcher to get hold of authentic data, but at the same time (and as well for methodological reasons) this relationship needs to be limited to the one of a 'relative outsider.' However honourable the ideals of reliability and validity may be, an almost instrumentalised form of engagement as a means to bring about an image in the respondents' perception and as such to recover relevant data clashes with the way I relate and want to relate to these people. It pregnantly raises the question: Is the relevance and meaningfulness of my research for these people something I truly believe in, or is it an argument I like myself to believe in order to legitimise what I am doing?

This interference of various roles not only counts for the charity work; during the research process, I also got involved in other settings in the field where I was not (or could not be) a neutral observer on the side-line: I was invited to give input to action groups, steering groups of new projects and initiatives; my opinion on the highly

politicised topic of Roma integration was asked for in media interviews; and I co-founded a non-profit Roma organisation and interest group in Ghent. Although I could search for excuses for these activities that may threaten my scientific objectivity and neutrality by saying that I nicely separated 'working time' and 'private time,' that does not really solve the problem, as different roles do not allow themselves to be separated by a proportionate distribution of timetable partitions. It is generally recognised that the position of a researcher in the humanities can never be a neutral one, and that some form of normativity is always involved (e.g. Lincoln, 1995; Wagner, 1997). Evidently, this normativity is shaped by the other roles described above. Still, little attention is drawn to the reverse influence of being a researcher on these other roles. What does it imply if someone is not only a charity volunteer, a citizen, a human being or an activist, but also a scientific researcher? How does this feature alter the meaning of these various roles? It certainly does not cancel them out. Similarly to the mutual influence each of the roles has on the others, being a researcher also adds something to these. A researcher disposes of a specific form of citizenship; they are in some way a 'professional' volunteer and a *heterologously-informed* political actor exactly because of the knowledge gathered throughout their professional activities. Because they have been informed in a specific way, they may be favoured and privileged to take up these roles with regard to particular topics. To be privileged here does not mean their opinion is more valuable in a moral sense (a researcher is not necessarily a 'better person'), but it does imply that the scientist's contribution is informed differently (with regard to particular topics). One might thus argue that it gives a surplus reason to researchers to take up these roles exactly because of being a researcher—they have something else to say about it. For example, my voluntary work is experienced in a markedly conscious and reflective way because of theoretical discussions and insights I acquire in my professional work, as was illustrated in the opening quote of this article. When participating in the public debate on the migrations and social integration of Roma in Belgium, I dispose of background information that exceeds the limited and often very coloured information provided in the media; I became familiar with the history and living conditions of Roma in countries of origin throughout the literature, and in my own research I obtained an overview of the various perspectives of many involved stakeholders on the present situation. That particular background too colours what I have to say about it; but qua researcher, it does so in a particular way, which may, as I want to argue, have an added value to the public debate. The insight that being a researcher implies that one has something else to say about particular topics prompts new questions with regard to the goal-setting and finality of science, and educational science in particular. It could therefore be suggested, for example, that it is not only tolerable but moreover desirable for social scientists to 'take up their responsibility' by turning their scientific knowledge into a vivid leverage of discussion, action and change in the public arena. The latter does not imply that researchers are expected to run for political positions. But they may, for example, have their voice heard in public by publishing work that is less scientific or written in the local language; by participating in discussion panels or in the public

debate throughout the media; or by setting up or participating in steering groups of local social projects. Academic reward for such engagements could contribute to the embeddedness of social science in the public sphere and the local context. Some authors take this argument a step further and explicitly argue for a more engaged way of practicing and 'using' science as a vehicle for social change (e.g. Beck & Maida, 2013). This requires both an altered conceptualisation of the researcher's identity and of science, which will be the subject of the next section.

6.4   Situated professionalism and implications for the conceptualisation of science

In the former section, attention was drawn to various tensions and roles that constitute the positionality of the researcher. This position is not univocal and unambiguous. By definition, it is situated in a historically and geographically contingent context. An autoethnographical account is helpful to shift the attention not so much from research subjects to the researcher, but rather towards its positionality in the research setting, i.e. its embeddedness in the context. Raised awareness about the intrinsic *positionality* and *relationality* of the researcher calls for an adapted conceptualisation of professionalism—in particular, a situated one. This *situated professionalism* can be related to the various roles mentioned before. Most evidently, every professional is situated in a particular working environment: for the scientist, this is academia. Besides that, the researcher is also situated in society, in a policy context and in a private life (with family, friends, etc.). All of these contexts have different *modi operandi*, with corresponding exigencies and expectations. From an academic perspective, the researcher has to meet quality criteria and respect deontological codes; his assignment in the field is, in the first instance, to gather data that may add to the project of knowledge-building. But when entering the field, they may be confronted with other expectations: teachers, social workers or policymakers may appeal to the expertise of the researcher that may be of help to support them in their work. Moreover, the researcher qua citizen de facto has a voice in the public debate, e.g. through the right (or obligation, depending on the legal conditions) to vote in elections. This voice is not neutral, and is informed by their work as a researcher. Past experiences and personal relationships like friendships or family ties may in turn influence the interpretation of these positions. Not only in a practical sense may having a proper family restrict the time management of research: opinions of beloved ones or positive or bad experiences with, for example, a neighbouring Roma family cannot be strictly separated from the roles as researcher or citizen. In some cases, this may bring along confinements for the scientific work: loyalty to the people one is working with can, for example, restrain one's freedom to speech in certain situations, as saying certain things could undermine (personal) relations. For example, the self-referentiality of many Romani leaders, who deem their proper voice as something that should naturally be accepted and is not to be questioned, may be considered problematic as it risks the closure of dialogue, the over-simplification of things or even

the exclusion of other voices (alienation of a so-called Romani elite from the grassroots is a well-documented phenomenon in the literature; cf. Vermeersch, 2006). When one is confronted with such situations, bringing these up on a public forum may evidently alter the relationship with the people involved as it is critical towards their sayings, and their personal attitudes may be explicitly questioned. In that sense, situating oneself involves difficult balances, which entail opportunities as well as confinements. The researcher is not only a performer or an executor of these roles with adhering *modi operandi*, but has to position and to situate themselves over and over again. That difficult task incurs a *political actorship*, including mediation in and between each of the earlier mentioned domains. Raising awareness about this situatedness and mutual influences opens opportunities for more directed and intended forms of change. These influences must not only be looked upon as unavoidable interferences for scientific accuracy and objectivity, but may turn out to fruitfully affect knowledge-building. In other words, it opens a space for an engaged exercise of scholarly activities (Beck & Maida, 2013; Rappaport, 1995; Skocpol, 2003). Conversely, reverse influences may be beneficial too; for example, and as mentioned before, scientific work offers opportunities for a better informed citizenship. These insights prompt new questions with regard to the finalities and the conceptualisation of social science as a whole, to which I will now turn.

The obvious assignment of the researcher is to contribute to science; but what then is the assignment of social sciences? And how can we conceive of this question in relation to the situated professionalism of the researcher? I will here distinguish four paragon types of research, each of which relates to a different way to conceive of the positionality and situatedness of scientific professionalism in social sciences. In actual research, these approaches only rarely appear in a pure form. Generally, it concerns hybrid forms or combinations of various approaches within a broader research framework. This is not only an empirical finding; it is moreover desirable, as there is no such thing as the proper form of doing (social) research. Each of the following approaches entails a different focus, has different interests, applies distinct methods and produces particular kinds of knowledge. As a supplement to and in dialogue with each other, they may contribute to the production of 'valid knowledge,' which is not the outcome of any of these normative approaches in itself, but of the ongoing discussion amongst them. The first approach is the *technical-instrumental* one. Value neutrality and performativity are central quality standards to this view that transfers the predominant way of working in natural sciences to the study of human reality in social sciences and humanities. Science is supposed to be productive within the pre-existing order, and serves as an instrument to find solutions to occurring social problems. In educational sciences, Brezinka (1972) is one of the most influential exponents of this view. He explicitly expels value judgments out of the scientific domain; these are subjective, thus unscientific decisions and science should not get mixed up in such affairs. His scientific positivism argues for a teleological causal-analytical-oriented approach that limits itself to the examination of necessary conditions to reach particular goals (Smeyers & Levering, 2001). Secondly, the *utopian idealist* approach disagrees with the former as it expects

science to contribute to a better world. How 'better' is defined remains, to a certain extent, open to discussion, but it generally concerns an increased humanisation or civilisation of the present state of affairs in order to realise some kind of ideal society. In educational terms, an explicitly normative pedagogy is implied here, of which the most well-known examples are the eighteenth and nineteenth-century great pedagogical theories of Kant, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Herbart. Rousseau's illustration of how an ideal citizen may be educated is in his *Emile, or on education* (Rousseau, 1972), and is very exemplifying. But more recent theories like the one of Freire (1970) also build on a utopian, more humane society. The third type of research—the *critical deconstructionist*—disagrees with the technical-instrumental paradigm in a different way. Rather than presenting an alternative social ideal, the constitution of the present state of affairs is critically analysed. The definition of deconstruction applied here exceeds the tradition initiated by Derrida (1967), and more broadly refers to various poststructuralist attempts of dismantling structures, uncovering power relationships and identifying implicit presuppositions (see Koro-Ljungberg, 2004). Achieving a critical distance from the subject of research is a requirement to fulfil that task, and is pushed forward as an educational ideal (Masschelein, 2004). Fourth and finally, the *interpretative explorative* approach seeks for a better understanding of social reality starting from a raised awareness about the situatedness of the researcher. Meaning is socially constructed, and cannot be unfolded as a static reality open to objectification. Attention to the role of the researcher in relation to the research context is of central importance to that meaning-making process. They are not investigating a reality as an outsider, but unavoidably co-construct the social reality under investigation. As Smeyers (2006) clarifies, "science here is no longer seen as disinterested and value-free: instead there do not seem strict boundaries between science and society" (p. 482). More specifically, "educational research participates through dialogue in improving our practical knowledge of on-going social life but at the same time necessarily invokes a normative stance" (Smeyers, 2006, p. 483).

For that reason, both autoethnography and situated professionalism suit this approach very well. They offer an adequate framework to shift the focus of attention to the positionality of the researcher, its relatedness with the broader context and its role-taking in the construction of meaning. The implication of this approach—and which is also a common trait of deconstructionism—is that social scientific research too is considered to be a socially constructed practice, the meaning of which is unremittingly under negotiation. Still, the latter does not imply that one can freely define science just like that. Excrescences "using" science as an instrument for external goals, such as blind forms of activism aiming for changes of the political order, are at most reverse perversions of the technical-instrumental approach. But more moderately, this approach does open the door to more engaged forms of scholarship. In the concluding section, the consequences of such an approach for educational research are further explored.

6.5   Conclusion: Exploring the relation between autoethnography and educational research

The concept of *educational research* may be interpreted in various ways. Firstly, it refers to a discipline. In that sense, educational research is research within the domain of educational sciences, of which education in one of its various meanings (as an institution or as a practice) is the research subject. In other words, it concerns research 'on' or 'about education.' Secondly, it may refer to research for the use of educational practice. In that case, research is employed to answer questions emerging in these practices. This we could call research 'for education.' But research may also be educational 'in itself.' It is then conceived of as an educative practice questioning or reconstructing social reality. As Gitlin (1990) writes, "most educational research still is a process that for the most part silences those studied, ignores their personal knowledge and strengthens the assumption that researchers are *the* producers of knowledge" (p. 444). To alter this relationship, he proposes the use of *educative research*—a dialogical approach that attempts to develop voice as a form of political protest. Similarly, Elliott (2006) refers to 'educational research' as distinct from 'research on education,' defining the former in terms of "its practical intention to realise educational values in action," adding that "in doing so, it cannot avoid taking an evaluative stance on the aims of education" (p. 169). He states that "for research to count as 'educational research' it would need to be free from objectivist assumptions and the standpoint of the impartial spectator" as "instrumental reasoning alone does not justify educational practice" (Elliott, 2006, p. 184). In order to concretise the latter, I now turn back to my own study and the question of how it relates to the foregoing interpretations of educational research.

In some ways, each of the above definitions covers the cargo of my proper research project. With its focus on the right to education and educational practices, it certainly is a study about education. Also, it aims to serve educational practice. As a researcher, I set myself the objective to answer the questions directed to me by teachers and social workers in some way or another. The outcomes of my research should be of some use, and hopefully ameliorate the educational situation of Roma children. What this 'amelioration' may mean remains open at the beginning, and is dialogically shaped with these people throughout the research process. Although its interpretation is not predefined, it clearly also is research for education. Last but not least, my research project aims to be educative in itself. It wants to question things by redefining and adjusting them. 'Things' covers just about every aspect of the study: the role and position of the researcher, as well of research subjects; the way the context is designed; relevant policy; opinions and beliefs of various stakeholders; mutual prejudgments; theoretical assumptions; methodological choices; deontological issues, etc. My study is not an example of voice-giving to Roma, nor does it attempt to be the objective representation of a social reality. Rather, it reflects a dialogical process between various stakeholders.

In order to understand this properly, 'dialogue' requires some specification here. It is to be distinguished from talk or conversation, as it implies "that all participants see the discourse as important and have a say in determining its course" and it "enables participants to work together to understand the subject being discussed" (Gitlin, 1990, p. 447). Although the 'truthfulness' of research no longer relates to the objectivity of data extracted by an individual armed with a set of methods, and although a bias cannot be removed, it remains central "to identify and examine the normative truths that are embedded in a particular historical context" (Gitlin, 1990, p. 448). Rather than representing these normative truths, it presents a historically and geographically contingent normative 'truth,' which is materialised in a written reflection. As the researcher holding the pen, I am the 'director' of that reflection. That is inescapably so: I am the principle author of the study I initiated and wrote down. Still, I am not the only author of the reflected process, nor is this normative truth only mine, as the dialogue is not merely a dialogue with myself. Other stakeholders are 'present' too, such as Roma parents and children, teachers, social workers and policymakers. But in what way are they? This reflection is not merely a representation or a description of a communicative process, but forms part of that ongoing dialogue. It actively shapes this dialogue as well as mutual relations, and has an explicitly political meaning in that it 'e-ducates' in the original meaning of the word: it 'leads out' the self-evidence of a pre-existing order, thus creating moments of vulnerability and spaces for something new. It educates me throughout explicit self-reflection (for which autoethnography is of the utmost value); it educates Roma by forcing them to reflect upon themselves, for example, when an interview is taken from them; it educates policymakers by showing them a different reality behind the letters of the law; and it educates professionals in schools and other institutions when they are challenged by the perspectives of other stakeholders (such as the parents or policymakers) that exceed the scope of their own work.

Autoethnography is closely linked to educational research. As an approach, it commands the researcher to reflect upon their *situatedness* and, as was clarified before, it centralises the focus on their *relatedness* with the research context. In educational research, this is exactly what is at stake. Whether it is research *on* education, *for* education or educative research, its focus on "education" implies attention for the pedagogical relationship that is at the very heart of every educational process. But with regard to the educative interpretation, the connection between autoethnography and educational research may even be taken a step further. Not only do their focuses of interest on situatedness in a context and relatedness as a subject matter provide a commonality—as is the case for all interpretations of educational research—both approaches also offer opportunities to *shape* this situatedness and relatedness, and moreover intend to do so. Because of this intentionality, the autoethnographical approach is intrinsically educative. This conclusion has consequences that transgress the scope of educational sciences as a discipline. More particularly, it may be educative for social science as a whole by inciting reflective processes on the positionality of science itself. As Elliott (2006) formulates it, "the project of re-describing educational research is necessary for political reasons,

since it can provide an alternative account […] to realise our hope of a better, more democratic and just society" (p. 185). Whatever the outcomes, these processes would affect a down-to-earth move, forcing science to reflect on how it is socially embedded, i.e. how its relation to, and situatedness in, the social reality should be conceived of. Such an 'educationalisation of science' is not merely a thought experiment, but it may prove to be helpful in order for interpretive science to make sense. It should relate to the context it is part of, be conscious of how that relation is shaped, and position itself in the construction of that relation in an unremitting dialogue.

6.6   Afterword

To conclude, let me add some comments on the position of the educational researcher. Although in the beginning of this article I may have suggested seeking clear answers to the question of how to conceive of the position of the researcher in various life domains and fields, I am forced to admit that this autoethnographical account has so far only succeeded in throwing light on that question to a limited extent. So let me dedicate some final words to that challenge. The observation that I have not so much decided upon which is the most desirable positionality of myself as a researcher, might in itself reveal an answer. The unremitting self-reflection on how to position oneself is the leverage needed for the educative exercise of keeping to question oneself and the environment in relation to one another. That choice—to continue my voluntary work in a charity organisation and combine it with advocacy initiatives for Roma while doing scientific research—is a conscious one. And I continue to consider it being a fertile one both for my scientific work and my personal development, as it unremittingly pushes me to pursue my quest. Maybe a state of abeyance can thus be recognised as fertile soil not only of educational practice and research, but also of the educative challenge of life itself. The pragmatics of life leaves the opportunity to do so open to us, and for myself I may say that has been, and continues to be, an educative experience.

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Chapter 7

Questioning the policy framing of Roma in Ghent, Belgium: Some implications of taking an insider perspective seriously [1, 2]

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1 Hemelsoet, E., & Van Pelt, P. (submitted). Questioning the policy framing of Roma in Ghent, Belgium: Some implications of taking an insider perspective seriously.

2 The life of the second author of this article, Pauwel Van Pelt, was tragically taken in a traffic accident while writing this article. I hope that this final result does justice to his ideas as I tried to my best to further fulfil our shared interest and attempt to co-construct the space for an insider perspective in research as well as policy making on Roma during the past few years and months.

Abstract

The recent flow of Roma immigrants to Western Europe has caused a lot of societal and political discussion. Initiatives and policy measures are introduced at the European and national or local level in order to deal with this situation. This article explores to what extent experiences and self-perceptions of Roma immigrants in Western Europe correspond with the constructed discourses. In policy practices, there seems to be a tension between a willingness to strengthen the particular identity of Roma on the one hand, and a desire to fit those people into mainstream society on the other hand. Based on a case study with a small sample of in-depth interviews, the authors explore what an insider perspective may add to the construction of policy. Finally, conclusions are drawn on how policy conceptualisations of Roma may gain meaningfulness in relation to (self) identification processes.

7.1   Introduction

In 2004 and 2007 the European Union was extended to a number of Central and Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (2004) and Romania and Bulgaria (2007). It is in particular from these countries that many Roma people have migrated—and increasingly continue to do so—towards Western Europe, mainly into cities. This increasing migration gives rise to much political debate[2], as Roma are considered to have a very particular way of living which it is feared will infringe on social stability. Additionally, they are related to numerous social problems that have emerged or grown since their arrival in Western Europe, such as (particular forms of) criminal behaviour, extreme poor housing conditions, noise and litter inconveniences, begging, etc. Consequently, a lot of action is taken at various policy levels, not least at the European level. In this complex situation, a recurring question of decisive importance is to what extent the migrations of Roma are different from other ones. Targeted measures are often legitimised by the particularity of Roma. In doing so, reference is made to an on-going history of diaspora, exclusion, discrimination and even persecution (Fraser, 1995; 2000; Hancock, 1997); to specificities of the Roma culture (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 1992; Liégois, 2007); or to the absence of a homeland of the Roma people, often in relation to a problematic social position in their countries of origin (e.g. Bancroft, 2005; Ringold et al., 2005). The field of tension between a need to confront social problems related with Roma on the one hand and the willingness to recognise Roma identity on the other hand, is very present here. It is in this tension the research at hand can be situated.

In this article, the question to what extent experiences and self-perceptions of Roma immigrants in Western Europe correspond with the way they are represented in contemporary policy discourses, will be further explored. As such, we build upon the significant contribution of Nacu (2012b) in this journal, which stressed the centrality of the way in which identity has an impact on the politics of migration at European, national and local scales. The 'ethnicisation' of Roma identity in policy measures influences the way these people contribute to the construction of this identity themselves. Throughout their contacts with public institutions, Roma are subject to struggles of definition and framing in which they use everyday strategies to try to turn the situation to their advantage. The pragmatic 'use' of identity as constructed in policy may deliver benefits on the short term (e.g. by receiving support from target group oriented measures towards Roma). On the long term, however, there is a risk that this 'use' will reinforce stigmatisation schemes. This process, of course, is not unidirectional. Beyond the question how a constructed identity shapes the politics of Roma migration, it may be questioned how self-definitions of Roma may in turn be meaningful to conceive of policy differently. What is at stake, then, are Roma's own attributions of meaning behind outer behaviour. The insight that the way the 'Roma problem' is framed and reproduced in society is the most important obstacle

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2 See, for example, the Roma evictions by French president Sarkozy in 2010 and all forthcoming discussions (cf. Tran, 2010; Traynor, 2010; Nacu, 2012a).

hindering Roma political development (Vermeersch, 2002), compels us to take such an insider perspective seriously. Doing so, Roma's own definitions of their identity (and culture) may serve as a step-up to changes in the present socially constructed meaning-granting framework. Still, this commitment is not an easy task. In relation to the search for a proper understanding of the insider perspective, Bridges (2009) refers to the need for an 'ethical sensitivity' which outsiders need to bring to an enquiry into the experience of the other, i.e. the insider. Amongst other things, he mentions

> the need for respect for and sympathy with others' desire to construct their own understanding of their lives and practice; caution about importing external frameworks of understanding which might be oppressive rather than emancipatory; and sensitivity in negotiating alternative and especially threatening understandings (p. 120).

Elsewhere, he takes the argument for taking an insider perspective into account a step further, recognising that "respect, care and dialogic relations are not enough. Research must be conducted in such a way that it contributes actively to the creation of a more just society" (Bridges, 2001, p. 383). He proceeds by saying that "the claim 'nothing about us without us' ought to be an ethical as well as an epistemological truism in educational research as a statement about the kind of relationship which should obtain between researcher and participant" (ibid., p. 384). Insider understanding is not only about whose voices are listened to, but also about who is entitled to research them and how this can be done.

The starting point of our quest was an interest in what the people at whom initiatives are targeted have to say about the discussions they are subject to. Plenty is written on adequate policy strategies, but Roma themselves are only scarcely heard in the debate[3]. An important presupposition of this position is that at this point the definition of 'Roma identity' is to a certain extent open in the sense that it can be reframed or reconstructed differently. Our research focuses on how ethnic Roma who have recently migrated from Eastern Europe (*in casu* former Czechoslovakia) towards Western Europe (*in casu* Ghent), define Roma identity *themselves*. Two research questions were central to our project: 1. How do recently immigrated ethnic Roma in Ghent define their own identity and how/in what sense do they relate to 'being Roma'? and 2. How does this self-identification correspond with currently predominant policy discourses towards Roma?

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3 It would be incorrect though, to generalise this statement all too much. Not going deeper into much of the political debate on social participation possibilities, it must be stressed that a massive volume of studies on Roma has been produced already in Central and Eastern Europe. Increasingly, the voice of Roma themselves is heard in both scientific, policy and interest group research. In Western Europe though, such studies are still very scarce. Moreover, when Roma are taken into account both within scientific research and policy making, large discussions remain on representativeness. Within the Romani movement, the question who gets the mandate to speak on behalf of the Roma is recurring since over two decades. It is unclear how a legitimate Romani representation can be created, meanwhile a 'Roma political elite' that is regarded as representative of the Roma, has come to existence. As intellectual activists, this elite risks losing its connection with 'ordinary' Roma citizens as well as grassroots advocacy movements (Vermeersch, 2007).

In what follows, we first provide some information concerning the research context. The situation of Roma in Belgium and the city of Ghent in particular will be described shortly, as well as local policy initiatives. We then proceed to the empirical part of our research, which consists of an in-depth case study with a limited amount of in-depth interviews. Based on our findings, we will argue that an insider perspective has an important added value not only for developing policy towards these people, but also for questioning these policy measures.

7.2   The research context: The city of Ghent, Belgium

7.2.1   Roma in Belgium: A state of affairs

It is estimated that there are about 30,000 Roma in Belgium (Council of Europe, 2012)[4], although it must be stressed that there are no official numbers, as ethnic background is not recorded in the Belgian public administration system. Further research, moreover, shows that this number is going around since over five years and was taken over from older figures whilst most migrations are said to have taken place during the last few years (mainly since the expansion of the European Union as mentioned earlier)[5]. The Flemish expertise centre on migration and integration[6] provides a figure of 15,000 to 20,000 for Flanders and Brussels (Vlaams Minderhedencentrum, 2010), which fits quite well with the earlier, but as they mention themselves this number also goes back to 2003 (Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie, 2012). Still, there is a lack of more nuanced and relevant information. Roma[7] in Belgium live in well-defined geographical spaces, mainly in the major cities (Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent are said to count for 90 per cent of the present Roma) but a few communities live in smaller municipalities too (e.g. Sint-Niklaas and Diest). Roma populations in these various cities can rather clearly be distinguished based on their countries of origin. While in Antwerp (as in Sint-Niklaas and Diest) most Roma come from former Yugoslavian states (mainly Kosovo, Macedonia and to a smaller extent Serbia and Montenegro), in Brussels it are mainly Rumanians. Ghent, in its turn, has a large population of Bulgarian and Slovakian Roma. Apart from these identifiable cultural and religious differences, the legal status between various groups may differ too. People stemming from other countries within the European Union can travel to Belgium freely, and settle under particular conditions[8]. This is not the case for people

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4 i.e. 0,28 per cent of the total population which officially counts 10,4 million people.

5 Cf. figures provided in Liégois, 2007. Still, the European Commission (2011) presents this number as a 14 September, 2010 update. For a large discussion on problems related to similar estimations, see Hemelsoet, 2010.

6 'Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie' (since 2011; before 'Vlaams Minderhedencentrum').

7 'Roma' should here be distinguished from the far smaller groups of Roms and Manuches (estimate ca. 300 people) or so-called 'Woonwagenbewoners' [caravan dwellers] (estimate ca. 2000 people) who have the Belgian nationality and reside in the country since many generations (Vlaams Minderhedencentrum, 2010). Roma here refers to more recent immigrants stemming from Central and Eastern European countries of origin.

8 Within the context of this article, we will not go deeper into the very complex legal conditions that are decisive whether one can settle in the country or not; but the major condition is 'financial independence', which in practice almost always implies that at least one person of the family has a job.

who come from Kosovo or Macedonia, for example, as a result of which these people often reside illegally in the country. These differences evidently have consequences for the particular living circumstances of various groups (Vlaams Minderhedencentrum, 2010; Decoodt & De Reu, 2009). In the next paragraph, the specific context of the city of Ghent—where our empirical research took place—will be further described.

7.2.2 The interesting case of Ghent

The city of Ghent seems an interesting case to further investigate for various reasons. First, the inflow of Roma is (albeit not in absolute numbers) probably nowhere as visible as it is in Ghent[9]. Second, this inflow consists of largely differing groups (cf. infra), which gives rise to a very particular situation in relation to group identification. Finally, a lot of initiatives towards Roma people are taken in Ghent, both by policy makers and NGO's. The foregoing properties explain why many discussions in the wider public debates in Flanders find their starting point in this city. The Roma living in Ghent can rather clearly be divided into three groups originating from various countries: Bulgaria, former Czechoslovakia, and Rumania. Although some similarities can be observed, their motives of migration as well as their living circumstances, habits, integration patterns and survival strategies are to a certain extent different[10]. It is moreover remarkable that there is hardly—if not, any—communication between these three groups. Bulgarians generally seek alliance with the large Turkish (non-Roma) community in the city. It mainly concerns Turkish-speaking Bulgarians who are employed and housed by Turkish immigrants. Although their working and living conditions are in many cases abominable, they appeal only to a limited extent to social services. Slovaks struggle more difficulties in finding a job and are proportionally more dependent upon the social security system. Not rarely, their families count up to 10 or even 12 children with whom they often live in miserable circumstances in squats. Rumanians live in a smaller, rather close-knit community. Traveling back and forth between the place of origin (the city of Oravița and its surroundings), Ghent and other European cities is a common practice amongst this group. Their major source of income is begging in the streets. Most of the money they collect is sent to their home country in order to financially support their families and children who mostly stay there.

9 The number of legally residing Roma immigrants in Ghent was estimated to be 4,820 on a total population of 247,262 (i.e., 2 per cent of the population) on 31.12.2011. This estimation is based on official registrations of Central and Eastern European immigrants in population registers. The total amount of registered immigrants from these countries (EU10: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Rumania, Slovakia and Slovenia) was 9,433 at this moment, which is about four times higher than five years before. In absence of ethnic data, it is estimated by the cities integration service that 50 per cent of all Bulgarians and 90 per cent of all Slovaks and Czechs are ethnic Roma. This leads to total numbers of 2,815 Bulgarian, 1,737 Slovak and 268 Czech Roma. Rumanians are not included in the estimations, probably because there numbers are very limited. At the date of measurement, 175 Rumanians were registered in the city. It must be stressed though, that there are no clear criteria for the suggested percentages, and discussions with fieldworkers on their correctness persist. Moreover, unregistered immigrants are not included in these numbers and estimations for obvious reasons, which makes numbers even more uncertain.

10 Tremlett (2009) stresses large differences amongst various Roma communities. This heterogeneous character of the Roma implies large difficulties for universal policymaking for (all) Roma and moreover problematises homogenising discourses.

Their ambitions to build up a life in Belgium are limited, as is their willingness to integrate into civil society (Hemelsoet, 2012). The hereby described situation explicitly illustrates the relevance of the question how policy makers can handle the present differences.

Before clarifying our empirical research, it might be interesting to have a look at local policy initiatives. The city of Ghent developed a particular policy to deal with the recent influx of Roma immigrants. In this policy, reference is made to the pressure that those new migrations exert on the social climate and on the supporting power of the local community. As the possibilities for local authorities to influence *push* factors (those are the factors which give people a reason to leave their countries of origin) are limited, the focus is mainly on so-called *pull* factors (factors of attraction for new immigrants to choose for Ghent more in particular).

As Philips and Philippet (2010, p. 1) phrase it in the city's policy document, "The city sets out a two-track policy by offering support through integration and settlement measures on the one hand, and taking repressive actions against all forms of (semi-) illegal practices on the other hand". Priority measures are situated on the following four levels:

1. *Coordination and intensification of the policy towards intra-European migration*. This should happen both horizontally (crossing different policy domains) and vertically (warranting the connection between different policy levels). A 'Permanent Consultative Body' which will be responsible for further coordination, should be established.
2. *Housing policy*. This comprises proactive avoidance and consequent termination of squatting as well as further supervision of precarious living circumstances.
3. *Residence, training and work*. The establishment of a central information point for social workers and intermediates, the introduction of 'bridging figures' and mediators and a more strict approach to irregular labour circuits are prior measures in relation to this topic.
4. *Supra-local action*. Amongst other things, this involves pointing out lacunas in legislation; sensibilisation for and provision of information on voluntary return to countries of origin; exert of pressure on European authorities; organisation of specific information campaigns towards particular cities and regions of origin.

By now, action has been taken on each of these four levels and this policy document has been brought into practice in its various dimensions.

7.3   Empirical research

7.3.1   Framework

The empirical research consisted of qualitative interviews conducted during the summer of 2011 in the city of Ghent, Belgium with a total of 17 persons all self-identifying as 'Roma' and originating from former Czechoslovakia. The aim of the interviews was to retrieve in-depth insights rather than generalizability based on representativeness, which explains the rather limited number of respondents. Respondents were contacted by the spread of words in our own and the translators' networks, which largely explains

the former Czechoslovak origin of all respondents. Interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire in order to fully establish the narrative aspect of the requested information. During the interviews, socio-economic profile, identity, and cultural habits were inquired. As mentioned by Silverman (2007), regarding the way of measuring identity and cultural aspects, it is best not to ask about these themes specifically, but rather to consider the whole encounter as an expression of identity and culture. As such, we tried to 'de-ethnicise' the interview as much as possible. Specific questions about culture and identifications were introduced in the end, and cultural expressions during the interview were taken into account.

Table 1: General characteristics of respondents (age; gender; nationality; time of residence in Belgium; number of children; source of income)

N°	Age	Gender	Nationality	Years in Belgium	Children	Income
1	40	F	Slovak	6	4	Welfare: unemployment, children
2	45	M	Slovak	4	4	Welfare: unemployment, children
3	30	M	Slovak	5.5	1	Income, welfare
4	41	F	Slovak	2	4	Welfare: unemployment, children
5	45	M	Slovak	1.5	4	OCMW[11], children
6	42	F	Slovak	0.2	4	Donations
7	19	F	Slovak	2	Pregnant	Income
8	16	M	Slovak	6	0	Student
9	37	M	Czech	2	3	Welfare: unemployment, children Donations
10	40	F	Czech	2.5	3	Welfare: unemployment, children
11	33	F	Czech	18	2	Welfare: unemployment, children
12	27	M	Czech	12	1	Welfare: unemployment, children
13	35	M	Czech	5	4	Welfare: unemployment, children
14	30	M	Czech	4	2	Income
15	33	M	Czech	8	3	Welfare: unemployment, children
16	37	M	Czech	9	3	Welfare: unemployment, children
17	18	M	Czech	10	0	Student

To overcome the language differences, two translators were contacted, proficient in either Slovak or Czech, and Dutch. Even though the researcher had personal connections with Roma people through more than six years of voluntary work with Roma people, one of the most difficult aspects was to find people who were willing to participate in our research. The main reason for non-participation was that few people were willing

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11 Public Social Welfare Center (Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn)

to identify as Roma. As we could experience ourselves in our search for respondents, "the long-standing experience of xenophobia and marginalisation faced by Roma over decades [in countries of origin] has inevitably led to a deep mistrust of the majority community" (UNICEF, 2011, p. 74). At the beginning of each interview, we carefully presented ourselves as neutral researchers, affiliated with Ghent University, and not in any way associated with the city administration (which we expected would only further nourish distrust). Furthermore we guaranteed the interviews to be anonymous, and only to use the obtained information in the context of our research. All 17 interviews were conducted at the respondents' residences.

7.3.2 Results

7.3.2.1 Socio-economic profile

All respondents had an official residence (in Ghent) except for one respondent, who was residing with her family in a squat. All respondents had access to (hot) water, toilets, bath room with shower, cooking facilities and heating[12]. Only the family in the squat had no access to hot water and only had access to heating through a bad functioning electric heating machine. The latter family was also the only one mentioning that they did not have a sufficient income to buy enough food and clothes. One respondent was living on her own, one family had their children residing elsewhere, and in two cases the family was sharing the house with multiple families. The houses were often small and in very bad condition. Nine people mentioned that their house was too small for them. Three respondents, of which a 19-year old youngster and two older people, had an income at the moment of the interview. One person was working part-time as a social assistant, and was the only respondent with a university degree, and also the most proficient in Dutch. Another respondent was working as a longshoreman, and got this job through a relative who was working at the same company. The third respondent with a job was working as a cleaning lady, and likewise found this job through a relative who was employed at the same place. These three respondents, together with three unemployed respondents, were also the only ones who were proficient in Dutch. Many respondents had been in Belgium for several years, but had never worked. Without any exception, however, every respondent commented that they would really like to work, and that they were looking for employment. It was often mentioned that they had not find a job yet because of their poor knowledge of Dutch. In addition, most of the women wanted to focus on managing the household and the children. One person was already residing in Belgium for over 18 years, was very proficient in Dutch, but had never found a job, despite her own intents.

7.3.2.2 Access to services (healthcare, city services, education)

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12 It must be stressed that this situation is very probably not representative for many Roma living in Ghent. Neither was representativeness strived for when searching for respondents, as our main focus was on respondents who reside in Ghent since a relatively long period and aspire to stay here and to 'form part' of Belgian society to a more or lesser extent.

None of the respondents felt discriminated by any of the city services, healthcare institutes or educational institutions. Except for one respondent, all subjects and their families had access to affordable healthcare. Most families found their doctor or medical centre through referrals of their connections. All subjects were satisfied with their experiences with their medical centre[13]. We also specifically asked about the experiences of the people with city services (employment aid, police, integration office,…). Almost all respondents had positive experiences with these services. Interestingly, when asked if they 'trusted' that these instances handled in their best interests, the answers were negative. Although they mentioned they can easily access city services, a basic distrust and discontent towards these services remains. It was often mentioned that the information was not specifically targeting 'Roma'-issues, and lacked sensitivity to these issues. These issues concerned the receipt of information about their rights and opportunities (employment, etc.) in Belgium. Still, they seemed to uptake a rather powerless and expecting position, and limited the interaction with the service providers themselves. As depicted by two respondents:

I: *How about the OCMW[14]? Are you confident that these people really try to help you?*
    R: Sometimes yes, sometimes not. I do not really know what my rights are. I do know about all the things I need to do, but I do not know about my rights when I visit an OCMW.
I: *And did you ask about your rights to the OCMW-employees?*
R: *I asked once, and then I got a response that I did not really understand, it is all so difficult.*
I: *Are you saying that communication about your rights should be improved?*
R: *Yes, totally. People should better explain what our rights are, and maybe give some more specific information for Roma.   (Czech man, > two years in Belgium)*

I: *What is your position regarding the city services? Do you trust them?*
R: *In general I think it is very positive that the city welcomes diversity. The quality of some services is low however. (…) Some services say that they provide certain services, but there is often something wrong. Often they do not know the background of the people, the social status, the family situation. They should also be better prepared to work with certain cultures and people, as Roma.   (Slovak man, > four years in Belgium)*

Regarding their trust in the police, the answers were similar. The respondents declared that they felt they could make use of the police, and never had any bad experiences with them. When asked if they would also really contact the police in very difficult

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13 Throughout the first three months of their residence, intra-European immigrants officially reside in the country under 'tourist' status. If they are willing to stay longer, they are expected to register in the city and continue to be self-supporting after that period (which generally implies to find a job). If they do not succeed to do so, they become irregular migrants. Concerning medical care, this implies that within the first three months they can make use of medical services as other tourists can. For irregular migrants, 'urgent medical care' is provided; this includes free care in case of 'urgent' need, a concept which in practice appears to be stretchable depending on the particular doctor/aid supplier.

14 Cf. footnote 11.

situations (e.g. difficult neighbourhood situations, fights,…), the respondents gave a similar answer: they would not contact the police, unless it would get 'really bad'.

7.3.2.3 Migration

The causes of migration to Belgium are diverse. Two respondents refused to talk about this topic, 13 others declared that the major *push factors* of migration were economic issues. Discrimination of Roma in their home country was mentioned nearly always, and for two respondents this was exactly the reason why they moved to Ghent, one of whom had been threatened to death for being Roma. As described by a respondent:

I: *Why did you leave your home country?*
R: *There was nothing there. (…) If you work there, you would earn five euros per day. So you go to work, and they do not even pay you. That way you can never earn enough money to buy a house. Everything is expensive there. And when you have children: milk, food, nappies,… It is all very expensive. Roma are also being discriminated. There are many advantages of living here.*

When asked why specifically they decided to come to Belgium (*pull factors*), all respondents answered that they had family or friends here. Most respondents reported they were relatively happy in Belgium, and all respondents were keen on staying here.

7.3.2.4 Social organisation

We asked our respondents about existing Roma organisations in Ghent, and were interested if they would be interested in getting more connected. All subjects responded that there were no official channels or groups by which the Roma people are in contact with each other. Six of the Slovak respondents had heard about *Opre Roma*, an organisation set up by a Slovak Roma, taking initiatives specifically targeted at Roma. Besides this project, little was known about any project specifically working with Roma. Interestingly, during our study, *Opre Roma* took the initiative to start a football-team, which was a tremendous success. On the first training 30 youngsters were present, and this amount kept growing each training. This might also be related to the fact that the communication among Roma-youngsters might go faster than the communication between adults, but it did demonstrate a clear interest of at least some Roma people to get more engaged in 'organised' activities.

Interestingly, when asked if they would be interested in the mere organisation of the Roma as a group, almost all respondents answered they did not feel the need to organise themselves. The social network of most subjects consisted of their (far) family, and there was little interest to get connected with other Roma (groups) in a formal way.

7.3.2.5 Identity

Identity and culture were investigated both directly and indirectly, as these aspects are foremost manifested *in situ* as mentioned. We investigated identity indirectly by

assessing the social network of our respondents. In addition, we also asked to which extent they affiliated themselves with Belgians, non-Roma and Roma from the country of origin, Belgium and other countries, and how they felt about the 'other' Roma groups. The affiliation with the country of origin was rather limited. Most respondents had little or no contact with people in their country of origin, other than their direct family. Furthermore, the social network of our respondents in Ghent consisted almost entirely of direct family members, and Roma from the same group and region of origin (who often appeared to be 'far' family).

With regard to 'identity', our interviews revealed some differences between (older) adults and youngsters. Children identified even less with their country of origin, as demonstrated by their very limited interests in these countries, and had a stronger focus on improving their life and social network in Belgium. Their social network was significantly 'broader' than the networks of the adult respondents. All the youngsters in our interviews had Flemish friends, as well as friends from a different origin, as a result of the social contacts within their schools. In addition, they were able to speak Dutch reasonably well.

Distinctions between the different Roma groups were established here as well. As mentioned, the social network from the (adult) respondents consisted almost entirely of Roma from the same region of origin, and simultaneous migrations. Additionally, most respondents had many prejudices about the 'other' Roma. As discussed by some respondents:

R: *The things we share as Roma are the language, the music, food, dancing, and that is all. Our parents have always been poor. They had no means and time to spend too much time on the education of their kids, it just did not happen.*
I: Does that make it hard to speak in general terms about Roma?
R: Yes. There is also a lot of rivalry between Roma. They [the Slovak Roma] say that we are not real Roma because we do not wear that type of clothes, and dye our hair blonde. There are also many differences between the country side and the cities. I have no contact with other Roma in Ghent, only with my Roma neighbours, and my Roma family. (…) With Belgians I have no contact at all, except for *** who sometimes comes here to help.

R: *They sometimes confuse us with caravan dwellers! But we are not! They drive around in their cars and steal… But we don't!*

I: *Can you tell me about the people in your social network in Ghent?*
R: *I mostly deal with my family, yes, my family is the most important to me. With Belgian people I rarely make contact, unless for specific services. I do know some Slovak Roma who live next to me however.*

I: *Can you tell me about the interaction between the different Roma groups here in Ghent?*
R: *There is very little interaction, because this is not supported by the government, or by*

the offered services. They do not support the Roma culture. We have very little contact because at first sight, you do not know who is Roma, and who is not. You cannot talk to the people on the street, so you do not know about the other Roma.

These testimonies suggest that the main reason why various Roma (groups) do not know each other is not a certain 'distance', but rather the fact that they are not familiar with each other's existence. It is particularly the (extended) family who plays a major role in the daily life of the Roma.

When asked with which ethnicity ('Belgian, 'Flemish', 'Roma', 'Slovak',…) they identify most, all adult respondents said that they affiliated most with Roma, followed by 'Slovak' or 'Czech'. The youngsters, however, responded differently to this question. They all affiliated most with 'Roma', but after that they strongly preferred the 'Belgian' identity. In addition, they minimised their Roma-identity. As mentioned by some respondents:

I: *Who do you most identify with? Roma, Belgians, Slovaks,…?*
R: *With Roma. But not at school. There it does not matter that much either, and there I play a lot with my other [non-Roma] friends.*
I: *Do you see yourself as Slovak?*
R: *No, not really. I do not know, I have very little affiliation with Slovakia, and I do not want to go back.*
I: *And do you look at yourself as a Belgian?*
R: *Just a little, but not really… I do not know. It does not really matter to me either. Nobody ever asks it to me, and we are all equal. You, me, we are all people.*

I: *You will soon go back to Slovakia for a holiday, are you looking forward to it?*
R: *Not really no. I have not been there in years, it has been too long ago.*
I: *And are you not excited to go back?*
R: *No, not really. Slovakia is not my country anymore, I do not feel it that way. I am also not proficient anymore in the language. And I like being here (…) And I have a cat here, I need to care for it. Do you want to take care of my cat while I am gone?*

We were also interested in hearing to what extent people explicitly declare their (Roma) identity in social or professional environments. Most respondents told us that they usually do not mention they are Roma, but rather mention their country of origin. The reason for this is that services in Belgium do not require people to mention their ethnic background, but only their nationality.

7.3.2.6 Culture
Culture was also discussed both directly and indirectly. We explicitly asked about the importance of language, religion, and the perspective on relationships. In addition, we inquired themes that would spontaneously arise during the interview such as hygiene, music, mobility,… Indirectly, we were confronted with culture, in the sense that it

manifested itself continuously during the interview, from the moment we entered a living room onwards, until the moment we left.

The tendency to think on the short term that is frequently related to Roma, was often reflected in the interviews. It manifested itself most obviously in the way interviews were planned. Without exception, they had to be planned maximum two days in advance, because the availability of the people was too difficult to estimate otherwise. It was also manifested by the academic choices made by the youngsters, who were all very keen to start working as soon as possible.

We asked to which extent they were speaking R(r)omani[15] with each other, and if they were passing it to their children. Twelve respondents indicated that they mainly speak the language of their country of origin (Romanian, Slovak, Czech) with their children. Two of the three interviewed youngsters understand Romani, but do not really use it.

Hygiene was a recurrent theme. We mention it, because it reappeared often, and in a similar way with most respondents. For example, we had to take off our shoes before entering the respondents' houses, which is a rather uncommon habit for Belgians. Additionally, the theme 'hygiene' often raised spontaneously during a discussion in rather surprising ways.

I: *Would you like your child to marry another Roma? Or does that not matter?*
R: *With a Roma, a Belgian, anybody… it does not matter to me. If only it is a good husband. But I would prefer her not to marry a Turkish person.*
I: *Why?*
R: *They are not very hygienic… They are circumcised, it is not clean…*

7.4   What an insider perspective may *add to* policy construction

Though our research was very explorative, some of our preliminary results are surprising. First, our findings reveal that there is a large gap between Roma and the provided services. Even though the respondents did not experience direct forms of discrimination, there is a general and explicit distrust in these services. A possible reason for this distrust may be found in migration histories: although most respondents identify economic issues as the major pull factor of migration, reference is almost systematically made to profound discrimination and racism in their countries of origin. A general distrust and an expectation of discrimination are thus *a priori* presumptions of Roma in their contacts with services. This feeling of distrust is an important finding to take into account within policy making towards these groups.

Second, most respondents primarily identify with being 'Roma'. Surprisingly though, further questions on this topic revealed that this identification had few connection with

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15   *R(r)omani* or *Romanes* is the 'proper' language of the Roma. This language exists in numerous varieties and even more dialects, which differ a lot between each other. Moreover, it has no standardised written form. For further reading, see Bakker *et al.* (2000) and Matras (2005).

the broader meaning which is generally attributed to it, i.e. Roma as an ethnic group living in diaspora all over Europe (and to a lesser extent in other continents). For the respondents, 'Roma' rather refers to the informal social networks these people are living in. Those networks are mainly comprised of large extended families in which everybody is somehow related to each other, either through blood lines and/or marriages and if not as close neighbours (Nacu, 2012b). 'We, the Roma' as distinguished from the rest of society refers to this extended family rather than to Roma as an ethnic group. Moreover, respondents often expressed prejudices about other Roma (groups), which in some cases results in an unwillingness to identify themselves with these other Roma (groups). This became clear in the answers to questions on the desirability of forms of social organisation: there certainly is a kind of interest in social organisation but not merely for Roma as a(n ethnic) group. Implicitly, this is further affirmed in the self-group *Opré Roma*, which is received very enthusiastically but solely consists of Slovak Roma from the same area of origin.

Third, our findings revealed important intergenerational differences. Whilst for adults most contacts are limited to in-group communication within the extended family, the youngsters in our interviews have broader social networks and a lot more out-group contacts. Moreover, they far less identify with countries of origin and rather feel Belgian than e.g. Slovak or Czech. Although they still feel Roma in the first place, this identification is clearly less strong. Apart from that, they also have Belgian and other non-Roma friends and they generally have better Dutch language skills than their parents. This is probably due to education: throughout schooling, they structurally and repeatedly get into contact with other children, which is evaluated positively by the youngsters themselves. The need for an affirmation of a Roma identity as being different from, opposed to or 'outside' mainstream society seems thus to be less present in youngsters than in (older) adults.

Apart from the former findings some 'family resemblances' amongst the respondents were found. First of all, the short-term perspective in their thinking and behaviour was very present. Planning was problematic and in almost every sense they expressed a day-to-day living style. Concerning language, there was only a partial use of Romani. Most respondents speak the official languages of the countries of origin at home, in some cases mixed up with Romani. Somehow surprisingly, hygiene was a recurrent theme in the interviews, mostly brought in by the respondents themselves. The opposition between 'clean' and 'dirty' structured a lot of observed behaviour and was sometimes explicitly introduced in conversations. We consciously use the term 'family resemblances' amongst respondents rather than 'cultural characteristics'. Not only is our sample of respondents too small to generalise our conclusions, it would also run the danger of referring to a broader 'Roma culture' which, as we have clarified above, has dangerous consequences. It is also unclear whether the described features refer to cultural characteristics or rather properties that relate to the particular – often deteriorated – living conditions of these people (it is for example plausible that the living circumstances argument counts for thinking on the short term).

This brings us to the added value of an insider perspective to policy making. Roma narratives supply interesting input for policy making for various reasons. First, we can distinguish informative-interpretative reasons. Roma narratives offer insights which could not be retrieved elsewise and as such they 'inform' policy making: they may break through existing prejudices, affirm existing conceptions, clarify underlying motivations or causes and bring in new elements. As such, they add to the discussion on a proper understanding of social practices. The latter are not static realities though: social practices change over time and therefore the process of understanding is never-ending. That brings us to the second set of reasons, which are political-interpretative. Stories do not only inform us about a (static) reality, they in turn contribute to the constitution of that reality and form part of it in a creative way. This political dimension relates to one of the purposes of voice-giving: taking voices or perspectives into account is a democratic act. Interest in these narratives opens a space for participation in an on-going conversation and discussions on who Roma are and what is in their best interest. What they say (and thus who they are) is literally 'taken into account': it forms part of the societal debate. Concerning identity, there are moreover good arguments to say that they are the most privileged actors to speak: who else is in a better position to say who they identify with and which group(s) they belong to?

There are thus good reasons to take an 'insider perspective' into account when constructing policy. Still, the former arguments sound rather abstract. Some arguments as well as examples are presented of how Roma 'bring in' something new or different. But what are the implications of this added 'information' and how far do political implications reach? In the concluding paragraph we will further focus on the implications of the foregoing for the way policy towards Roma is currently conceived of.

7.5   How an insider perspective may *question* policy

This concluding paragraph stretches the developed argument a step further. It is our hypothesis that self-defined identities developed within an insider perspective may not only *add to* policy but can also be useful to *question* the latter in a more profound way. As Vermeersch (2012) states,

> the current EU appeals for increased attention entail the creation of a political space for the formation and contestation of new understandings of who the Roma are, what they need and how they should be helped (Simhandl 2006, 2009). In other words, the EU has now joined a complex political game of framing and reframing the Roma. (p. 1196)

What then are the consequences of taking 'insider voices' into account in this political space or game of contestation? By bringing in the question how Roma identify themselves, the present article invades the discussion on the desirability of targeted and mainstreaming initiatives.

To summarise again, our major conclusions stress the following: 1. There is a strongly mentalised gap with (institutionalised) majority society, 2. People first and foremost

identify with being 'Roma', but attribute a far more limited meaning to this concept compared to how this concept is usually understood both in the public debate and in scientific research (i.e., as an ethnic group or an international political/cultural/… movement) and 3. There are intergenerational identification differences (youngsters having a lot more out-group communication and identifying less strictly with being Roma than older adults). These conclusions stress the present distance between the specific community (i.e. the own network which predominantly consists of the extended family) and mainstream society, mainly for elderly people. There is no desire to identify with the broader Roma community; as far as this is the case, it involves a local community of familiar people. This insider perspective expresses no support whatsoever for a targeted approach towards 'the Roma' as such. Moreover, the affirmation of a present gap with the rest of society further strengthens the argument against particularisation. Listening to the insider narratives of Roma might imply recognising them as persons, rather than as Roma. As a Roma youngster framed it strikingly in one of the above quotations: *"It does not really matter to me […] we are all equal. You, me, we are all people."* That conclusion may of course be transferred to other minority groups too. Its particular importance for the Roma lies in current policy discourse towards this group. The example of Ghent's policy is representative for a broader European tendency, although in its formulations it refers less explicitly to *Roma* and *inclusion* as guiding concepts. The major distinctive feature of this tendency is its directedness towards a particular (ethnic) target group which is moreover defined in terms of societal problems. Whether it concerns criminality, a condition of poverty, racism or discrimination seems to be of secondary importance; that these are presented as *features of a culture* is what is at stake here.

This observation may be surprising, as this approach towards integration of ethnic minorities has been left behind increasingly during the past few decades. And although policy makers may find good reasons to stick to an ethnic minority target-group oriented approach in the incomparable differentness of Roma with regard to other groups, the insider perspective seems to bring about a somehow different story. Its implications for policy may be far-reaching:

- The plea for 'a right to self-identification' of Roma does not only bring about new, adapted definitions of the Roma concept 'from the inside'; it moreover questions whether policy should still be directed towards Roma *as such* (i.e., as a distinguished target group).
- Rather than reframing *Roma* in current policy making, the insider perspective reframes the meaning of *inclusion*. What matters most to Roma is not the content of the name of the ethnic group they belong to, but rather how they are treated: they prefer to be approached as 'people' instead of 'Roma'. As such, a direction towards a different understanding of *inclusion* is suggested.

Of course, it would be a dangerous pitfall to generalise these conclusions as being *the* insider perspective of *the* Roma. There are probably good reasons to state that the sample of this enquiry is not representative for all Roma in Ghent, and that Ghent is

not representative for the situation of Roma all over Europe. Other Roma in Ghent or elsewhere obviously *may* have a different opinion about things. But as we mentioned in the beginning of this article, this kind of generalisation was not our aim. That does not restrict the impact of the respondents' perspective in any sense though. On the contrary, we hope that the presented insider perspective may fuel broad discussions in a fundamental way: because however few they are, what they say, it is our opinion certainly in this case, matters a lot. In what sense then does it matter, if it is not to be generalised nor can it claim representativeness? Smeyers (2009) refers to the limits of the predominant interpretation of insider understanding as experience-based. The latter evidently incurs insurmountable problems. Experience is highly liable to subjectivity between individuals: it always refers to *a subject who is having this experience*. This evidently follows from the insight that it is very improbable for two people to have the same experience for participating in it. As such, the 'knowledge' produced by a small sample of respondents indeed is limited. Consequently, Smeyers introduces an alternative form of insider understanding. The question at stake here is in what sense *taking part in a practice* is an issue of understanding. The one who is part of a practice evidently is someone 'who knows how to go on' and does so in a particular way. The focus thus shifts from 'knowledge' to 'doing' and being entitled to do so in the future. What we can learn from insiders is 'what makes sense' to them *as* insiders. Exactly this is what privileges insiders: they know why they go on as they do. They have chosen to take a particular route exactly because that route makes sense to them. As the above-mentioned implications for policy proved, what makes sense to them may indeed be helpful to 'know how to go on': not to find 'the' proper definition of who the Roma are through new knowledge, but to value an insider perspective's contribution 'to go on' shaping the society we all live in. And in that story, we are all insiders.

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Chapter 8

Whose problem is it anyway? Realising the right to education for Roma children in Ghent, Belgium. [1]

Abstract

Western European cities are increasingly inhabited by Roma due to intra-European migrations. These societal changes pose new challenges for schools and other social institutions. By this case study on the city of Ghent, Belgium, this article sheds light on problems concerning the realisation of the right to education for Roma children in a context that has recently emerged rapidly. A distinction is thereby made between problem definitions of policymakers, school actors, and Roma parents. Each of these stakeholders defines the current situation in their own way. It is argued that in order to 'make sense' of the right to education these various perspectives must be brought into communication with one another: an interactionist dialogical approach seeking mutual understanding may more fruitfully contribute to finding solutions for the problems at issue.

8.1   Introduction

There is large agreement on the manifest disadvantage experienced by Roma children in nearly every aspect of schooling. Roma educational achievement has been historically poor across Europe, and the situation is even said to have worsened over the last two decades (Unicef, 2011). Both in scientific literature and policy making, attention is drawn to this problematic schooling and to possible solution strategies. Numerous research projects analyse this state of affairs, and they attempt to identify possible causes of problems and map existing 'good practices' that may inspire policy (e.g. European Commission, 2010a; Szalai, 2012; The World Bank, 2012). The European Union points to the crucial importance of education in order to realise equal opportunities in society for Roma (e.g. European Commission 2010b; 2011; Unesco and Council of Europe, 2007) and many NGOs denounce the violation of children's rights with regard to education (e.g. Amnesty International, 2010; 2013; European Roma Information Office, 2012; European Roma Rights Centre, 2000; Open Society Foundations, 2012).

A two-fold focus can be discerned in these scientific and political efforts. With regard to content, attention is mainly on *structural factors* such as segregation, discrimination and poverty. Education is then looked upon as a lever for social integration. Most literature on the schooling of Roma focuses on segregation as one of the major problems threatening a successful school career of children (e.g. Cahn *et al.*, 1999; European Roma Rights Centre, 2004; Greenberg, 2010; O'Nions, 2010; Rostas, 2012). The charge is obvious: educational segregation not only represents but further quickens the discrimination and social marginalisation of Roma all over Europe. In most cases, segregation in education violates fundamental human rights and is contrary to the principles of non-discrimination (Rostas, 2012). The influential case of *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic*[1] which was brought to the European Court of Human Rights (2007) placed discriminatory practices in relation to school segregation high on the political agenda and gave cause for further research and policy initiatives. Second, there is a strong *geographical focus on the situation in Central and Eastern Europe* (e.g. Cahn *et al.*, 1999; European Roma Rights Centre, 2004; Greenberg, 2010; Kyuchukov, 2000; Mihok, 2004; O'Nions, 2010; Rostas, 2012; Salner, 2005; Şandru, 2009; Székelyi *et al.*, 2003; Unicef, 2011). This is evidently due to this region having the largest Roma population. In addition, the general socio-economic circumstances of countries in this region pose impediments to development, which further impact upon education. Recently, however, things are changing. Although it is still the case that most Roma live in Central

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1 The case concerns 18 Czech nationals of Roma origin who had all been assigned to special education schools for children with learning difficulties. Recognising the vital importance of the right to education for the future of these children, the Court judged that this placement amounted to a discriminatory denial of the children's right to education. As such, it violated the European Convention on Human Rights. Statistical research based on data of 1999 proved that disproportionate numbers of Roma were being assigned to special education schools in the Czech city of Ostrava. In particular, over half of the Roma children were placed in special schools. Indeed, over half of the population in special schools were Roma. Most strikingly, Roma children were almost 28 times more likely to be placed in special education schools than non-Roma children (European Roma Rights Centre, 2000).

and Eastern Europe, their presence in Western European cities is increasing rapidly. This is mainly owing to the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007. Even though the quantitative presence of Roma remains limited in Western Europe so far, public debates are often heated owing to social unrest and the great social visibility of these new immigrants.[2] This unprecedented situation presents more or less 'stable' welfare states with new challenges.

The aim of this article is to broaden the scope of current discussions in two ways. First, the focus on structural factors is supplemented with explicit *attention to the way the problem is defined by different actors*. Desegregation makes an indispensable contribution not only to educational equality but, moreover, to social justice in a more general sense. This contribution adds to that approach with a comprehensive perspective that is enabled throughout an in-depth case study. Attention is thereby drawn to the particular way various stakeholders define the constraints with regard to the schooling of Roma children. Second, this article shifts the attention from the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe to Western Europe. Although probably many parallels can be drawn between both contexts, important differences can be expected too. The sudden social changes that arise from the recent presence of larger Roma communities[3] require creative solutions. It might thus be interesting to investigate more closely how the present challenges are dealt with in Western Europe. Therefore, the investigation starts by posing the following question: *'Which problems do policymakers, school actors and parents identify and experience with regard to the schooling of Roma children?'* After a clarification of the research framework and adopted methodology, the problems identified by three distinct groups of stakeholders will be outlined. Finally, the foregoing perspectives are related and compared with one another; some present tensions are discussed; and the focus is directed towards the way existing differences can be dealt with fruitfully when constructing policy.

8.2   The research framework: An in-depth case study

This enquiry focuses on the situation in the city of Ghent, Belgium. Two reasons render it of particular interest to the current discussion. First, the inflow of Roma is very visible in Ghent, albeit limited in absolute numbers.[4] Many of the discussions surrounding Roma in Belgium centre on Ghent. This atmosphere stimulates a reflective and critical attitude of the various stakeholders who are active in the field; moreover, the city has a leading role in dealing with the situations at stake. Many initiatives towards Roma people in

2 One may, for example, have in mind the Dale Farm evictions in Essex, UK (see Kennedy, 2011; Topping, 2011), or the Roma evictions by French president Sarkozy (cf. Tran, 2010; Traynor, 2010; Nacu, 2012), which were reported in newspapers worldwide.

3 'Roma' here refers to more recently immigrated groups stemming from Central and Eastern European countries of origin, and should be distinguished from the far smaller groups of *Roms* and *Manuches* (estimated ca. 300 people) or *caravan dwellers* [Woonwagenbewoners] (estimated ca. 2,000 people) in Belgium. These people have Belgian nationality and have resided in the country for many generations (Vlaams Minderhedencentrum, 2010).

4 The number of legally residing Roma immigrants in Ghent was estimated to be 4,820 in a total population of 247,262 (i.e., 2 per cent of the population) at 31.12.2011 (Integratiedienst Stad Gent, 2012).

Ghent derive both from policy makers and NGOs. There is a large public debate at the local level both on identifying the problems that require attention and on the strategies for dealing with them. So far, it is one of the rare examples of a Western European municipality adopting a local policy towards Roma and intra-European migration (cf. Philippeth and Philips, 2010).[5]

During extensive fieldwork in the period 2008–2012, in-depth interviews with over 60 relevant stakeholders (Roma parents; teachers and other school staff; mediators; social workers; volunteers; policymakers; etc.) were conducted. Starting from many personal encounters stemming from preceding voluntary work, contacts were made with all relevant city services, schools, and professional and voluntary organisations. Using the snowball approach offered opportunities to engage a broad network of contacts. This finally allowed the researcher to select respondents and to gain an overview of key persons in various contexts and at different levels.

Interview data were analysed through thematic analysis. The initial aim throughout the interviews was to identify and distinguish recurrent themes, problems, and related causes with regard to the schooling of Roma children. Often, underlying 'problems' are identified as the clear-cut, self-evident and clearly identifiable targets of shared action. This presupposes a common agreement amongst stakeholders as to the focus. But because of their respective perspectives, respondents may stress different aspects of a problematic situation. Moreover, sometimes they situate existing problems elsewhere: a problem for one is not necessary a problem for another. As analysis of the data showed large differences between the perspectives of various stakeholders, the results in the following paragraph will be subdivided into stakeholder categories, rather than by theme. In particular, it concerns policymakers (including politicians and people working in cabinets), school actors (including principals, teachers, mediators, etc.) and Roma parents. In the forthcoming discussion, three major points of discussion between each of the perspectives will be dealt with.

8.3   Results

8.3.1   Problems identified by policymakers

The extent to which policymakers consider something to be a problem largely depends on the social aims to which they aspire. Essentially, this involves the observation of regulations, such as compulsory education or the legal framework warranting equal educational opportunities. These regulations reflect society's values and define what the government should warrant for every citizen. In general, the problems policymakers identify implicitly or explicitly refer to these 'grand principles'. In its most recent 'truancy action plan', the Flemish Government (2012) explicitly refers to 'Central and Eastern European youngsters' as a specific target group, because of notable high truancy rates. The focus of action is on 'informing the target group', which implicitly suggests that the underlying problem of truancy in this case is a lack of insight into the value of education.

5 For a more elaborate discussion on this policy, cf. Hemelsoet and Van Pelt (2013).

The topics below are the problems most frequently broached by policymakers.

8.3.1.1 Irregular school attendance

From a policy perspective, both truancy and lateness at school are problematic in the sense that they imply a violation of compulsory education which is lawfully embedded in all European countries (this is the case for other children as for Roma). The importance of compulsory education as a tool for getting a better view on irregular attendance and to get children into schools is repeatedly emphasised. Policymakers state that irregular school participation is much more common amongst Roma. Specific reasons are mentioned, and reference is made mostly to a specific culture as well as to the situation in countries of origin:

> Each time these girls and boys reach fourteen years old, they stop going to school. Boys start doing I don't know what and the girls get pregnant, become a mum and hop, the vicious circle of predestination repeats itself and the culture of the group is carried on.

> People say, they are resourceful fellows. But how did that become so? They had to. Because in countries of origin they were excluded and discriminated against on the base of their ethnicity. So they cope with things.

Policymakers therefore state that the issue of irregular schooling requires action: children should be led to school, and parents sensitised in the interest of their children; and Roma must be alerted to the fact that educational institutions and the system are not the same as in their countries of origin.

8.3.1.2 Drop-out in the transition from primary to secondary education

The problem of drop-out is closely related to truancy. Reference is mostly made to drop-out in the transition from primary to secondary education, which is perceived to be a bottleneck. Official figures confirm this phenomenon. In the city of Ghent, Bulgarians and Slovaks[6] represent respectively 3.1 per cent and 1.6 per cent of all children in primary education. In secondary education, these numbers drop to 0.8 per cent and 0.4 per cent (Hemelsoet, 2013). Although there may be other interfering variables such as demographic characteristics, it can be expected that a large proportion of this difference is due to drop-out in the transition from primary to secondary education. The latter is, moreover, confirmed throughout the perceptions of fieldworkers. Policymakers suggest that some causes of this drop-out include the changing power relationships between parents and children, teenage pregnancies, and early marriages:

> Parents have large problems, mainly when the children are getting older, to convince them to go to school. […] They want to become independent as fast as possible, so they want to learn and to work at the same time, so they prefer part-time education.

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6 Figures on the situation in Ghent do not refer to Roma but are based on nationality. This is the case because registrations of ethnicity are not available nor lawful. The city's Integration Service estimates that about 50 per cent of all registered Bulgarians and 90 per cent of all registered Slovaks and Czechs in the city are Roma. This leads to absolute numbers of 2,815 Bulgarian, 1,737 Slovak and 268 Czech Roma. (Integratiedienst Stad Gent, 2012)

> *But these girls of thirteen years old or a bit younger, twelve let's say, mainly girls, because it is crucial. […] this is the age they drop out, then they are married off.*

These statements affirm findings of other studies that refer to a relatively short adolescence period amongst Roma. As a consequence, children are regarded as independent and 'adult' from an earlier age (Myers, McGhee & Bhopal, 2010). The lack of confidence that education may offer better opportunities for the future is also mentioned, as well as financial thresholds. Finally, a lack of priority for secondary education in favour of early childhood initiatives in European policy is referred to:

> *But I think sometimes there are these kind of waves of things people consider at a particular moment in time. Now that really is 'early childhood' and that is a topic, well yeah, I don't know how that goes. It's like fashion I guess, I don't know, it's a new trend and everybody sides with it.*

8.3.1.3 Homogeneous school populations

The social debate on homogeneous school populations or so-called 'concentration schools' is not limited only to Roma. 'Concentration' is often defined in terms of 'black' and 'white' schools, with reference to an over- or under-representation of migrant children in school compared with the general population (e.g. Boado, 2011; Duquet *et al.*, 2006). Lately, attention has shifted to concentrations of children with a comparable socio-economic background (e.g. Duru-Bellat, 2000a; 2000b; 2008; Boone & Van Houtte, 2013; Van Damme *et al.*, 2004). In relation to Roma, both definitions are employed. Advocates of equal educational opportunities stress the importance of a social mix, thus condemning homogeneous school populations:

> *It is desirable that all schools are socially mixed, that children from various backgrounds get acquainted with each other and that less advantaged groups are taken along by a stronger majority.*

Figures prove that 'concentration schools' are not a fiction in Ghent. Four different schools out of a total of 129 account for one third of Bulgarian and Slovak enrolment in primary education (unpublished figures provided by AgODi, the Flemish Agency of Education Services).

8.3.1.4 Overrepresentation in special education

The over-representation of Roma children in special education schools is extensively discussed in the segregation debate. A lot of research in Central and Eastern European countries has focused on this situation, with varying explanations (e.g. Cahn *et al.*, 1999; European Roma Rights Centre, 2004; Greenberg, 2010; O'Nions, 2010; Rostas, 2012). But it concerns not only an Eastern European reality. In Ghent too, the presence of children originating from Eastern Europe in special education schools is disproportionally high compared with other populations. In primary education, 19 per cent of all Slovak and 22 per cent of all Czech children are in special education schools, compared with 7 per cent of all Belgian children. This disparity is even more remarkable in secondary education.

Here, 5 per cent of all Belgian children are enrolled in special education schools, whilst for Slovak children it is as high as 33 per cent, which exceeds the former by a factor of 6.5 (POC Werkgroep Onderwijs, 2013). Respondents presume various causes for this fact, citing the educational systems in both Belgium and the countries of origin:

> *Another major problem, I think, is that children are too quickly locked into special education, vocational or part-time education. That goes way too fast.*

> *In Eastern European countries of origin, Roma often end up in special education schools. This is demonstrated by the disproportate representation of Roma children in this kind of education [in Belgium].*

8.3.2 Problems identified by schools

Not only policymakers but school teams also conceptualise problems with respect to the education of Roma children. As is clarified below, these problems are of varied nature. Often, they are situated in the tension between *sui generis* pedagogical ambitions and external expectations. The latter may concern formal requirements demanded by policy regulations as well as expectations of external partners and/or parents.

8.3.2.1 Irregular school attendance

Irregular school attendance is a problem identified by both policymakers and schools. However, because of the particular role attributed to schools by government, it is defined differently. Schools are expected to monitor truancy precisely and to inform authorities on prevalence. If this duty is neglected, they may be sanctioned (Flemish Government, 2006). But the responsibility of schools is not only to register and report truancy: they must actively prevent it. In this way, schools are faced with the difficult task of motivating children, as well as controlling and sanctioning them. A strong focus on the creation of a favourable school environment and on tackling the underlying causes of truancy is thus required. Within that focus of interest, truancy proves to be symptomatic of problems rather than being a problem in itself. Teachers and other school staff mention particular causes of truancy which must be dealt with in respect to Roma children. Apart from the evident consequences of poverty, such as a restricted mobility, there are some reasons that are less obvious or visible:

> *A dad told me one day: "Well, I do not want to send him because he is not washed and he smells, and I do not have food to give him". He was ashamed about that, and scared that his child would be bullied.*

> *Sometimes they are absent because of the komuna. They stay home as an interpreter; the children then have to translate when parents have to go somewhere.*

> *They are scared that children will get ill and that they will not be able to afford a doctor. That's why they do not want their children to participate in swimming classes.*

Sometimes reference is made to different regimes in the educational system of countries of origin (e.g. with regard to holidays). Several schools also refer to the sudden

'disappearance' of children. They confirm that truancy is more common amongst Roma children, but meanwhile stress that absenteeism is only rarely caused by a lacking appreciation or recognition of the value of education. Rather, causes are almost always attributed to external factors (poverty, legal status and associated fear, the situation in countries of origin, culture, etc.).

8.3.2.2 The school: an educational or a care institution?

The difficult circumstances in which many Roma children live lead to extensive welfare problems which bring further challenges to schools. Existing care provisions in schools are sufficient to cope with a limited number of children and with manageable problems. That task becomes less manageable when the nature and size of the problems exceed the capacity of the school. When respondents describe these additional challenges they refer to the lack of financial means to buy food, clothes and school material, rack-renting and other housing problems, etc. They also mention parents' ignorance of administrative routines and institutional procedures, as well as psychological problems arising from the 'state of uncertainty' which accompanies living in deprived circumstances. All of this demands extra efforts from the school with relation to care:

> Both children and their parents can come to wash themselves at school. […] And food is always available. […] A child can only learn when he or she feels good and basic needs are met. A child that is hungry cannot learn.

These practices prompt the question as to what extent it is *desirable* for schools to take on tasks which are rather far from their core business. Should efforts be made to increase the caring capacity of schools or is this more appropriate for welfare services? Amongst the respondents, there does not seem to be much agreement. Still, almost all of them stress that 'being a teacher' is not the same as 'being a social or welfare worker', adding that the latter cannot be *expected* from the former.

8.3.2.3 Lacking school skills and attitudes

A problem that many consider to be 'typical' for Roma is a lack of skills, attitudes and discipline that matter at school. Often, this is a consequence of the lack of the required school experience of the children and/or their parents. In this case, 'school culture' remains unknown and is far removed from 'home culture':

> Children of nine years of age who cannot make a puzzle of six pieces […] You see large differences in everything. Colouring, cutting; the kind of skills other children already learn from the age of two at school or at home. But they don't; sometimes they see a pencil or scissors and ask, 'What is that?'

> We notice immediately whether a child has gone to school or not. Children who know to sit still, where to put their school bag, who watch the blackboard and know what it is for, who know 'ok, at the end of the day my parents will come to pick me up again'.

8.3.2.4 Language and communication problems

There is often poor communication between schools and parents as a result of language differences. As is the case for other migrants, parents do not always have a sufficient command of the Dutch language to communicate effectively. This problem is not confined to Roma, however, and in order to overcome it, interpreters are regularly deployed. However, communication problems are not merely matters of technical language proficiency. There may be a lack of mutual understanding in a broader sense: parents do not understand expressed expectations and teachers, conversely, are uncertain as how to understand and interpret particular behaviour. Teachers repeatedly express a need for more background information on the people they interact with, including the places they come from. For example, there is a recurrent communication breakdown concerning the emotional reactions which attend special education schools. Overcoming these communication breakdowns and misunderstandings is in its turn complicated by insufficient language skills. Teachers do, of course, try to develop creative tools to deal with this situation:

> When they do not understand me, I make a letter with pictograms, or I call in the children. I tell them: 'Do you remember that letter? Can you tell that to mum and dad?' And if it really does not work out, there are still the telephone interpreters.

8.3.3 Problems identified by Roma parents

The perspective of Roma parents is rooted in their everyday experiences and is strongly mediated by the conditions in which they live. These are mainly characterised by difficult circumstances, ignorance, and a defensive attitude. Against that background, regular school attendance is neither always a matter of course, nor a priority.

8.3.3.1 Difficult living circumstances

In the mind of parents, deteriorated living conditions are a first major barrier to their children's school participation. Amongst other things, this concerns problems related to residence status, uncertain housing conditions and a lack of comfort, an absent or uncertain income, and health problems. At least as relevant as the rather self-evident material dimensions of poverty is the associated psychosocial condition of people which is strongly determined by uncertainty. In confidential conversations, parents express feelings of shame, fear and distrust. Often, they are inclined to remain silent about even these if a school offers opportunities for (partial) subsidy of costs:

> Like the teacher of my oldest; 55 euros had to be paid for a school excursion and she told me if we were not able to pay it, she could do… but I always try to make these things work; if not the children do not feel comfortable when things are different for them than for the other children.

Finally, in some extreme cases children are not regularly sent to school because their help is needed in order to earn income for the family. These children are expected to (help with) work themselves (i.e., to make a *direct* contribution to the family's income),

or to stay home to take care of other children while their parents go out for work (i.e., to make an *indirect* contribution to the family's income).

8.3.3.2 Adequate knowledge and information

A second obstacle that is often mentioned is the lack of appropriate information. Many Roma are unfamiliar with the educational system in Belgium. They are not familiar with existing opportunities and prevailing rights and duties, nor with the expectations, aims and function of schools. Parents say they are supported in many ways, but still have the impression they do not to receive all the necessary and accurate information. This is the case for education as it is generally in everyday life:

> *Well, they can take assimilation or Dutch courses but I think that does not do the job. Some kind of support on how to live in this society is missing, let us call it orientation for daily life: where to go shopping, where things are cheapest, where you can find healthy food, which things to be careful for, which landlords are dangerous, and how to pay bills.*

Part of the reason for being badly informed is their limited command of the Dutch language.

8.3.3.3 Fear of and distrust towards social institutions

As mentioned above, distrust towards the school and civil society in general hampers educational participation. This may be related to residence status. Some Roma reside illegally in the country, and this evidently engenders a defensive attitude towards all official institutions, including schools. In addition, and more specifically for the Roma, there is repeated reference to a history of discrimination both at the personal level (the situation in the country of origin) as well as at the collective level (the history of the Roma as a people):

> *I also had problems at school because I was the only one in my class who was a bit dark, well yeah, black. And yes, a bit of racism from my teacher too. And then skinheads beat me and my mother up.*

> *This distrust towards civil society did not just come like that. People have their reasons […] The injuries that have hurt the Roma over centuries do not dissolve in one year only.*

8.3.3.4 The perceived gap between family and school culture

Poor living conditions, a lack of knowledge, and distrust all implicitly refer to a 'gap' between the situation at home and at school. Parents also mention some additional differences such as a 'Roma culture' which is said to be different from 'school culture' (although it is often hard to specify this further). Some examples are provided:

> *I always thought children have to wear two pairs of shoes at schools up to a certain age. So one pair they only use at school and another pair to play outside and come home. But in school, they only use one pair; I do not like that. And there are also other hygiene problems, some kids are just walking around with globs of snot.*

Not all differences mentioned are this trivial though. Reference is also made to earlier marriages and pregnancies, gender-related expectations and the importance of family life.

8.4   Discussion: deconstructing and reconstructing a problem definition

Although there are certainly points of agreement between the various involved parties, and each recognises the presence of problems and barriers related to the schooling of Roma children, the preceding results have also shown large differences. For policymakers, a lawful perspective is predominant. What matters is that the legal framework must be observed and complied with. Such a perspective has two important consequences. First, the focus is on the *phenotypical manifestation* of phenomena; examples are the first two problems identified by policymakers: irregular school participation and high drop-out rates. Although it is not stated that underlying influencing factors are of no importance, no explicit attention is drawn to these. What is at stake is observation of the law: that is, the requirement that these children have to attend school. Second, attention notably is paid to *structural factors* and *deviations of standard patterns* in particular. This is evident by the focus on figures and tendencies, which policymakers attempt to control. Participation rates, drop-out rates, homogeneous school populations, segregation within schools, as well as over-representation in special education schools, are problematised as they may signal an injustice and the lack of equal opportunities for all children.

For schools, the perspective is somewhat different. Attention shifts to a need for an *understanding* of the phenomena they are confronted with in their everyday work. As loci of pedagogical action they 'have to get involved' and face the present challenges; more precisely, they *are* involved. Requirements of the government have to be met, whilst particular issues which arise at school concerning the children and their families have to be addressed. Reconciliation of both these challenges is at the heart of the schools' agenda. For this reason, irregular school participation is problematic for schools also. However, to tackle the problem a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons for truancy is required. If policy expectations are to be realised, the construction of a communicative bridge with the people inhabiting the school seems to be an indispensable prerequisite. The problems defined by schools all refer to that need for bridging, whether it concerns practical obstacles (such as language and communication problems as well as pupils' lack of school skills and attitudes) or the debate as to the extent to which the school is an educational and/or rather a care institution. Thus, here too a double focus can be perceived. First, attention is drawn to the *feasibility* of the proper task: 'How can we realise what we are expected to realise'? Second, the *content* of the proper task *is questioned*, thus prompting the question, 'What are we to realise it'? This double focus confirms the position of schools as a locus of pedagogical action. As societal institutions, they shape existing policy first of all by *carrying it out*. Secondly,

they shape this policy also by *critically (re)constructing* it.

Finally, the perspective of Roma people is mainly *experience-based*. It is grounded in everyday struggles and general problems separate from—and otherwise unrelated to—the domain of education. These people's stories give an account of irregular participation in the educational system; that is, they clarify the consequences of these problems for the schooling of their children. Although irregular presence is recognised, it must be stressed that all of the respondents express a willingness and intention to participate (regularly) in education. This perspective shows that the idea that Roma 'just do not care' about the education of their children is an unfounded assumption. Such a prejudice does injustice to a far more complex reality, in which the difficult living circumstances, which complicate school participation in various ways, have to be overcome. Apart from that, difficulties are situated in the migration status and in the cultural differences between Roma and mainstream society. The need for adequate information, the existing fear and distrust towards societal institutions, as well as the perceived gap between family and school life, are referred to repeatedly. The focus thus is on the particularity of the situation, the character of which can be divided into often connected factors related to living circumstances (difficult living conditions), to recent immigration (a lack of knowledge and language problems), and to being Roma (distrust towards mainstream society and perceived cultural differences).

The foregoing analysis addresses our initial research question. Problems related to the schooling of Roma children were identified and structured in accordance with the standpoints of various stakeholders. Unfortunately, identifying the differences between various perspectives will suffice neither for policymakers nor for practice workers who have to deal with the situations at stake. The realisation of communication among these viewpoints is an additional prerequisite in order to be able to 'go on' (Smeyers, 2009). With an eye towards bringing about that dialogue, recognising similarities and commonalities will be as important as acknowledging prevalent differences. Before drawing further conclusions, I will now attempt to describe a few connecting threads and forthcoming tensions by looking upon the various perspectives *in interaction*. Three themes that overarch the various perspectives will be dealt with in turn: the presence of children at school, the tension between education and care, and the gap between the school and home culture of these families.

'The presence of children at school' is first and foremost problematised from a policy perspective. As a matter of fact, this is reflected in all four problems discussed earlier. Irregular school attendance, drop-out, homogeneous school populations and over-representation of Roma education in special education all in some way or another refer to a problematic presence. The first two relate to *whether* children are present, the latter two to *where* they are present. Owing to their particular role, irregular school attendance is problematised by schools somewhat differently. Still, a shared interest with policymakers to get children into schools is virtually self-evident. Contrary to common belief in public debate, the problems defined by parents generally also reflect a willingness to get their children (more) into school. They express this more implicitly

with reference to difficult living circumstances that pose as barriers to regular school participation. The school is not denounced, but these living circumstances. Discomfort with *where* their children are present is reflected in a general fear and distrust towards institutions. Parents protest when their children are referred to special education schools, not because they do not want their children to go to school, but rather because they would prefer them to be in good schools. This first overarching theme clearly offers opportunities for a constructive dialogue between each of the outlined perspectives. Although various stakeholders approach the topic from a different angle, there seems to be general agreement on the desirability to 'improve the presence' of Roma children at school, both in a quantitative way (*whether* they are present) and a qualitative (*where* they are present) way.

The shared interest for participation in quality education brings us to the impediments for its realisation. A recurrent theme is the need for extra care and support of families surrounding the education of children. Parents repeatedly refer to difficult living circumstances as the major cause of failing to offer their children a proper education. Schools affirm this finding, which leads to the difficult challenge to safeguard the balance between their educational core business and caring tasks. The latter implicitly relates to the finding of policymakers that Roma children are over-represented in special education schools. Children are referred to these schools because the mainstream school system is not suited to their particular needs. The discussion about the care which should be provided and the means to achieve this remains unresolved. Whether difficult living circumstances should be tackled by the welfare sector and outside the school or whether more care provisions should be foreseen at and by schools, is a question which cannot unequivocally be answered. Nor is it herewith clarified to what extent target-group orientated initiatives are desirable in meeting the particular needs of these children. But again, beyond the different focuses of attention, there seems to be agreement on something across the three perspectives that may be a point of reference for the ongoing discussions: many of these children and their families live in difficult living circumstances and have extra needs which stand in the way of realising the right to education in its fullest sense. Leaving aside the question, 'How?', the acknowledgement that something must be done is shared by all.

Third, reference is made to the tension between the 'school culture' and the 'home culture'. This tension can be divided into differences at the level of the *content* (it then involves different social practices) and at the level of the *communicative process*. Parents refer to both. They mention school habits and expectations that are alien to customs at home (the 'gap between the family and the school culture'). But they also point to a lack of adequate knowledge and information. The latter gap refers to ignorance rather than to being alien to practices, though both are not always easy to distinguish. In fact, the absence of technical language skills and being ignorant of tacit knowledge may very well look alike. The intersection between both is reflected in the fear and distrust of many Roma towards social institutions; this may be due to disagreement with what they aim for or how they work, but also to ignorance or misunderstanding. It is no

coincidence that there is talk of 'home culture' rather than 'Roma culture'. When schools state there is a lack of school skills and attitudes, it would be a mistake to ascribe these to a supposed 'Roma culture'. Many of the observations made by schools could relate to poor living circumstances, a lack of preceding school experience of both children and parents, etc. Without answering the question what does or does not belong to 'Roma culture', it should be clear that this is not what is under discussion here. What various stakeholders agree upon is that in most Roma families there is a gap, or at least a tension, between the social practices that structure life at school and those which structure life at home. That tension should in turn be dealt with in order to realise the same right to education for Roma children which exists for other children.

8.5   Concluding remarks on the significance of an interactionist dialogical approach and the particular role of the school

The foregoing has shown the complexity and multi-layeredness of the problems with regard to the realisation of the right to education for Roma children. There is no such thing as a fixed problem definition to be tackled by all involved actors. Particular problem constructions are strongly mediated by the actorship of various stakeholders. That insight seems rather straightforward and self-evident, but it has significant implications for future problem-solving strategies. Too often, problems as defined by various stakeholders are conceived as independent of one another: initiatives have to be taken at the policy level to tackle structural injustices, adequate communicative tools have to be developed to support schools in dealing with 'new target groups', and specific integration initiatives and citizenship courses are deployed to integrate new immigrants into mainstream society. Clearly distinguishable initiatives which are taken in various clearly demarked policy domains suggest almost self-evident divisions. This research shows that there are common concerns and shared commitments to improve the schooling opportunities of Roma children, as well as to increase their participation in education. Although the focus on particular dimensions and the perspective may (largely) differ, these commonalities express the possibility of a more integrated, interactionist approach that takes various attributions of meanings into account. There are, moreover, good reasons to suggest that such an approach is not only possible, but also desirable. Problem definitions are socially constructed and, as such, they unavoidably reflect power relationships between various stakeholders and their problem conceptualisations. To conceive solutions to deal with these problems cannot be contemplated independently of this process of problem construction. If policymakers are willing to take the concerns of various stakeholders into account, explicit attention for this problem construction process, as well as the implication of various stakeholders, is required.

Within such an approach, each of the actors appears to have a particular role. Policymakers represent 'the agreement that exists at the level of society'. Laws and

other regulations can be conceived of as materialised normative choices that are—at least within democratic societies—to a more or lesser extent accepted. These express 'what society stands for' and the content of these expressions is subject to political discussions and public debate in the democratic arena of negotiation and decision-making. The role of the school as an 'intermediate' both carrying out and shaping policy is of crucial importance here. This is where different beliefs are in confrontation with one another, where they interact, and where a dialogue is to be constructed. From an education point of view, this dialogue is ineluctable. Neither 'acceptance', nor 'ignorance' or 'indifference' towards the tension between various beliefs are taken into account as valuable options. These attitudes are explicitly not pedagogical as they express a refusal to deal with prevailing tensions. If schools take up this task, thus employing the discretionary space and autonomy they enjoy, they may, amongst other places, be loci of pedagogical action and democratic reconciliation.

To put it more forcefully, a better 'understanding' of different voices is a necessary prerequisite for an effective and just policy. The latter involves more than 'taking voices into account': an interchange of—and dialogue between—meanings of actors is at stake here. The 'better understanding' of present situations has a double function for policy. First, it has an *informative value*: different voices provide added information, and a well-informed policy evidently has more chance of success than an uninformed one. Second, it has a *political value*. It involves those who are subject to the policy not only as executors but also as co-constructors of the latter. As such, it is recognised that policy is more than a textual reality to be put in place by social workers, teachers and target groups: it concerns a democratic practice. Such an approach grants 'rights' a meaning beyond legally enforceable privileges. The latter requires a shift away from an technical or instrumental comprehension of the question, 'How to realise the right to education', to the preceding question, 'What the right to education may mean'. If that step can be taken successfully, rights may become a vivid educational practice in which people can find each other in search of a shared interest: a better future for all children.

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Chapter 9

Shaping the right to education for Roma children:
A case study of present practices in Ghent, Belgium. [1]

Abstract

Western European cities are increasingly confronted with Roma immigrants. These societal changes bring along new challenges for schools. Through a case study, this article sheds a light on present practices which shape the right to education for Roma children. Three principal success factors are distinguished: boundary-blurring practices, a life world oriented approach and commitment. Finally, the relation between promising practices and a rights-based approach to educational justice is discussed.

9.1   Introduction

As Liégois (2007) states, "when discussing the schooling of Roma children, the issue is almost always considered a *problem*" (p. 11). Most research focuses on a range of problems related to the realisation of the right to education for Roma children, similar to that for other children. Educational segregation is probably the most frequently examined threat to a successful school career (e.g. Cahn *et al.,* 1999; European Roma Rights Centre, 2004; Greenberg, 2010; O'Nions, 2010; Rostas, 2012). Segregation is closely related to discrimination and may imply a violation of human rights (Rostas, 2012). This was affirmed in the influential case of *D.H. and others v. Czech Republic*, in which the Czech Republic was judged to have violated the European Convention on Human Rights because of segregation practices (European Court of Human Rights, 2007). Recent research has demonstrated similar situations in other Central and Eastern European countries (e.g. Roth & Moisa, 2011; Salner, 2005; Şandru, 2009). The conclusion of these analyses is not very encouraging: "Despite the efforts to expand and improve education for Roma children, as much as 50 per cent of Roma children in Europe fail to complete primary education. In certain countries, between 50 and 80 per cent of Roma children are enrolled in special schools" (Unesco and Council of Europe, 2007, p. 7). The challenges and barriers are hard to overcome in order to achieve Roma children's right to education: "acute poverty, inadequate housing, xenophobia and prejudice, social exclusion, learning in an unfamiliar language, biased assessments, an alienating curriculum, inadequate teaching and chronic underfunding […] In addition, the long-standing experience of xenophobia and marginalisation faced by the Roma community over decades have inevitably led to a deep mistrust of the majority community" (UNICEF, 2011, pp. 73-74). Arising from this discussion is the question of where to begin to fulfil the right to education for Roma children.

Following on from Liégois' (2007) remark, it must regrettably be concluded that the education of Roma children is often problematic. However, that does not imply that their schooling is *by definition* a problem. While recognising present problems, this study also draws attention to some initiatives that attempt to improve their school situation. As such, the article subscribes to a project initiated by Bhopal (2004) in an earlier issue of this journal: the identification of transferable 'promising practices' in order to tackle the problems at stake. This study turns to these promising practices, dealing with the following questions: How do schools and other public institutions deal with the recent presence of Roma children? How do they contribute to the realisation of the right to education for these children in particular? Which initiatives can consequently be conceived of as promising practices and what contributes to their success? The next paragraph of this article sets out the applied methodological framework of the empirical enquiry. Consequently, results are presented in two parts. First, some examples of successful practices are portrayed. Second, success factors of these practices are identified and further illustrated. Thereby, the question of what

turns a practice into a 'promising practice' is further explored. Finally, the results are related to a human rights-based approach to educational justice.

9.2   The research framework: An exploratory in-depth case study in the city of Ghent, Belgium

9.2.1   The context: Calling attention to Western Europe

There is an extensive volume of research on the education of Roma children in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Cahn *et al.,* 1999; European Roma Rights Centre, 2004; Greenberg, 2010; Kyuchukov, 2000; Mihok, 2004; O'Nions, 2010; Rostas, 2012; Roth & Moisa, 2011; Salner, 2005; Şandru, 2009; Székelyi *et al.,* 2003; Unicef, 2011). This body of research exists for evident reasons: due to their geographic dispersal, these countries contain the most significant population of Roma people. Since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, societal attention towards these people is also growing in Western Europe. This is mainly because of increased migrations from Eastern to Western Europe since the borders were opened and freedom of movement (both of people and of goods) was introduced. Immigrants stemming from Rumania, Slovakia or Bulgaria, for example, are now free to travel, work and settle all over the European Union. In the case of Roma, these migrations did not go unnoticed. Although their presence in Western Europe is still quite limited compared to the situation in their countries of origin, it is highly contested.[1] The recent arrival of larger groups of Roma goes hand in hand with social changes and new challenges. As is the case for other institutions, schools too are confronted with a number of problems. They are frequented by children living in extreme poverty, living in abominable housing circumstances, lacking hygiene and so on. Moreover, their retention and drop-out rates are high, their educational achievement is generally low, they do not easily assimilate into the present school mentality and in some cases they have limited school experience, if any. In addition, as is the case for other migrants, they experience language problems or they are unfamiliar with the educational system. Last but not least, Roma may bring with them the earlier mentioned distrust towards the majority community. They are often reluctant towards the school and other social institutions, amongst other things because they fear being discriminated or even becoming subject to violence (Hemelsoet, 2013). In this enquiry, the particular focus is on the situation in Ghent, Belgium. This city derives its particular interest from the visibility of Roma immigrations. Although the inflow of Roma is limited in absolute numbers,[2] the public debate is very vivid. Moreover, a lot of initiative is taken both by grassroots organisations and the municipal authorities. Ghent is one of the rare

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1 One may, for example, remember the recent Dale Farm evictions in Essex, UK or the Roma evictions by the French president Sarkozy (Nacu, 2012).

2 The number of legally residing Roma immigrants in Ghent was estimated to be 4,820 in a total population of 247,262 (i.e., 2 per cent of the population) on 31.12.2011 (Integratiedienst Stad Gent, 2012).

examples of a Western European city that has developed a particular policy towards Roma and intra-European migration (Philippeth & Philips, 2010)[3].

9.2.2 Methodology

It would be an insurmountable task to describe all Roma initiatives that have taken place in the city.[4] Extensive fieldwork carried out in the period 2008–12 focused on (1) initiatives which in some way or another aimed to contribute to the realisation of the right to education of Roma children, and (2) initiatives within the municipality of Ghent. Given the lack of in-depth research on the situation of recently immigrated Roma in Flanders, the fieldwork has an explorative character. Starting from many personal contacts throughout preceding voluntary work, contacts were made with city services, schools, and professional and voluntary organisations. A snowball approach allowed further development of a broad network of contacts. This finally offered the researcher an overview of the initiatives that have been carried out in various contexts and at different levels. In a next stage, each of these initiatives was further investigated through fieldwork (participatory observation in a school and in various activities of other organisations; attendance at relevant meetings and consultations; participation in steering committees and boards; volunteering in various initiatives) and in-depth interviews with over 60 relevant stakeholders (Roma parents and children; teachers and other school staff; mediators; social workers; volunteers; policymakers etc.).

The results of the enquiry are subdivided into two parts. First, some examples of concrete strategies and solutions that are developed to deal with prevailing problems are presented. This is done through a selection of 'portraits' of noticeable practices. These portraits are based on information retrieved both during the fieldwork as well as from the interviews. Some of the investigated practices were selected on the basis of their particular profiles: because of how they were shaped and how they came to existence, each of them expresses a distinct innovative way to deal with present situations. Preference was thus given to a-typical practices in the sense that they are not self-evident policy-steered initiatives but came about in an organic way. As such, they represent a more or less open search for adequate ways to deal with the situations at stake and their content was only to a limited extent predefined. They do so from distinct frameworks; they are situated in various sectors (two in education, one in welfare), both voluntary and professional (one and two initiatives, respectively) and came to existence in different ways and periods. Still, it must be stressed that the portraits are not definitive answers to prevailing problems. Rather, they may be conceived of as possibly inspiring practices and as loci of success factors in action. In the second part of the results, the focus shifts to the success factors of these practices. These were identified in various steps. First, fieldwork notes were revised and re-edited into elaborated and detailed 'portraits' of every practice. Second, reflections of involved stakeholders obtained from

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3 For a more elaborate discussion of this policy, cf. Hemelsoet and Van Pelt, 2013.

4 For a more elaborate description, cf. Hemelsoet, 2013.

interviews and informal conversations were taken into account for the evaluation of each practice. Third, success factors were traced in the practices respondents considered to be promising practices.

9.3   Results: From 'practice' to 'promising practice'

9.3.1   Present strategies and solutions

9.3.1.1 The Bridging Figures Project (BFP)

The *Bridging Figures Project* [Brugfigurenproject] aims to improve communication between schools, families and the neighbourhood. The project employs social workers within schools in order to build these 'bridges'. They do so for all children, but in particular those with unequal opportunities.[5] Their tasks are defined in four segments, focusing on contact with students, support of parents, sensitisation of the school team and cooperation with the neighbourhood (Op den Kamp *et al.,* 2007). The tasks of these social workers should be distinguished from what (intercultural) mediators do. Most activities concern a form of proactive outreaching: bridging figures work *from within* the school, but only part of their work is situated *in* the school. Amongst other things, they spend a lot of time at the entrance gate of the school and make home visits. In order to realise mutual involvement and increase accessibility, the physical boundaries of the school are transgressed. This approach succeeds to increase the involvement of Roma parents in the schooling of their children, although the initiative is not particularly directed towards them. Rather than large-scale information sessions, an individualised way of working meets the present needs. It offers opportunities to break through present resistance against social institutions and the majority society. Literally to 'come home' to Roma houses opens a space for positive experiences such as hospitality, obligingness and pride. Without idealising things, acquaintance with the home culture is said to be of decisive importance in order to get parents involved. In the first instance, it creates opportunities to gain an insight into the expectations of people as well as in existing barriers for (regular) school attendance. By showing involvement with the situation of families, a basic confidence is created. In the second instance, this confidence facilitates steps to be taken beyond noncommittal help. From the perspective of school and society, there are also expectations such as the participation of all children in the educational system. Bridging figures walk on a thin line between the sometimes opposed expectations from the family and the school. The arising relation of trust is based on a shared interest to create optimal developmental opportunities and prospects for the children. The BFP 'builds bridges' between the school and the family life as well as with the outside world. On a meso and macro level,

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5 This concept is further defined in the 'Equal Educational Opportunities Decree' [Gelijke Onderwijskansen Decreet]. Five indicators are set down to distinguish children with unequal opportunities, on the basis of which extra funding is provided to schools: (1) the family is supported by one or more scholarships, (2) the parents are traveling people (caravan dwellers, bargees, and circus or fair operators), (3) the mother did not complete secondary education, (4) the student does not live with his or her family and (5) the language spoken at home is not Dutch (Flemish Government, 2002).

it has a similar effect on the delimitation between education, welfare and integration: it concerns social workers who operate from within the school, who cooperate with many other organisations in various sectors and whose work merges into each of the earlier mentioned policy domains. The requirement to approach people proactively implies a far-reaching commitment with families and their situation. Most respondents affirm this and state that the scope of this job almost evidently crosses professional boundaries. In this work, the meanings and expectations of people are taken as a starting point for action. A rather personal relationship thereby creates the basis for mutual trust which is said to be decisive in order to obtain results with these families regarding school involvement and participation of their children.

9.3.1.2 Roma and Education Schools Committee

The *Roma and Education Schools Committee* [Scholenoverleg Roma en Onderwijs] is a voluntary consultative body founded by school staff from various schools who deal with Roma in their everyday work. Coincidental encounters between some of the people involved gave reason to the foundation of this committee. Each of them was confronted with similar situations and problems they did not always know how to deal with. A forum to exchange and discuss both positive and negative experiences was a shared need of these school workers. The initiative came to existence through a *bottom-up* process and was not steered nor funded by any institution. As a consequence and a possible disadvantage, the composition of the committee is rather arbitrary and other possibly interested people might be unaware of its existence. An achievement of the initiative is that it succeeds to transgress otherwise very traditionally maintained boundaries. Stakeholders from various school systems (independent as well as state schools), educational levels (primary as well as secondary education) and types of schools (standard as well as special education schools) who would otherwise never meet in a professional context are united and all engage in this initiative. This is rather surprising as each of the preceding boundaries has a long history and existing delimitations are generally regarded evident and functional.

Half-a-day meetings are organised bimonthly and consist of an exchange of experiences (mostly based on concrete cases and events), a supply of information on policy changes, formation (often, an external expert is invited to provide information on a specific topic of interest) and the preparation of political action from within the group (for example, a letter with reflections concerning a new policy initiative on behalf of the committee was sent to the major and aldermen of the city). As such, practice workers explicitly position themselves in the public and political debates surrounding Roma (and education) with a unified voice. The main focus of the meetings is not so much on teaching, but rather on more general problems surrounding the education of children like the residence status, housing problems, poverty, teenage pregnancies and the allowance of child benefits and scholarships etc. Most of these relate to the welfare conditions children bring with them to the school. Members of the committee refer to the fact that for many of these families, the school is one of the only institutions in society where they

encounter, or at least where they may have positive experiences (in opposition to social services for example, which are often looked upon as severe enforcers of the law). At the basis of this lies the far-reaching involvement of teachers and other school staff with the situation of these children. Most of the members of the committee have a voluntary engagement exceeding their job assignment: they are active in voluntary organisations or do home visits during leisure time. The way discussions on meetings are structured from within people's life world expresses this commitment. In as far as situations at home are not taken as a starting point, they at least occupy a prominent position in every discussion.

9.3.1.3 Case management for large families in precarious living circumstances

Since 2009, one of the city's *Centres for Social Welfare* [Centra voor Algemeen Welzijn] has run an experimental project to support large families in poor living circumstances through case management. In most cases this concerns Roma families, although the selection of families is based on the size of the family (families with six children or more) and the bad quality of living circumstances, and not on ethnicity or nationality. The initiative aims to bring together various care providers who support the involved family. Amongst others, this includes the bridging figure of the school, a street worker, volunteer workers of a charity organisation, a representative of the employment service and a delegate of the social service of the police. One of the parents and an interpreter are also present in every monthly meeting. In various ways, meetings appear to be fruitful. First, a lot of information is exchanged. Various stakeholders are each involved with the family in a particular way, and by gathering these partial perspectives it becomes possible to get a more complete overview of the family's situation. Secondly, the foregoing reveals existing overlap. Often, the same work is done by various persons. This is not only a waste of time but moreover implies the risk of unnecessarily contacting (and in the worst case irritating) services repeatedly. Third, the initiatives create opportunities for care providers to get to know each other's profession. Often, people have basic knowledge about other organisations but are only informed about the particular assignments of various jobs to a limited extent. Finally, this approach creates opportunities to develop a long-term future perspective *for* and *with* the family, which makes it fruitful not only for care providers but also for the families that are involved. Whereas support of families in poor living circumstances is mostly based on immediate needs requiring an acute solution, case management meetings open the possibility to conceive of a more structural change of conditions. They imply cooperation over the boundaries of organisations and sectors and gather both professionals and volunteers around the table. Problems such as school drop-out and retention are explicitly and comprehensively defined in terms of the bad living circumstances some large families are struggling with. Families face a multi-problem situation which characterises almost every domain of their lives. With its focus on the undividable connection between all life domains, the coherence of living circumstances is taken as a starting point to think of solutions. Educational participation for example

is viewed in terms of conditionalities caused by poor living circumstances. Problems as well as solutions can only be conceived of in coherence with one another and in dialogue between various stakeholders including the family.

9.3.2   Identified success factors

9.3.2.1 Boundary-blurring practices

Traditionally, policy in Western societies is structured in a range of 'thematic' areas. The following include some relevant examples in the context of this enquiry: education, welfare/social policy, health, youth, housing, civil affairs, poverty, migration, employment etc. Definitions and boundaries between areas may slightly differ depending on organisational particularities of the local context, but in each case distinct policymakers and cabinets bear responsibility and authority over marked out subject matters. Furthermore, social institutions are structured accordingly in clear-cut sectors which function rather autonomously. Most initiatives that contribute to the schooling of Roma children can be situated in the education, welfare or integration sector; however, in most cases, they play a role from within the sector. Collaboration over sectors exists, but it is generally confined to small projects or instrumental cooperation. Only rarely can structurally embedded collaboration be found. A good example is truancy. This phenomenon is socially problematised and attributed the education sector. It is a 'school problem': something that takes place within the schools, that schools are confronted with, that is legally framed in compulsory education legislation and that should be solved by and inside schools. Other sectors, services and organisations such as the police or youth care offices are involved but their role is limited, well-defined and clearly marked out. In Western European societies, the arrival of Roma implicitly seems to question this organisational structure. In one way or another, it appears these structures are not prepared for Roma people. To conceive of solutions for the problems at stake only in terms of what is offered on the supply side will not suffice. If the search for adequate assistance and service provision for Roma is to find its way, it will necessarily have to question the way policy is shaped. Although there is often a willingness to invest and plenty of initiatives are taken, well-intending people run up against boundaries time and again.

Many of the investigated practices can be looked upon as experiments 'beyond' the boundaries of a space pre-structured by policy. Often, they are based on voluntariness; they treat boundaries of existing structures creatively and sometimes even question the latter very explicitly, as was shown for each of the presented initiatives. The importance of such experiments should not be underestimated in the context of recent phenomena like the immigration of Roma. In as far as they are considered to be successful, they may lead to changes in policy: temporary projects may be embedded structurally, organisational structures may be adapted to the changing social context and the vision towards broader social issues can be revised. It is characteristic of these experimental initiatives that they blur (or even undo) boundaries. They can do so in a more explicit (e.g. the applied strategy to conceive of the case management initiative) or rather implicit (e.g. the Roma and Education Schools Committee, where blurring boundaries

was a consequence rather an intended aim in itself) way and this may involve a diversity of boundaries, e.g. between sectors or organisations, but as well between educational levels, state and private schools, or professional and voluntary work, as was clearly exemplified in each of the earlier described practices.

9.3.2.2 A life world oriented approach

A life world orientation grounds the reconstruction of the life world within the concrete and lived, but often disregarded existence in the everyday human world (Husserl, 1970). In this life world, people's everyday issues, crises and experiences mirror how they shape their lives, "manifesting themselves as primary and fundamental dimensions of human life situations in all their meaning and dignity" (Grunwald and Thiersch, 2009, p. 133). More practically, this approach takes the coherence of various elements in a situation as a starting point for further action. As such, it links closely to the first success factor of the practices described above. A focus on the integral character of the life world presupposes that existing boundaries are undone or blurred. The latter should be distinguished from widespread (and strongly methodised) 'integral approaches' aiming for cooperation between organisations or sectors. As clarified above, cooperation is often pushed forward as a useful instrument to solve problems. However, within a life world approach, integration is not only an ingredient of problem solving strategies but also of problem definitions. Problems within various life domains are unavoidably interrelated and defined in terms of lived experience. This changes the perspective towards the problems itself: it now concerns an integrated multi-problem context which is taken as a starting point to be dealt with.

As previously discussed, this is exactly what many of the presented initiatives do: they focus not only on a particular problem in order to solve it, but take the life world of families as a starting point. From within this life world, a situation can be approached 'as a whole', with its varying problematic and less problematic dimensions. This is often far from evident as care providers cannot be expected to be experts in every kind of problem. To clarify this with an example, schools may be willing to meet problems related to poverty or residence statuses that children bring along but which are not directly linked to school. Unfortunately, that willingness does not always imply they possess the required capacities, resources or knowledge to be of any help. Nor can they be expected to do so; it would be unreasonable to count on schools to help people in applying for asylum, to wash their clothes or to provide showers and food for children who lack resources at home. Here, cooperation with other relevant actors in the field can fulfil a crucial and irreplaceable role. was Although as previously clarified, this cooperation is a necessary but insufficient prerequisite of a life world oriented approach, which brings me to the third success factor.

9.3.2.3 Commitment as an educational attitude

Concepts like 'commitment', 'involvement', 'engagement' and 'trust' sound rather vague and are rarely if ever related to professional attitudes. Indeed it is quite the reverse as

it is often stated that a professional attitude requires an appropriate distance. From this perspective, too much involvement or close-tied confidential relationships may encompass a threat for professionalism. Still, close association with families often appears to make a difference and allow schools to initiate communication and create opportunities for mutual understanding, thus breaking through pre-existing fear and distrust (Bhopal, 2004; Myers, 2009). In each of the earlier described practices, the distinction between professionalism and voluntariness is fuzzy. From personal engagement, many people invest time and effort beyond the boundaries of what is strictly expected within their job description. This commitment often comprises outreaching action, which is not only a method but also a 'way of thinking'. Outreaching goes back to the idea of 'presence', which implies that it is more important to relate to clients than to give them something. On the principle 'not a gift but a giver' (Richmond, 1907), visits at home were introduced in social work in the early 20th century. Later on, it was further developed in various ethics of care theories (e.g. Baart, 2004).

A focus on commitment seems to be at odds with a frequently defended approach based on rights and obligations. It is true that the 'you scratch my back and I will scratch yours' rationale may bring in good results in the short term (Sollie *et al.*, 2013). For example, school attendance rates can be increased by offering other forms of help to parents. However, fundamentally, it changes nothing to the position of people within society. On the contrary, existing distances are maintained through the creation of a relation based on a business footing. In a distant relation of negotiation, possible oppositions between 'the Roma' and 'the majority society' only risk to be deepened. A bargaining point of view starts from the conditionality of provided services rather than the aspirations and expectations of people. An attitude of commitment breaks radically with this idea as it engages in the quest for what matters to people, i.e., what 'makes sense' to them. As such, the possibility of a relationship based on trust is created, which in its turn provides a safe background for dialogue. 'Dialogue' must be distinguished from 'negotiation' here. Dialogue involves expectations to be retrieved, made explicit and tuned to one other in a joint search. The need for a safe context in order to deal with legitimate fear, resistance and reserve is of great importance to take the step towards a conversation beyond mere negotiation. Of course, dialogue too has its limitations. Emotions may never serve as a legitimation of socially unacceptable behaviour expressed in, for example, crimes. The legal framework, which is constantly liable to public debate, draws the lines and limits to give shape to 'dialogue' and 'commitment'. These boundaries are both necessary and desirable, and as such do not impose any constraint on the potential of 'commitment' as an educational attitude to step into the arena of communicative coexistence.

9.4   Discussion: Promising practices and rights-based practices, two of a kind?

In the previous discussion, some concrete practices investigated during the fieldwork were presented and success factors were identified. Consequently, questions were

answered such as how public institutions attempt to realise the right to education for Roma children in the city of Ghent and what contributes to their success. Obviously, there are limitations with regard to transferability. It is not my aim to present these practices as unambiguous, clear-cut and definite answers to problems related to the education of Roma. Still, they offer an insight into an exemplary Western European setting where the immigration of Roma is a recent phenomenon. As such, they may inspire policymakers and fieldworkers in similar contexts. Notwithstanding existent limitations, it thus seems a matter of course that 'promising practices' may inspire policy. Still, the answer to the question of what turns a practice into a promising practice is not evident. All of the investigated practices share the commitment to contribute to the schooling of Roma children. They do so with varying success: in some cases large effects were realised almost naturally, but in other cases good intentions were confronted with insurmountable obstacles. But concepts such as 'to be successful' or 'make a difference' are as biased as 'promising practices'. Things are promising or successful *in the light of* pre-set criteria and aims to be achieved. In this case, practices are considered 'promising' or 'successful' in as far as they contribute to a form of social integration. This implies that they succeed to overcome or at least narrow the present gap between Roma and mainstream society, and that connections are made in one way or another. The foregoing does *not necessarily* result in increased participation rates or higher educational achievement. These effects are of course desirable but in themselves they are subordinate to the meaning education has for the persons under consideration. Within such a view, it is most important that Roma connect to the meaning attributed to education within the broader society, by sharing or at least understanding it *and* vice versa. If that is the case, the meaning of participation shifts from 'being present in school' to 'becoming a part of society', including its prevailing beliefs and norms. The standard of success pushed forward here is social integration in terms of increased mutual understanding. How that aim relates to a rights-based approach of the right to education is the focus of this concluding discussion. Can the hereby presented practices be conceived of as rights-based practices?

Unicef and Unesco (2007) have developed an extensive human rights-based approach to education for all, and for Roma in particular (Unicef, 2011). The goal of such an approach is "to assure every child a quality education that respects and promotes her or his right to dignity and optimum development" (Unicef & Unesco, 2007, p. 1). A rights-based approach is defined in opposition to needs-based development approaches to education. It is expected to promote social cohesion, integration and stability, to build respect for peace and non-violent conflict resolution, to contribute to positive social transformation, to be more cost-effective and sustainable, to produce better outcomes for economic development and to build capacity. Whereas needs-based development approaches address risks, power, stakeholders, root causes and gender, a rights-based approach is informed by the full range of relevant human rights and does so in a comprehensive way. Conceptually, it requires a framework with three interdependent and interlinked dimensions: the right of access to education, the right

to quality education and respect for human rights in education. The *right of access to education* entails that education is provided throughout all stages of childhood and beyond, that education is available and accessible to all and that equal educational opportunities are realised. The latter implies attention for economic, social and cultural barriers, both in the community and in schools. The *right to quality education* requires a broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum for all, rights-based learning and assessment with respect for the agency of children and young people who are to be recognised as active contributors to their own learning, and a child-friendly, safe and healthy learning environment. Finally, the *right to respect in the learning environment* implies respect for the identity (without defining a 'correct' approach to deal with the tensions related to identity issues), respect for participation rights and respect for integrity and a child's dignity (Unicef and Unesco, 2007).

Implicitly, boundary-blurring practices, a life world approach and an attitude of commitment may concentrate on these three dimensions and contribute to related goals. Very obviously, these success factors express 'respect for human rights in education' and in a less direct way, they pay attention to economic, social and cultural barriers as required to warrant a right of access to education. Moreover, to reconsider existing boundaries and organisational structures from within a life world perspective and with the required commitment may be helpful to realise quality education for all. Still, it would be dishonest to say there is a perfect match between the exigencies of a human rights-based approach and the presented success factors. Although the latter *may* contribute to the realisation of the earlier, in no way it *warrants* that rights can, let alone will be enforced. As such, they are helpful but insufficient tools with which to realise the right to education. This is surprising as the criterion to count as a success factor or a promising practice is defined in line with a human rights framework, in particular in terms of its contribution to the promotion of social cohesion, integration and stability.

Are the identified promising practices not rights-based practices then? They certainly are not in two senses. First, they are not grounded in a human rights framework. Fieldworkers who are active in these practices and who embody the success factors may work in line of thought with human rights, but they do not explicitly refer to the latter as a guiding principle of action. Second, because of the insufficiency mentioned before, they do not fulfil the requested conditions to 'make the right to education happen'. In another way though, they *are* human rights-based practices. To understand this properly, various interpretations of human rights should be recalled. Dembour (2010) distinguishes four schools of thought with a proper understanding of human rights: 'natural scholars' conceive of human rights as *given*, 'deliberative scholars' as *agreed upon*, 'protest scholars' as *fought for* and 'discourse scholars' as *talked about*. Between these schools, there is discussion on the value of human rights law as an embodiment of human rights, on the foundation, the realisation and the universality of human rights as well as on the overall position towards human rights. This article does not want to take up these discussions, nor does it aim to decide between any of the schools. What is

more pertinent is how each of these approaches stresses diverse dimensions of human rights. It is here relevant to distinguish a *legal* and an *educational* dimension, each of which derives its legitimacy from the pursuit of the 'humanisation' of individuals' lives. These dimensions are not opposite to one another. On the contrary, they presuppose each other and cannot be conceived of independently. In their analysis of the United Nations Convention of the Right of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) as a framework for pedagogical action, Roose and Bouverne-De Bie (2007) argue that "the debate on children's rights should not so much focus on the rights children have or do not have but rather […] on the question of how the rights of children, just like the rights of adults, are to be *realised*" (p. 440). The latter implies a fundamental commitment, not only of parents but of society as a whole. This commitment is expressed both in the legal and the pedagogical dimension. Whereas human rights legislation reflects a commitment of the state (as a structure and political entity), the *educational* dimension refers to the (joint) commitment of individuals. Although the status of both commitments is clearly distinguishable, they are closely interrelated. As the first success factor expressed, engagements of individuals in practices may blur, undo and/or change existing boundaries which are often part of an existing legal framework. The legal dimension is by definition continuously subject to discussion, and is reconsidered and adapted over and over again in the public debate. Reversely, the legal framework structures educational action and delimits it to a certain extent. Existing boundaries may be deliberated, but not infinitely nor without obligations. Both dimensions thus shape, incite, feed and correct each other in an unremitting human rights-producing dialogue. The latter leads back to the question of how the promising practices and success factors at hand relate to a human rights-based approach. The investigated practices clearly form part of the educational dimension described above. It concerns common personal commitments which do not enhance the legal enforceability of human rights, but rather contribute to their realisation in concrete action. A closer analysis of the legal framework is beyond the scope of this article, but it has become clear that both dimensions are to be seen in mutual coherence. To shape the right to education for Roma children in the same way as for other children, and to have a better understanding of human rights in general, will require a commitment of all: of policymakers, to foresee a human rights-based legal framework that sets the scene for fieldworkers and leaves a creative space to experiment in order to come closer to achieving the particular needs of all children; and of all citizens, to be committed to the project of human rights for all. Only together, and through our commitment, we can make the right to education happen for Roma children as well as for other children.

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Chapter 10

Between ideal and reality: Reflections on the desirability of a social mix at school. [1]

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1 Hemelsoet, E. (submitted in Dutch). Tussen ideaal en werkelijkheid. Reflecties over de wenselijkheid van een sociale mix op onze scholen.

Abstract

The debate on cultural and socioeconomic diversity in our schools can look back on a long history. Opinions diverge as to which causal factors account for unsuccessful school careers, but there is growing support to seek solutions for prevailing problems in terms of a social mix. The existence of segregated schools goes against an ideal where each school reflects the diversity present in society. This article critically examines the potential added value of this social objective going from the case of Roma in Ghent schools. The point of departure for this reflection is the question 'Whose interests are served by a social mix?' Which notion of justice underlies this ideal? And in what sense does this alter the meaning of child-rearing and education? Throughout this discussion, a classic sociological perspective is confronted with an educational perspective stressing the particularity of contexts and situations.

10.1 Introduction

Scholars have divergent opinions on the extent to which schools bear responsibility to cancel out existing social inequalities. Some say that education should primarily focus on its core business: the transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes. From this perspective, the school should be an adequate environment in which to learn these things. Still, the attention for more 'social' aspects of education continues to grow. The school is not only a learning community; it is also a living community. This ideal is affirmed in numerous research projects focusing on the well-being of children as well as in the increasing amount of care initiatives that are set up in classes and at schools (Engels, Aelterman, Schepens & Van Petegem, 2003; ten Dam, Volman, van der Veen & Zwaans, 2005).

The latter shifts the discussion to the broader social framework of which the school is part. Without saying that both coincide, this increased attention to care for individual children concurs with a focus on the wider aim of creating more social equality. The relation between both these intentions is explicitly expressed in current initiatives with regard to equal educational opportunities. The 'equal educational opportunities' concept may refer to a legal framework (in Flanders, it concerns in the first place the Equal Educational Opportunities Decree; Flemish Government, 2002), to a social ideal with a forthcoming understanding of justice or to compensating or caring measures on the work floor (i.e., the practical application of the preceding ideas and rules in support of individual children). One should be conscious of the normativity that unavoidably attends the foregoing. First, aiming for equal educational opportunities may refer to very divergent images of society (compare Hemelsoet, 2012; Merry, Driessen & Oulali, 2012). But there is more going on. However noble assumed ideals may be, in their abstraction they always start from an ideal-typical image of society. This focus implies the danger to be oblivious to concrete human interactions in educational practices. Even if the ideal is founded in these practices, it at least adds something to it. As such, the danger to decontextualise is not excludable. Throughout a discussion on the desirability of a social mix in schools, I will argue that such a top-down approach may overlook relevant dangers and that it is necessary to take along the earlier mentioned practices of pedagogical interaction when education is conceptualised on a policy level. In the following, I will first deal with the 'social function' of education (§ 10.2). The classic discussion on the reproductive vs. the emancipatory function of education will be concisely clarified. Subsequently, the focus will shift to the ideal of a social mix (§ 10. 3) which is, to an increasing extent, put forward as a commendable aim for education. The presumption of this standpoint is that schools should reflect a society that is increasingly characterised by diversity. The following section questions the universality of that ideal and deals with the interesting case of Roma children (§ 10. 4). The exploration of this case is based on research in so-called 'concentration schools' (schools with a rather homogeneous population). This look at some concrete practices is subsequently supplemented with an enquiry of the possibly positive effects of concentration schools

(§ 5). Finally, the concluding paragraph deals with the contribution of an educational perspective to the debate.

10.2 The school: Reproduction of injustice or a step-up for social mobility?

It is a classic view that one of the nuclear goals of education is to contribute to individual opportunities for development and as such to enable upward social mobility. The apparent evidence of this aim was profoundly shaken when Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) published their reproduction theory. This point of reference in the sociology of education indicated that education tends to reaffirm and even strengthen the reproduction of social inequality rather than counterbalancing, let alone undoing it. Ever since, the debate has known a rich tradition in which many burdens of proof were brought to the fore against the presumed emancipatory force of schools. The educational reality in most Western European countries is characterised by a strong social stratification and a Matthew effect that reinforces the distinctions between children from different social classes (Hirtt, Nicaise & De Zutter, 2007; Nicaise & Desmedt, 2008). Empirical research nourishes the critiques and serves as a solid base to shape education and equal opportunities in a different manner.

Nowadays, the debate gains more attention in Flanders than anywhere else. The PISA reports show that the social reproduction in the Flemish educational system is very large (Duru-Bellat & Suchaut, 2005; Groenez, Van den Brande & Nicaise, 2003; Jacobs, Rea, Teney, Callier & Lothaire, 2009; OECD, 2001, 2004, 2006). The concurrence of top performances and large inequalities is striking and rather exceptional in comparison with other countries. As the Flemish educational system is generally respected for its good quality, attention was initially mainly drawn to the educational arrears of migrants in order to explain the observed gap between the performances of native and immigrant pupils (De Rynck, 2007; Duquet, Glorieux, Laurijssen & Van Dorselaar, 2006). More recently, the focus of attention in the search for explanatory factors with regard to educational performances has shifted to the social environment of pupils. The principal predictive factor of school success is the socio-economic status (further SES) of pupils, not their ethnicity (Hirtt *et al.*, 2007; Van Damme, Van Landeghem, De Fraine, Opdenakker & Onghena, 2004; Van Ewijk & Sleegers, 2010a; 2010b; Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009). In their everyday use, the concepts *ethnic* and *social* mix are used interchangeably. Both forms of segregation indeed often coincide, although significant differences between both issues may be discerned. Notwithstanding their relevance, I will not elaborate further on these nuances, as they are not decisive for the discussion at hand, the focus of which is on the desirability of an (*ethnic* or *social*) mix to counter societal inequality and to deal with present diversity.

Neither initiatives that arise from the Equal Educational Opportunities Decree, nor the growing attention for lifelong learning succeed to wipe out stubborn Matthew effects. Instead, it is quite the reverse as 'education increasingly seems to be the defining

factor for society's dualisation' (Vandenbroucke, 2009, p. 12). These findings evoke some questions. First of all, it is hard to estimate to what extent the growing (social) division in our society is a development that accrues from education. Causal factors for such large-scale changes are hard to grasp. It concerns social movements that consist of often hardly distinguishable factors which influence each other in complex interactions (one could think about the elusiveness of complex phenomena such as 'globalisation'). Moreover, the distinction between the causal role of education on the one hand and the incapacity to set off or compensate for social changes on the other hand is almost impossible to make. Does the equal educational opportunities policy fail or is it rather destined to catch up with developments that occur in society whatsoever? What are the prospects and restrictions for education to respond to these changes and to exert an influence on them? A closing answer to these and many other questions cannot presently be provided. Without denying its general importance, a quantitative assessment of the degree to which education can realise social change is of secondary importance, from an educational viewpoint. Still, it should be the commitment of education, as a wide-spread societal institution, to draw attention to social justice within the limitations of existing possibilities. I will now turn to the question of how this can best be achieved. Therefore, the ever-returning discussion on the desirability of a social mix will be taken as a starting point.

10.3 A social mix as an aim of education

In Flanders, the debate on how education can possibly contribute to more justice is generally carried out in terms of the desirability of an ethnic and a social mix. This ideal sharply contrasts with a reality of many 'white', 'black' and socioeconomically homogeneous schools. It is remarkable that this ideal is not only put to the fore as an ethical choice (it then would concern something that we are expected to do because it is ethically valuable, independent of its actual effects) but rather as something close to a belief (the hope, expectation and faith that it will result in effects). Apparently, it is evidently accepted that aiming for a social mix within education will lead to more social justice. This presumption is not subject to discussion and does not require any further legitimation in the dominant discourse. An example that takes this idea for granted is the study of Janssens, Carlier and Van de Craen (2009) on compulsory education in Brussels. The authors declare that "a better social mix of the school population is essential to pursue an effective desegregation policy and to close the gap between schools" (p. 8). Still, they by no means argue this statement. However, they do not stand alone: the broader debate on the social mix is invariably structured around the double question on the *feasibility* of this task and on *how* this aim can be realised, without discussing its *desirability*.

The director-general of the catholic school system in Flanders [Vlaams Secretariaat van het Katholiek Onderwijs], Mieke Van Hecke, restarted the public debate with her media interventions in early 2011. She wondered whether a social mix is indeed *feasible* for all

schools now the attempts of the past years to create a social mix in homogeneous—and mainly 'black'—schools have proven to be unsuccessful. The permanent governor of the public school system [GO!], Ryamonda Verdyck, sided with her, affirming that the equal educational opportunities policy does not work (SD., 9 February, 2011). These statements were followed by a stream of reactions. Wildemeersch (2011) refers to prevailing market forces in education as a possible barrier. In his opinion, the equal opportunities discourse focuses too much on the individual social promotion of pupils, while neglecting that education is also a space of real democratic convivance. Some civil society stakeholders, for their part, stress the need for a stricter application and enforceability of the Equal Educational Opportunities Decree (Minderhedenforum, 2011). The Minister of Education, Pascal Smet, promptly proposed a new registration system that forces 'white' schools to give preference to pupils with threatened opportunities. Similarly, 'black' schools must advantage more privileged pupils (SD., 23 March, 2011).

Very recently, the *desirability* question was placed back on the agenda due to the observation that the Equal Educational Opportunities Decree has not succeeded in realising a social mix. The question of whether and why segregation is problematic is thus highlighted again. The revival of this discussion finds a pretext in research that shows a greater influence of the social background on school performances in countries with strong social segregation in the educational system than in countries with a large social mix (Duru-Bellat *et al.*, 2004). Building on these findings, Nicaise (2011) offers some proposals. As 'soft' measures like non-discrimination pacts or extra funding have only a limited desegregating effect, he suggests alternative strategies e.g., the allocation of schools, preferential treatment at registration, minimum quota for schools and the foundation of magnet schools. Magnet schools start from the idea that the creation of a powerful learning environment (e.g., through socio-artistic projects) on black schools is not only advantageous for the pupils but that it will also attract a more privileged public. As such, a social mix with win-win effects for all involved stakeholders can be realised. But is the desirability of such a social mix as unambiguous as it seems at first sight?

10.4 The case of Roma children in primary schools in Ghent, Belgium

The preceding description has illustrated and clarified the predominant focus on the need to tackle segregation in existing research (Agirdag, Van Avermaet & Van Houtte, 2012; Bakker, 2012; Karsten, Felix, Ledoux, Meijnen, Roeleveld & Van Schooten, 2006; Walraven & Peters, 2012). This paragraph examines the particular case of the Roma, which offers interesting leads allowing a different light to be shed on the outlined segregation discussion. Internationally, vast research has been conducted concerning the educational segregation of Roma children, often in relation to racism, discrimination and social exclusion (for overview studies, see for example O'Nions, 2012; Rostas,

2012; Unicef, 2011). Notably, the presented solutions to tackle the problems at stake generally presuppose a specific approach based upon particular characteristics of this group of people. For example, European policies explicitly pursue "that the national, regional and local integration policies are clearly and specifically directed towards the Roma" (European Commission, 2011, p.4). However, tension can be ascertained when combining desegregation and target-group oriented approaches, due to the fact that the latter implicitly distinguish between Roma and non-Roma.

The following reflections are substantiated by extensive fieldwork, which investigated social practices that contribute to the realisation of the right to education for children of Roma origin. This research, conducted over the course of six years (2007-13) in Ghent, Belgium, illustrates that teachers also strike a different note, in that concentration schools could be potentially beneficial to their opinion. In some Ghent 'black' primary schools, reference is, for example, made to the positive consequences of many years of experience with minority groups and socially neglected families. Language differences, discrimination, a lack of motivation and a limited interest in education both of children and parents confronts schools with challenges that demand considerable engagement and creativity. Besides high drop-out rates and numerous rotations in the teaching staff, there is a motivated core of teachers who continue to 'rethink' the education they offer in function of changing target groups. Dealing with such diversity in value patterns, customs, traditions and convictions is part of the core business of a 'black' school. Moreover, both teachers and professionals indicate that the 'black' character of the school can increase its accessibility. While it seems to scare off 'white' parents, the specific profile of these schools may facilitate participation of the parents that can otherwise hardly be reached. They affirm that often and for many of them, it even makes the difference between whether to subscribe and go to school or not. In relation to the latter, the example of Roma is striking. Some schools succeed in raising the otherwise often problematic attendance rates of these children spectacularly, through specific strategies. Parents confirm this finding and mention that they send their children to school because it is that particular school: a place where professionals express an involvement with the situation at home, where their children can be between 'peers' and where they can get help with all kinds of questions. It does not concern local schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods; frequently, children living on the other side of the city populate these schools, notwithstanding their often limited transportation possibilities. Rather, it is expertise schools that have developed adequate strategies to connect to the family life.

10.5 Research on the positive effects of schools with a homogeneous population

In line with the findings of this inquiry, other recent research also draws attention to possible positive effects of so-called 'concentration schools'. For example, Verhaeghe *et al.* (2011) affirm that the average learning gain in 'black' and 'white' schools in Flanders is

comparable. The performance level both at the start and the end of the learning process is generally lower, but the progress children make in both types of schools is similar.[1] The socioeconomic and ethnic background of pupils rather than the composition of the school appears to be of decisive importance. Teachers' expectations towards their pupils also matter a lot (Ysebaert, 2011). Agirdag (2011) refers to some other advantages of 'black' schools (notwithstanding possible dangers): there would be less racism and consequently more well-being for immigrant pupils and 'white' pupils sometimes perform better in these schools. Dronkers (2010) states that migrants perform worse in more diverse schools. Additionally, a spreading policy (e.g., by means of preferential registrations of disadvantaged children) is perceived as stigmatising by immigrants. In Karsten *et al.*'s (2002) enquiry, 71 per cent of all natives supported a spreading policy as a strategy to strive for a social mix, while 62 per cent of all immigrant parents were against it. Finally, Merry *et al.* (2012) clarify that segregation is not problematic as such. They refer to the relevant distinction between voluntary and involuntary forms of educational segregation. The proposition that social integration is neither the only nor the best manner to realise equal opportunities, is thereby advanced.

Still, it would be oversimplified to brush the desirability of a social mix aside based on these findings. By contrast, the findings of the fieldwork study showed that the preceding positive experiences in 'black' schools do not restrain these schools from subscribing to the desirability of a social mix. However, regarding the feasibility and how this should be realised, there is less agreement. Reference is regularly made to the shared responsibility of 'white' schools. For their part, these should develop expertise to deal with diversity. Furthermore, the significance of schools that are representative for the existing social diversity is emphasised: only so, education can prepare for our present-day society. An unambiguous answer to the question whether a social mix is desirable, is thus not available just like that.

10.6 Exploring an educational perspective on the debate

Aiming for a social mix is pushed forward as the self-evident solution to counter social injustices in education. Still, education bears upon more than merely cancelling out social injustice. The current discussions seem to ignore this insight and mainly focus on the question of 'how' a social mix is to be realised. The question 'why' such a mix is desirable, subsequently gets neglected. Too often, the distinction between description and prescription is insufficiently made in the debate on equal educational opportunities. The realisation of a social mix within education is presented as the

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[1] It should be remarked that the (presumed negative) effect of schools with homogeneous populations cannot be isolated from the (presumed positive) effect of extra funding stemming from the Equal Educational Opportunities Decree for these schools. The absence of a reference group (which could, for example, be a school with a homogeneous population but without surplus funding) stands in the way of a more clear and objectifiable evaluation.

answer to the reproduction of social injustice. Still, that chain is not as self-evident as it may seem. It presupposes a particular notion of both social justice and equal opportunities. These concepts are not neutral. The focus on a social mix most evidently refers to an egalitarian perspective that deems social equality as the *summum bonum* of education. More libertarian notions, for example, can be distinguished from the latter. These predominantly define justice in terms of autonomy and freedom of choice[2].

Whichever point of view on equal educational opportunities one adheres to, the desirability of a social mix is invariably argued for in terms of a societal ideal. These rather abstract models of an ideal-typical society may be in tension with the interests of children. They dispose of a right to education which should be realised over and over again at the level of every particular individual. Whereas most perspectives on equality are developed in relation to the desirability of a particular societal order and as such have a recognisable public significance and suitability, the consequences of forthcoming initiatives for the individual are here taken as a starting point. This is at the heart of a educational perspective: to offer every child as many opportunities as possible to develop themselves. The meaning of 'development' remains open to further discussion, along with the question of how these aims can best be realised.

The latter leads back to the case of Roma in Ghent. It was clarified that 'black' schools are sometimes very successful in dealing with existing needs and barriers and as such succeed to offer these children more educational opportunities. Identifying the factors that contribute to this success would require further research. At any rate, the engagement, involvement and creativity of teachers, as well as the significance of being between 'peers' at school, are mentioned repeatedly by teachers as being of decisive importance. In this line of thinking, the continued existence of (some) 'black' schools seems very defendable or even desirable—although we might more positively call them 'expertise schools'. Still, these critical reflections do not question the idea of a social mix itself, exactly because it concerns the interest *of these children*. Their interest cannot be conceived of in independence of other (social) interests if we want to answer the question regarding what is most just or socially most desirable.

The foregoing has at least two important implications. First, within an educational perspective, 'justice' (whether it is conceptualised in terms of a societal ideal or not) cannot be conceived independently of the context in which it is to be realised, nor of the particular interests of individuals and/or (minority) groups. Consequently, these should be taken into account. Second, reversely, the discussion on justice needs to start from particular human interactions, but it is not limited to the latter. Justice is not *only* about serving individual interest (that can be the motive to be ethically involved with children, for example); it is inextricably entwined with 'the interests of others'. Bringing 'the educational' into practice does neither imply the realisation of a (pre-constructed) image of an ideal society, nor serving individual interests within a personal relationship. The discrepancies and similarities between the interaction of individual interests with

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[2] For an elaborate discussion on different conceptions of equal opportunities in relation to the right to education, cf. Hemelsoet, 2012.

respect to each other, and individual interests in tension with societal interests, collide in the complexity of educational practices. Subsequently, the educational challenge thus exists in aligning and steering these diverging interests towards one another. The latter entails that societal ideals are not the sole representation of what must be deemed as being just, or should be embraced by individuals as such. Rather, the exercise of aligning these diverging interests must commence from the openness or indefiniteness, which is presumed in educational practices. This precise openness creates space for mediation, which, in turn, allows for continuous assessment of the relative weight of varying interests, and the most desirable choice in any particular situation. Within this process, the concept of 'justice' is never defined in advance—on the contrary—it is inextricably connected with and dependent upon a particular situation and context. Within that particular situation, the decision concerning the desirability of a social mix—which is by definition neither unequivocal nor susceptible to generalisation—must be decided upon. The foregoing implies the necessity to comprehend these practices. The example of Roma in primary schools in Ghent illustrates that specific circumstances and the particularity of the context may cast doubts on ideals, however laudable these may be in abstraction. Moreover, this laudability may only be obtained within a historically and socially contingent setting. Research of educational practices thus offers not only a paramount complement to the current discussion on the desirability of a social mix, but should equally be its point of departure. As such, this discussion can gain the meaning and significance it deserves: as a mediating practice between various interests, of which the outcome is never conclusive.

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Conclusion

By way of conclusion…

This dissertation attempts to offer an answer to the question how the policies aiming to realise the right to education, the social practices children are initiated into within our educational system and the social practices Roma live in, relate to one other. Furthermore, it pays attention to the possible implications of the latter for the meaning of the right to education in order to give a critical appraisal of how that right is currently conceived of. As was clarified in the introduction, this general research question contains three central elements: the policies directed at realising the right to education; the social practices Roma live in (with particular attention to the meaning they ascribe to education and schooling); and the social practices aiming to realise the right to education. Each of these elements generates a set of sub-questions, which have been dealt with in the ten previous chapters. In what follows, these will be taken up and the conclusions to which they lead will be briefly outlined. While this first part of the concluding chapter sheds light on the research questions that are dealt with, the second part goes deeper into some of the implications for educational policy, practice, and theory.

11.1 Answering the research questions

With regard to policies, the first question was: *How does the rights discourse relate to other discourses applied in policies that aim to contribute to educational justice? Chapter two* deals with this question at large, and focuses on the relation between the right to education and equal educational opportunities, the latter being the predominant discourse in Flemish policymaking with regard to the realisation of educational justice. Whereas the notion of equality implicit in these policies generally refers to a particular social order, a subject-oriented approach to equality shifts the focus to the consequences of policies at an individual level. The (rather 'extreme') case of irregular migrants offers a useful insight into these issues. Often, children's rights advocates defend the interest of children from a juridical perspective, and call upon universal rights and legal frameworks. It is argued, however, that a view on the right to education as an educational practice draws attention to contextual elements and the particularity of situations, as it regards this right not as having a fixed meaning, but as something that is to be realised over and again in particular situations. Different discourses thus not only refer to distinct conceptions of educational justice, but moreover each of these in turn appears to be subject to different interpretations when looked upon as social practices.

The question: *How are 'target' groups defined and addressed in educational policies?* is dealt with in chapters three and five. *Chapter three* focuses on irregular migrants, and asks whether residence status is an appropriate benchmark for dealing with the social problems related to these people. There seems to be a homogenising tendency at work that reduces the complexity and diversity of irregular migration. Distinctions which need to be observed are not taken up or sometimes not even acknowledged when estimations of the number of irregular migrants serve as a starting point for

policymaking. Although inclusive education seems to provide an alternative that does not reduce individuals to a group to which they belong but conversely draws attention to individual differences, homogenisation seems to be at work here too. In an inclusive approach, everybody *must* be included and an outsider position is 'not allowed'. The case of Roma proves that this approach is problematic. As people with a very particular cultural identity, they frequently resist 'being included'. The question: *How can target groups be defined?* thus needed additional attention, and is further developed in *chapter five*. Starting from three predominant discourses on how Roma are represented in public debates, it is shown that even well intended policies take the 'problematic' character of Roma as a point of departure to develop actions and strategies. There are obviously large problems when a group is identified on the basis of social problems often found among its members. Nevertheless, policies increasingly tend to focus on Roma as a target group. The preliminary exploration of a right to self-identification developed at the end of the chapter needs further development and refinement. I will return to this in the second part of this conclusion.

A third question with regard to policies is*: Can any existing gaps and contradictions be found in present policies*? Conclusions with regard to this question may provide interesting direction indicators for the empirical research. A prevalent focus on the way access to education can be warranted for all can be identified in discussions on the right to education. The case of Roma raises some questions regarding the positive intentions of present initiatives to warrant these children's right to education. First, it can be asked whose interests are served when aiming for a right to education. When aiming for this right, the question 'Which kind of schooling makes sense to the children involved?', can be overlooked. The observation that formal education is not always valued by Roma prompts questions on the desirability of the way schooling is conceived of – and whether it can be otherwise. Building upon these reflections, one may wonder to what extent compulsory participation in an imposed educational system that solely reflects the dominant culture is in the best interests of children growing up in very different social practices. Third, the inevitably interconnected nature of human/children's rights is often denied. Tensions do not only arise with regard to the rights they are 'granted' or for those where a lot still has to be changed (the right to education cannot be considered independently of the right to work) but also between children's and parents' rights.

Turning to Roma social practices, two questions are dealt with. First, a general insight is sought into their social practices. A central question thereby is: *What in particular characterises the social practices of Roma? Chapter seven* explores the insider perspective of Roma. Focussing on the relationship between experiences and self-perceptions of Roma immigrants and policy discourses, interviews with these people reveal some relevant differences. A gap between the Roma and the civil services that are provided is observed; this exemplifies their distrust in what is offered. Second, although most respondents primarily identify as being 'Roma', to them, this concept refers to nearby informal social networks rather than to an entire ethnic group (to which most policies refer). Large intergenerational differences were also found amongst Roma. Youngsters

appear to have broader social networks and more out-group contacts than older generations. Finally, some commonalities were found amongst the respondents. For example, a short-term perspective and day-to-day life style could be recognised in their thinking and behaviour. *Chapter one* further explores existent differences from a different stance. Rather than exclusively focusing on 'knowledge about' the practices of Roma (in terms of aiming to get an overview), with the aid of a Wittgenstein-inspired framework the attention is shifted to 'knowing how to go on' when confronted with far-reaching experiences of difference. The need to take a step beyond 'what is the case' to 'what needs to be done' is argued for. Throughout this study, the question 'how to go on?' with policy, practice and educational research and theory emerges to be what is at the heart of a critical appraisal; it is further discussed in the second part of this conclusion.

Besides this more general insight into Roma social practices, particular attention was drawn to the question: *What are Roma views on education and schooling, including what they think the obstacles are and thus the problems that need to be overcome?* In as far as these were not developed at length in the first and the seventh chapters, they are explicitly addressed in *chapter eight*. Here, the various problems surrounding the schooling of Roma children are mapped. In order to do so various perspectives are distinguished: policymakers, school workers and Roma parents all define the prevailing problems in particular ways and situate these elsewise. Besides the rather obvious problems evolving from difficult living circumstances and poverty conditions, Roma parents mention a lack of adequate knowledge and information. Moreover, their fear of and distrust towards social institutions is affirmed, and a gap between family and school culture is perceived.

In order to gain an insight into the social practices that shape the right to education, two more research questions were addressed. The first is: *How are existing problems with regard to the schooling of Roma defined and framed?* This question matters as the way these are conceived of will to some extent draw out the lines or at least limit the scope of possible solutions. As described above, *chapter eight* deals with this issue. Apart from the Roma parents' perspective, policymakers and school workers also get a say. For policymakers, a lawful perspective is predominant. What matters to them is that the legal framework is observed and complied with. Consequently, irregular school participation and high drop-out rates are problematised. Structural inequalities running counter to policy aims, such as educational segregation and overrepresentation in special education schools, also attract the attention of policymakers. As loci of pedagogical action, schools are expected both to meet the requirements of the government and the issues arising at school concerning the children and their families and to address and possibly reconcile these. They are confronted with difficult pedagogical challenges, amongst which irregular school participation, welfare problems brought along by children, lack of skills and attitudes appropriate to school, and language and communication problems, are mentioned most often.

Apart from the problems at stake, what also needs to be clarified is how these are in fact

addressed at present: *Which practices are developed to contribute to the right to education for Roma children?* A selection of practices is presented in *chapter nine*. It concerns the Bridging Figures Project; the Roma and Education Schools Committee; and the case management initiative for large families in precarious living circumstances. Of wider relevance are the identified circumstances leading to the success of these practices. First, they are boundary-blurring: they cross policy domains and sectors, as well as boundaries between school levels, state and private schools, etc. This leads to a comprehensive approach which turns out to be possible. It prompts a second element: successful practices start from a life-world oriented approach. This relates closely to the idea of social practices: the focus is not on particular problems or causal factors, but on the integral coherence of people's lives. Third, commitment appears to make a large difference too. In the light of the earlier mentioned distrust of mainstream society, involvement with families and additional efforts to build a relationship of trust seems to be of great value. *Chapter ten* concerns an excursus that goes deeper into one of the principal strategies deployed to contribute to the right for education and educational equality in Flanders: the pursuit of a social mix at schools. The presumption of this ideal is that the existence of segregated schools goes against the ideal that each school reflects the diversity present in society. It is unclear though whose interests are served by a social mix, although its desirability is almost unanimously taken for granted. The investigation of the case of Roma children in Ghent schools shows that both school workers and Roma parents refer to the possible advantages of so-called 'concentration schools'. Teachers are generally motivated to work with these people and are experienced to deal with their specific situation (including language differences, particular problems with regard to their residence status or poor living conditions and cultural differences). Additionally, Roma often prefer schools where there are many Roma children: surrounded by their 'peers', there is less fear of discrimination or exclusion. However questionable it may be to tolerate this from a particular perspective (in some way it implies that society tolerates segregation), the reality holds that for many of these children, this increased 'accessibility' makes the difference between participation and non-participation in the educational system.

In this first part of the conclusions, each of the research questions has been answered. As such, it has clarified how the social practices into which children are initiated within our educational system relate to the social practices of Roma. There appear to be important differences, and some suggestions were provided as to the implications of the latter for the meaning of the right to education and how it is conceived of in educational policy. In what follows, this 'critical appraisal' will be further developed. The question 'how to go on?' is elaborated and discussed at two levels. First, with regard to policy and practice, the question 'what makes Roma so different?' is resumed and the preliminary suggestions on how to approach these people from a policy perspective as suggested in chapter five, are refined. Some attention is also drawn to implications for those who work in this setting. Second, the implications of the present study for educational research are identified and discussed. Attention is thereby paid not only

to the positionality and situatedness of the educational *researcher*, but of educational *research* also, and the approach it refers to (building upon the insights from chapters one and six). A *pedagogy of otherness* is thereby developed. To conclude, some suggestions are made for forthcoming research with regard to the further issues at stake.

11.2 Discussing 'how to go on': Challenges for policy, practice and educational research

11.2.1 How to go on with policy and practice: Towards a way to deal with differences

In various parts of this study, the issue of what legitimises the dividing lines to mark out particular target groups—*in casu* irregular migrants and Roma—has been approached from different angles. A tendency towards homogenisation was found (see *chapter three*), distinguishing traits were explicitly sought for (see *chapter five*), the people involved were questioned (see *chapter seven*) and the Wittgensteinian framework was deployed in order to make sense of the Roma culture and present differences (see *chapter one*). In the cases of both irregular migrants and Roma, it turned out to be difficult not only to demarcate clear boundaries between who does and does not belong to the group at stake, but also to identify specific characteristics. For irregular migrants, some residence statuses are not only fuzzy (in that it is unclear whether they should be classified as of irregular or regular status), but legal conditions may vary over various countries and over time too, which implies that no fixed criteria can be identified. For Roma, it was shown that linguistic, cultural, socio-economic and religious commonalities cannot be deemed characteristic for all Roma. Consequently, an approach that creates space for self-definitions was argued for in *chapter five*. The decisive argument to do so was not only that no common traits for all Roma could easily be found, but more importantly, that policies risk identifying target groups with problems (such as poverty, education, housing, criminality etc.). In *chapter one*, this view is further developed and refined. At least for the Roma immigrants in Ghent, a lack of trust in mainstream society and a reliance on fortune and social practices structured by the 'here and now' can be discerned. A historical interpretation of these features discloses what might be the most characteristic trait for Roma: a history of social marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination (compare Fraser, 1992; Liégois, 2007; Lucassen, Willems & Cottaar, 1998). This continuous experience shared by Roma over various countries and periods of time has been internalised by them and is reflected in their social practices. From generation to generation, a state of not belonging to mainstream society has been passed on: this is the existential horizon into which children are initiated over and again. Not only does this history explain much of the present behaviour—their distrust towards social institutions is not unfounded, nor is their 'here and now' life style—it concerns moreover an ongoing history; there is more left than some remains from the past. Even today, segregation, (extreme) discrimination and racism as well as social exclusion are ubiquitous in most countries inhabited by Roma (Amnesty International, 2013; Sykora,

2012). It makes their experiences even more tangible, as these do not only form part of the history of their people but frequently also of their own life history and of their relatives. This 'chronic state of exclusion' has resulted in social practices that are foremost characterised by a socially ascribed inferiority which has been internalised as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It has turned the Roma into pariahs: they have been the outcasts of Europe throughout its history up to today. That significant finding obviously should not remain unnoticed as it has implications for answering the question 'how to go on?' in both policy and practice.

Consequently, some of the preliminary conclusions in *chapter five* should be further developed, refined and nuanced. But before turning to the implications of the foregoing for policy, let me first say something about the consequences for practice. In order to narrow the gap between 'us' and 'them' so often referred to by schools and social workers, the lost trust in social institutions should be reclaimed. Because of their personal and collective histories, Roma have good reasons not to trust mainstream society. Although efforts from both sides may be required, the first step should be 'ours'. A basic level of historical consciousness suffices to acknowledge that a lack of engagement and efforts from their side cannot just be interpreted as a kind of unwillingness or laziness. The possibility of a different future should be made clear to them in order to allow Roma to believe that things can be different indeed, not only concerning what others can do, but also what this means for themselves. To gain trust is the necessary precondition to set expectations. Consequently, although a rights-and-duties approach may be successful in the short term (people indeed do things in order to be rewarded), it is often undesirable as it runs the risk of adding to the present distrust. The 'if you do this, I will do that' relationship is typical of a trading situation that tends to nourish rather than counterbalance oppositions. In a business relationship, people have different interests and they are not 'on the same side'. Rather, the conclusions of *chapter nine* seem to accord with a view focusing on finding trust: what makes a practice successful among other things is a life-world oriented approach and personal involvement with families. Besides a focus on gaining trust, something must also be said about the particular problems many of these children bring along to school (see *chapter eight*) and how these should be dealt with. But responses to these issues follow from the implications for policy, to which I now turn.

Regarding social policy, a radicalisation of inclusion is defended in this thesis. Inclusion is thereby not directed at particular predefined (ethnic) target groups, as this would unavoidably result in undesirable forms of homogenisation (see *chapter three*). Rather than deeming it an aim to be striven for, it is taken as a starting point of actions (see *chapter five*). In order to nuance this overarching stance, it is relevant to distinguish three different kinds of social policy that deserve particular attention. First, there are *policies that are explicitly directed at solving societal problems*. This obviously concerns the largest set, aiming to combat poverty, to fight criminality or other 'disturbing' behaviour, to ameliorate social welfare services or housing conditions, to tackle educational problems like truancy or irregular participation, etc. Here, the radical inclusive perspective argued

for in *chapter five* holds. What should be focused upon in these policies are the problems at stake: these should be the point of departure to consider desirable solutions, rather than a group of people. In as far as it is still considered desirable to define target groups (a debate not decided hereupon), these will be directly related to the problems at stake but not linked to an ethnic group such as the Roma. Let me clarify the latter distinction with an example related to education. As many schools are confronted with children who lack experience of school (for example, because they did not or only seldom attend school in their countries of origin), the establishment of specific (transition) classes for these children could be considered a useful strategy. In that case, 'organising classes for children who lack school experience' is a whole different thing from 'organising Roma classes' for various reasons. First, although most of the targeted children might appear to be of Roma origin, the possibility that other children might also be in this condition is precluded. Conversely, many Roma children will probably not be in need of such a class, as they do have school experience. The association of a problem (a lack of school experience) with an ethnic target group is thus in fact not correct. But second, and more importantly, what is happening in the second case is ethically undesirable. Roma are identified with a problem, i.e., they are 'problematised', and thus further alienated from mainstream society. They are not only considered to be different, they are moreover considered to be problematic—and as a consequence they should be 'fixed'. To conclude, policies directed at solving social problems should focus on these problems rather than on particular ethnic target groups.

As mentioned before, two other sorts of social policies can be distinguished though; here, acknowledging 'Roma' as a target group may remain desirable. First, it concerns *non-discrimination policies*. These are also directed at 'a social problem', but a very particular one. Non-discrimination policies target socially malconstructed identities and specific forms of exclusion and/or racism towards the involved group(s); their central aim is to correct the way identity was constructed in order to realise equal treatment and opportunities. Roma may be an example of such a group carrying many negative denotations. The meaning of the label 'Roma' is linked with negative stereotypes concerning behaviour. This 'social construct' is the target of non-discrimination policies and for that reason it is legitimate to focus on Roma. A large difference from the preceding category of policies is that 'Roma' are here not *identified* with a problem (i.e., they do not coincide with it), but they are *subject to* or *victims* of it. Although a more general victimisation of Roma as a people entails other problems and might be undesirable (Guy, 2013), with regard to non-discrimination the identification of this sub-group seems unavoidable and is possibly necessary.

Finally, *socio-cultural policies* aim to create a space for people to live their own 'culture' or '(group) identity'. If such policies were to focus on predefined target groups, they would run the danger of sustaining (positive) prejudices. In the case of Roma, reference is often made to their musical talent, and particular abilities to dance or to cook. Although such images may provide a more positive outlook of the Roma as a people, these too remain prejudices and in that sense 'stigmatise' a group. It suggests that this

is 'what Roma are good at', thus drawing attention away from the fact that individual Roma may be good at other things that are not typical for Roma too and that some Roma might not dispose of these talents at all. Still, some support for such activities is very legitimate. What matters is that a space is created for people to group themselves under a denominator they choose themselves, and that they are allowed to expand 'their cultural practices' as they want to identify with them. It concerns what one could call a *space for self-identification*, as explained in *chapter five*.

11.2.2 How to go on with educational research: The development of a pedagogy of otherness

At first sight, the aim to give 'recognition' to people, including their particularities, seems to disappear from the picture with the foregoing. But such a view is incorrect. Quite the reverse; although a different—*in casu* radically inclusive and not target-group-oriented—approach is developed in this dissertation, its starting point is an *ethical sensitivity* and *responsiveness* towards the people and situations at stake. It is shown that recognising the individuality of Roma may imply something else than 'calling them by their name' or 'revealing and affirming their positive characteristics'. More likely, it requires us to be responsive to who they are. That does not require that differences are stressed, nor that these are denied or to be overcome. The answer to the questions 'what needs to be done?' and 'how to go on?' with Roma issues *may* be one in terms of paying more or less attention to particular group differences; but that is not necessarily so, and especially not in an unequivocal or universal way. As argued in the foregoing paragraph, while in some contexts and policy areas it seems desirable to create a space for people to identify with being Roma, that might not be so elsewhere. Consequently, 'recognition' does not *require* any sort of particularisation. That is only one out of many possible answers to the situations at stake. Rather, and as clarified above, the *pedagogy of otherness* proposed here is inspired by ethical sensitivity, responsiveness and centralisation of the questions 'how to go on?' and 'what needs to be done?'.

The latter relates to the theoretical framework of social practices as it was more extensively developed in the *introduction* and in *chapter one* of this dissertation. From the focus on 'what needs to be done' it follows that an investigation of what exists is only a starting point. The more general question of what is at stake when dealing with social problems shifts to what is at stake *for someone*. In order to get a grasp of what matters to a person, it is necessary to obtain an insight into how she makes sense of things. That does not only imply recognition of someone as an emotional being but also a sufficient understanding of her social practices. This is the horizon of meaning from which she gives sense to the things she is doing and to how she stands in the world: it defines 'the rules obeyed' which are constitutive for these practices. But these rules are not fixed. In educational terms, initiation into practices is not a predetermined process. Initiation is not intended to result in a reproduction of social practices, though there are some 'conservative' elements. Neither is the process of initiation relativistic; rather, what one is initiated into shapes and defines a practice which in its turn continues

to be adapted and transformed. The learning processes concerned in initiation thus unavoidably imply a form of transformation (see Smeyers & Burbules, 2006)—which should not be seen however as an end-state.

This process of transformation is of the utmost importance for the educational position that is developed in this study. Practices are not fixed entities and therefore knowledge about these will by definition be partial and temporary. The questions here at stake relate to what characterises initiation processes: what are the limits and the possibilities to go on? The conceptual framework of (education as initiation into) practices has offered particular opportunities to deal with the issues under investigation. Irregular migrants and Roma are considered as 'limit cases', in which the meaning of the right to education is stretched to its limits. Discussing these in terms of social practices is of help to show that this right has no unequivocal meaning, that denotative frameworks of reference may alter this meaning and it has offered a language to bring up and explore these often hard to grasp differences. A proper insight and understanding of these differences is relevant to make sense of the question of how to realise the right to education. It enables the shift from a merely performative interpretation ('Which means should be employed to grant access to school to all children?') to an interpretation that aims for education to make sense to those involved ('What should be done in order for the right to education to be meaningful to the people concerned?'). Such an interpretation was prompted by the differences encountered: seeking to realise the right to education indeed 'loses its sense' in as far as it does not make any sense to the people to whom it is granted. This is moreover a challenge in the case of people whose social practices are 'different': what matters to 'them' is likely to be different from what matters to 'us'. On the one hand, the theoretical framework thus appears to be of great value to deal with the (extreme) differences at hand. It provides a language and framework to take a step beyond how these are usually approached and inspires an alternative approach. In that position, knowledge about the present differences cannot suffice; what is required is the kind of understanding that is helpful to go on. On the other hand, the case of the Roma has stretched the theoretical framework to its limits. That mutual understanding is possible, that one should not renounce it too easily to unwillingness on behalf of both parties, has often been invoked. Though this reliance may not be obvious for all who engage in an academic debate to further insight, it combines an epistemological with an ethical stance and remains open to the future. Of course, alternative interpretations or positions could have been chosen. Emancipatory approaches or critical theory, for example, would bring up other elements and draw attention to aspects that here remain unnoticed and vice versa. That is unavoidably so, as various stances stress other facets, approach these from different angles and may lead to different conclusions. None of these positions can claim comprehensive superiority, as the extent to which they are right depends on presuppositions that ultimately are to be accepted or not, and for which no conclusive arguments can be given. Still, it is argued that the stance taken offers an alternative to more classic approaches to the issues under investigation. Centring on the question 'how to go on?'

may be a fruitful way to deal with the (sometimes rather extreme) differences at hand, which put common ways to deal with differences to the test.

The added value of the conceptual framework not only lies in bringing to light particular elements regarding the investigated topic. It also offers a particular view on what social sciences should aim at and a specific way to position oneself as a researcher. The question how to conceive of educational research is reinterpreted in connection with the earlier mentioned responsiveness. The educational scientist has a voice in the present debates, not only on the basis of what she has observed but also as someone who can bring forward the voice of other stakeholders to shed light on 'what is possible'. This relates to the conceptualisation of educational research in *chapter six*. Through a philosophical and an empirical component, societal questions are resumed, redefined and returned to society. That is not a task on the side-line: the researcher being part of that society positions herself further. In this case, apart from the dissertation, I have participated in public debates in various ways: by giving presentations on study days for fieldworkers, by participation in steering groups and giving policy advice, by writing opinions in newspapers and giving media interviews, by publishing accessible pieces including a book for fieldworkers and policymakers, by co-founding a Roma organisation, etc. These activities are not scientific in themselves; but neither can they be strictly delimited from the scientific work. Doing fieldwork cannot coincide with being a neutral observer: the researcher participates in practices to some extent and is thus inevitably taking some position. What she does is informed, inspired, and sometimes even motivated by it. Conversely, these activities influence the outcome of the research: they give input to it and they guide the research towards focal points of 'what matters'. That contains advantages as well as disadvantages. Involvement in the field offers opportunities to make the people at stake 'visible'; rather than giving them a voice, it shows some of the things that are going on and calls attention to particular situations and elements. It enables a different way to look at Roma, as it makes this field visible *in a particular way*, in this case by the rather explicit initiation of social change. This step is of peculiar importance. Within such a stance, research does not only *show* things (that would merely be the production of 'knowledge about'), nor does it restrict itself to prompting the question 'how to go on?', it unavoidably also engages itself in the endeavour to offer answers to the latter question. This goes beyond an application of the findings. As a form of responsiveness towards the situations and social problems that present themselves, it answers the question 'what needs to be done?' by invoking educational processes in society as well. It gives shape to 'how to go on' and it does so in a particular way. Obviously this does not imply that other answers are impossible nor that these would have less value. A *pedagogy of otherness* 'educates': beyond the analysis and description of differences, it takes the step to wondering how these could be dealt with.

Finally, this leads to some suggestions for possible follow-up research. One line of investigation with regard to this topic—and especially of importance for practitioners and policymakers—would be to describe and map practices further to clarify which are

more and less fruitful ways to deal with present situations. Within education as well as in other domains, far more research is required to get a clearer view of how to go on. While this study remains of an explorative nature, in-depth knowledge and understanding of practices is required to provide answers about what needs to be done in more specific situations. A primary societal need at the start of this research project was one for an overall position on how to deal with newly arrived groups of immigrants concerning the right to education. Such position has now been developed. This offers a starting point to go deeper into specific needs, policy challenges and side paths both within and outside the policy domain of education. Various practices were preliminarily mapped and investigated, each of which may be subject to further analysis. For example, with regard to education, it could be wondered to what extent the bridging figures project could be of help to tackle present problems in secondary education; how inter-sector collaboration could be shaped to favour school participation of Roma children; how youngsters lacking previous school experience could be dealt with; how parents could be better informed about present opportunities and how communication between them and schools could be ameliorated, etc.

Second, and of particular relevance for theory, would be to develop further the suggested *pedagogy of otherness*. Investigation of other cases is required to evaluate the legitimacy of the stance taken to deal with experiences of difference. To what extent can this position centring on ethical sensitivity, responsiveness and the questions 'how to go on?' and 'what needs to be done?' form the base of a renewed theory of intercultural education? For example, how could this framework be operationalised in the case of orthodox Jews? During the investigation, this group of people as well as their position in Flemish society came repeatedly to mind. For evident reasons, many parallels can be drawn with the situation of the Roma: their extermination in the Second World War; the characterisation as pariah that has dispersed all over the world; and the societal particularisation and segregation. There are of course important differences too: not only are the socio-economic conditions of Jews in Belgium generally a lot better (which obviously alters their social position profoundly), but also their social practices are sustained by a religious belief that to a certain extent 'gives sense' to their position in society: they 'must' be outcasts *as* they are the Chosen People and until the day God comes back to earth, they will live the diaspora (Frank, 1993). This seems to alter their social practices profoundly and constitutes a distinct horizon of meaning. Another group of people that is at the heart of heated 'intercultural debates' is Muslims. Here too a shared religious belief forms the distinguishing mark of a group. When observing how they are looked upon by mainstream society, moreover, large differences can be identified as compared with Jews. For example, Jews live in rather segregated conditions (the Jewish quarter in Antwerp is a very good example), are dressed very recognisably and have their own schools. While each of these characteristics is to a large extent accepted in mainstream society, this is not so for Muslims. The 'headscarf debate' has almost continuously been present in public debates over the last twenty years, and the setting up of Muslim schools (parallel to Jewish schools) is highly under discussion.

Could 'differences' in both of these cases be approached in the same way as we did with the case of Roma? The exploration of other cases could contribute to a clarification of the standpoint and provide it with more theoretical depth and clarifying examples. Taking the argument a step further, this may lead not only to a renewed theory of intercultural education, but of education more in general. Whether it be in cultural or other terms, experiences of 'otherness' and 'differentness' are intrinsic to every educational context, and the position proposed here may offer leads to deal with all kinds of differences. That will also imply further crystallisation of the position of the researcher, and more specifically the delimitation of degrees and ways of involvement and engagement. This is at the heart not only of science but also of the question 'how to go on?': to question the world around us as well as ourselves and to investigate how we relate to it, and keep doing so. That, I may now say, is the challenging practice I have been initiated into throughout this study. And I modestly hope that this initiation may in its turn induce forms of transformation, and as such point to 'what is possible' beyond 'what is'.

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Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Een kritische beoordeling van beleidsmaatregelen
en praktijken gericht op het recht op onderwijs:
de case van de Roma in Gent

Dit onderzoek gaat in op de onderlinge verhouding tussen beleidsmaatregelen die er op gericht zijn het recht op onderwijs voor alle kinderen te garanderen, de praktijken die hieraan vorm geven en de sociale praktijken waarin Roma leven. Het uitgangspunt daarbij is dat het recht op onderwijs geen vaststaand gegeven is. Verschillende mensenrechtenverdragen zoals de Universele Verklaring voor de Rechten van de Mens, de Europese Conventie voor de Rechten van de Mens en het Internationaal Verdrag voor de Rechten van het Kind bieden weliswaar definities van dit recht, maar laten tegelijk ruimte voor heel uiteenlopende interpretaties en invullingen om dit recht concreet te realiseren. De meest voor de hand liggende interpretatie verwijst naar het tegemoetkomen aan de formele voorwaarden om alle kinderen toegang te verschaffen tot het onderwijssysteem. Vanuit pedagogisch oogpunt kan een dergelijke benadering echter niet volstaan. Rechten krijgen vorm in sociale praktijken die nooit onafhankelijk van een specifieke context kunnen worden begrepen. Vooreerst is de wettelijke basis om het recht op onderwijs te realiseren geografisch en historisch contingent. Overheden kunnen hiertoe uiteenlopende strategieën en initiatieven opzetten. De verleiding kan er dan in bestaan om de discussie over de betekenis van dit recht op te sluiten in de vraag *hoe* het recht op onderwijs het best gerealiseerd of geïmplementeerd kan worden binnen een specifieke setting (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998). Maar ook dan blijft het antwoord op de vraag *wat* het recht op onderwijs is, voorondersteld aan de discussie. Dat antwoord is nochtans minder eenduidig dan op het eerste gezicht lijkt. Vanuit pedagogisch perspectief is het uitgangspunt dat het recht op onderwijs gerealiseerd moet worden voor elk kind en dat het dus geen eenduidige of vaste betekenis kan hebben. Iets is altijd betekenisvol *voor iemand* en dient mee begrepen te worden in het licht van diens referentiekader.

De situatie van de Roma leent zich bij uitstek tot het bevragen van bestaande beleidsmaatregelen en concrete initiatieven om het recht op onderwijs te realiseren. In het bijzonder betreft het dan immigranten uit Oost-Europese herkomstlanden die sinds de uitbreidingen van de Europese Unie in 2004 en 2007 naar België zijn gekomen (CGKR, 2012; Reynebeau, 2011). Deze groep staat maatschappelijk vaak ter discussie, niet op zijn minst omwille van hun levenswijze en referentiekader die als zeer 'anders' worden ervaren. Ook de overheid stelt herhaaldelijk dat 'het ietwat unieke karakter van deze populaties en migratiestromen' een specifiek beleid voor deze doelgroep rechtvaardigt. Naast inspanningen in andere beleidsdomeinen wordt uitdrukkelijk ingezet op het verhogen van de schoolse participatie van deze kinderen (Bourgeois, 2010; Federale Overheid, 2012; Philippeth & Philips, 2010). Die scherpe verschilervaring stelt bestaande initiatieven op de proef; de vroeger gehanteerde aanpak blijkt plots tekort te schieten, en zowel praktijkwerkers als beleidsmakers dienen op zoek te gaan naar een gepaste aanpak. Ondanks die heel tastbare verschillen blijkt het niet zo evident om te benoemen wat Roma nu zo 'anders' maakt. Het belang van het antwoord op die vraag is nochtans groot: zonder een inzicht in hun levenswijze en sociale praktijken is het moeilijk om het recht op onderwijs ook voor deze kinderen betekenisvol te laten zijn. Voorliggend onderzoek gaat op zoek naar antwoorden op de vraag hoe dat wel

kan door de *mogelijke* eerder dan de *vastgelegde* betekenis van het recht op onderwijs centraal te stellen. De centrale onderzoeksvraag luidt daarbij als volgt:

> *Hoe verhouden de sociale praktijken waarin kinderen binnen ons onderwijssysteem geïnitieerd worden zich tot de sociale praktijken waarin Roma leven, en wat zijn de implicaties daarvan voor de betekenis van het recht op onderwijs en de wijze waarop dit binnen beleidsmaatregelen vorm krijgt?*

Het beantwoorden van deze vraag veronderstelt een inzicht in de wijze waarop het beleid op dit ogenblik vorm krijgt, in de sociale praktijken waarin Roma leven (met bijzondere aandacht voor de toegeschreven betekenis aan opvoeding en onderwijs) en in de praktijken die bijdragen tot de realisatie van het recht op onderwijs voor deze kinderen. De insteek daarvoor is het idee dat opvoeding een initiatie in sociale praktijken betreft (Smeyers & Burbules, 2006). Die opvatting sluit aan bij een traditie van auteurs die er van uitgaan dat het leven van mensen slechts kan worden begrepen in interpretatieve en/of narratieve termen (zie bijvoorbeeld Gadamer, 2004; MacIntyre, 1981; Ricoeur, 1981; Taylor, 1985; Winch, 1958; Wittgenstein, 1953). Mensen leven in sociale praktijken die evenzeer worden gestructureerd door ongearticuleerde processen van observatie, imitatie en participatie als door expliciete representatie en instructie (zie de notie van 'tacit learning'; Polanyi, 1967). Sociale praktijken zijn daarbij niet onveranderlijk, maar evenmin zijn ze willekeurig. Het proces van initiatie omvat altijd een transformatie: enerzijds worden bepaalde elementen doorgegeven (het 'behoudsgezinde' karakter van sociale praktijken) en anderzijds worden bepaalde elementen veranderd (het 'transformatieve' karakter van sociale praktijken). De focus op dit initiatie- en transformatieproces en het belang van impliciete kennis daarin verruimt de aandacht van 'aandacht voor de zaak' [*knowledge of the case*] naar 'weten hoe we verder kunnen' [*knowing how to go on*]. Initiatie veronderstelt niet alleen dat mensen allerlei zaken op expliciete wijze gaan leren, maar omvat ook het impliciete leren dat spontaan voortkomt uit de deelachtigheid in die sociale praktijken. Wat dan centraal komt te staan is niet de kennis over die praktijken maar 'weten hoe verder te moeten'.

Dat laatste heeft ook gevolgen voor onderzoek en de positie van de onderzoeker. Vanzelfsprekend blijft het van belang 'kennis over de zaak' op te bouwen: we willen zicht krijgen op de elementen die meespelen in het debat door in kaart te brengen hoe het beleid en relevante sociale praktijken concreet vorm krijgen. Die elementen volstaan echter niet om een antwoord te geven op de ruimere onderzoeksvraag die peilt naar hun onderlinge verhouding. De beantwoording daarvan veronderstelt aandacht voor de vraag hoe we nu verder moeten: de betekenisgeving aan het recht op onderwijs vanuit dit onderzoek ligt finaal in de dialoog tussen verschillende perspectieven, actoren en hun sociale praktijken. De onderzoeker is zelf een actor in dat verhaal en maakt al naargelang zijn positie op een welbepaalde wijze deel uit van het debat. In die zin is hij nooit een neutrale observator aan de kantlijn die de werkelijkheid slechts wil reconstrueren of representeren. Die mogelijkheid is illusoir, aangezien elke positie per definitie vormen van interpretatie en dus transformatie veronderstelt. Binnen

deze opvatting over sociaalwetenschappelijk onderzoek houden kwaliteitscriteria geen verband met een toegeschreven objectiviteit of waarachtigheid (in termen van correspondentie met een objectiveerbare werkelijkheid) maar eerder met argumentatieve samenhang en consistentie alsook met de mate waarin het vertoog door de betrokkenen betekenisvol geachte antwoorden biedt op de vraag hoe het nu verder moet. Naast de antwoorden op de concrete onderzoeksvragen thematiseert dit onderzoek vanuit die optiek de specifieke positionering van de onderzoeker en in ruimere zin de rol en betekenis van sociaalwetenschappelijk (*in casu* pedagogisch) onderzoek.

De tien hoofdstukken die volgen op de inleiding behandelen achtereenvolgens een aantal subvragen, die telkens thuis te brengen zijn in één van de drie voorgenoemde clusters (de wijze waarop het beleid vorm krijgt; de sociale praktijken van Roma; en de sociale praktijken die er toe willen bijdragen om het recht op onderwijs voor deze kinderen te realiseren). De vraag **hoe het rechtendiscours zich verhoudt tot andere beleidsdiscoursen die erop gericht zijn om rechtvaardig onderwijs te realiseren** komt aan bod in *hoofdstuk twee*. Meer specifiek wordt het recht op onderwijs daarin geconfronteerd met het gelijke onderwijskansendiscours dat een prominente plaats krijgt in het Vlaamse onderwijsbeleid. Naast verschillende opvattingen over gelijke onderwijskansen die telkens gedacht zijn vanuit een welbepaalde wenselijke samenlevingsorde, wijst een pedagogische benadering op de gevolgen van beleidsmaatregelen voor het individu. Terwijl mensenrechtenactivisten zich vaak beroepen op universele rechten en wetgevende kaders om het belang van kinderen te verdedigen, vestigt dit hoofdstuk de aandacht op contextuele elementen en de particulariteit van situaties. Binnen een dergelijk discours is het recht op onderwijs een pedagogische praktijk die telkens opnieuw voor individuele kinderen moet worden gerealiseerd. Verschillende discoursen blijken dan niet alleen naar verschillende opvattingen over pedagogische rechtvaardigheid te verwijzen; als we die maatregelen bekijken als sociale praktijken, zijn ze op hun beurt telkens onderhevig aan uiteenlopende interpretaties door de verschillende actoren.

De vraag **hoe doelgroepen gedefinieerd en geadresseerd worden in beleidsmaatregelen** staat centraal in twee hoofdstukken. *Hoofdstuk drie* focust op mensen zonder wettig verblijf, en schuift de vraag naar voren of het verblijfsstatuut een geschikt criterium is om groepen af te bakenen. Het risico om zeer heterogene groepen te gaan homogeniseren is daarbij groot. Een inclusieve aanpak lijkt een alternatief te bieden dat individuen niet reduceert tot de groep waartoe ze behoren en de aandacht vestigt op individuele verschillen, maar ook hier is sprake van homogenisering. Binnen een inclusieve aanpak 'moet' iedereen ingesloten worden en is een buitenperspectief onmogelijk. Het voorbeeld van de Roma die vanuit hun eigen identiteit soms weigerachtig zijn om 'ingesloten' te worden in een voorgestructureerde maatschappelijke orde, roept de vraag op naar de legitimiteit om voor een buitenpositie te kiezen. *Hoofdstuk vijf* gaat verder in op de afbakening van doelgroepen. Uitgaande van drie dominante beeldvormingen over Roma in het publiek debat, blijkt dat zelfs

goedbedoelde en ondersteunende beleidsmaatregelen uitgaan van het problematische karakter van Roma om acties op te zetten. Dat het identificeren van een etnische groep met sociale problemen heel wat gevaren met zich meebrengt, staat niet in de weg dat het beleid vaak focust op Roma als een specifieke doelgroep. De mogelijkheid van een alternatieve benadering in termen van een recht op zelfidentificatie wordt op het einde van het hoofdstuk preliminair verkend.

Een derde vraag is **welke breuklijnen en contradicties herkenbaar zijn in het huidige beleid**. Daarop gaat *hoofdstuk vier* dieper in. Zoals eerder gesteld, ligt de focus van beleidsmaatregelen grotendeels op de toegang tot het onderwijssysteem. Opnieuw levert confrontatie met de case van de Roma enkele interessante bedenkingen op. Ten eerste kan de vraag worden gesteld wiens belangen worden gediend bij de pogingen om het recht op onderwijs te realiseren. Bij heel wat van deze initiatieven verdwijnt de vraag welk soort onderwijs betekenisvol is voor de betrokken kinderen uit het gezicht. De observatie dat de school niet altijd gewaardeerd wordt door Roma roept de vraag op naar de wenselijkheid van de manier waarop dat onderwijs vorm krijgt en hoe het mogelijks anders kan. Zo kunnen we ons afvragen in welke mate de leerplicht binnen een opgelegd onderwijssysteem dat vrij eenzijdig de dominante cultuur weerspiegelt in het belang is van kinderen die opgroeien in sociale praktijken die daar ver van afwijken. Daarnaast gaat men dikwijls voorbij aan de intrinsieke samenhang tussen mensenrechten en kinderrechten. Spanningen treden op tussen toegekende en niet-toegekende rechten (het recht op onderwijs kan bijvoorbeeld niet losgekoppeld worden van het recht op arbeid) en tussen ongelijke rechten van kinderen en ouders.

Vervolgens verschuift de focus van het beleid naar de sociale prakijken van Roma. Dat gebeurt in eerste instantie aan de hand van de vraag **wat de sociale praktijken van Roma nu in het bijzonder typeert**. *Hoofdstuk zeven* verkent het perspectief van Gentse Roma. Aandacht gaat daarbij uit naar de manier waarop ervaringen en zelfpercepties van Roma zich verhouden tot beleidsdiscoursen. Zo geven Roma aan wantrouwend te staan tegenover de sociale dienstverlening vanuit de burgersamenleving waarmee een kloof bestaat. Daarnaast blijken ze zich weliswaar te identificeren met het Roma-zijn, maar definiëren ze dat begrip op specifieke wijze. Eerder dan te verwijzen naar de brede etnische groep (zoals in het beleid gebeurt) gaat het voor de betrokkenen om hun nabije informele sociale netwerken en ruimere familiebanden [*extended families*]. Vervolgens blijken er grote intergenerationele verschillen te bestaan bij de bevraagde Roma. Jongeren hebben doorgaans een veel breder sociaal netwerk en meer contacten met mensen buiten de eigen gemeenschap dan de oudere generatie. Tenslotte worden enkele gemeenschappelijke kenmerken geobserveerd bij de respondenten. Zo is er bij elk van hen sprake van kortetermijndenken en een dag-tot-dag levenshouding en dit zowel in hun denken als in hun concrete gedrag. *Hoofdstuk één* belicht bestaande verschillen op een andere manier. Eerder dan te focussen op 'kennis over' de sociale prakijken van Roma gaat de aandacht hier vanuit een Wittgensteiniaans geïnspireerd referentiekader uit naar 'weten hoe we verder kunnen' als we worden geconfronteerd met verregaande verschilervaringen. De noodzaak om een stap te zetten voorbij 'wat

het geval is' naar 'wat er moet gebeuren' wordt bepleit voor zowel beleid, praktijk als pedagogisch onderzoek.

Naast dit brede inzicht in de sociale praktijken van Roma krijgt de vraag **hoe Roma meer specifiek naar opvoeding en onderwijs kijken, met inbegrip van de hindernissen en problemen die ze daarbij ervaren**, expliciet een plaats in *hoofdstuk acht*. De problemen omtrent de scholing van Roma worden daarbij in kaart gebracht vanuit de onderscheiden perspectieven van verschillende belanghebbenden. Meer bepaald gaat het om beleidsmakers, praktijkwerkers en Romaouders: elk van hen erkent verschillende problemen en definieert deze op uiteenlopende wijzen. Naast de vrij voor de hand liggende problemen die voortkomen uit de armoedige en precaire levensomstandigheden van veel van deze mensen blijken Roma-ouders ook over onvoldoende informatie en kennis over ons onderwijssysteem te beschikken. Bovendien wordt hun wantrouwen ten aanzien van maatschappelijke instituties bevestigd en verwijzen ze naar een kloof tussen de schoolcultuur en de thuiscultuur die ze weliswaar moeilijk concreter kunnen benoemen. De perspectieven van andere betrokkenen vullen het antwoord op de vraag **hoe bestaande problemen met betrekking tot de scholing van Roma gedefinieerd en gekaderd worden** verder aan. Beleidsmakers vertrekken met hun probleemdefiniëringen overwegend van een juridisch perspectief. Hun voornaamste bezorgdheid is dat het wetgevend kader wordt uitgevoerd en nageleefd. Dientengevolge problematiseren ze onregelmatige afwezigheden, een beperkte schoolparticipatie en hoge uitvalcijfers. Structurele ongelijkheden die haaks staan op beleidsdoelstellingen zoals segregatie en oververtegenwoordiging in scholen voor buitengewoon onderwijs trekken eveneens de aandacht van beleidsmakers. Scholen zijn in dat verhaal pedagogische actoren bij uitstek. Zij moeten enerzijds tegemoetkomen aan de verwachtingen van de overheid, en anderzijds dienen ze om te gaan met de heel concrete problemen die kinderen en hun ouders met zich meebrengen naar de school. Dat stelt moeilijke pedagogische uitdagingen, waaronder onregelmatige schoolparticipatie, welzijnsproblemen die de school binnenkomen, een gebrek aan schoolse vaardigheden of attitudes en communicatieve en taalproblemen. Deze meervoudige probleemdefiniëring leidt tot de vraag **welke praktijken op deze problemen inspelen om het recht op onderwijs voor kinderen van Romaorigine te realiseren**. *Hoofdstuk negen* brengt een selectie van inspirerende praktijken. Meer bepaald gaat het om het 'brugfigurenproject' in het basisonderwijs, het 'scholenoverleg Roma en onderwijs' en het 'casemanagement initiatief voor grote gezinnen in precair verblijf' van het Centrum voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk Artevelde. Een aantal in deze praktijken geïdentificeerde succesfactoren hebben een bredere relevantie. Ten eerste gaat het om ontgrenzende praktijken: ze overschrijden de grenzen tussen beleidsdomeinen en sectoren, tussen schoolniveaus en onderwijsvormen, enz. Op die manier appelleren ze aan de mogelijkheid van een geïntegreerde benadering die aansluit bij een tweede succesfactor: het vertrekken vanuit een leefwereldgeoriënteerde aanpak. Die vaststelling sluit nauw aan bij het idee van sociale praktijken: de focus ligt niet op specifieke problemen of causale factoren die daaraan

ten grondslag liggen, maar op de integrale samenhang van het leven van mensen. Ten derde blijkt engagement van groot belang. Tegen het licht van het eerder vermelde wantrouwen ten aanzien van maatschappelijke instituties, maken persoonlijke betrokkenheid op families en bijkomende inspanningen om een vertrouwensrelatie op te bouwen een groot verschil. *Hoofdstuk tien* is een uitweiding die dieper ingaat op één van de belangrijkste strategieën in het Vlaamse onderwijsbeleid om het recht op onderwijs en gelijke onderwijskansen voor elk kind te realiseren: het nastreven van een sociale mix. De vooronderstelling aan dit ideaal is dat gesegregeerde scholen de in de samenleving bestaande diversiteit onvoldoende weerspiegelen. Wiens belangen precies vooropstaan bij het nastreven van een sociale mix is niet altijd duidelijk; dát de mix wenselijk is des te meer. Maar in het onderzoek naar de situatie van Roma in Gent verwijzen zowel praktijkwerkers op scholen als Romaouders naar mogelijke voordelen van zogeheten concentratiescholen. Op deze scholen zijn leerkrachten overwegend gemotiveerd om met deze groepen aan de slag te gaan en beschikt men doorgaans over de nodige ervaring om met hun omstandigheden en problemen om te gaan (bijvoorbeeld taalverschillen, problemen met het verblijfsstatuut of armoedige levensomstandigheden en culturele verschillen); in die zin lijkt 'expertisescholen' een meer gepaste term. De ouders geven op hun beurt aan een voorkeur te hebben voor scholen waar veel andere Romakinderen zitten: omgeven door hun 'gelijken' is er minder kans op discriminatie of uitsluiting. Hoe twijfelachtig dat standpunt vanuit een bepaald perspectief ook mag zijn (het zou impliceren dat de samenleving de vrijwillige keuze voor segregatie tolereert), het neemt niet weg dat de laagdrempeligheid die uitgaat van deze scholen een realiteit is die voor een aantal van deze kinderen het verschil kan maken tussen al dan niet participatie in het onderwijssysteem. Die nuance verdient op zijn minst aandacht in de huidige debatten die de wenselijkheid van een sociale mix op evidente wijze vooronderstellen.

Daarmee zijn de onderscheiden deelvragen van dit onderzoek beantwoord. Er blijken belangrijke verschillen te bestaan tussen de sociale praktijken waarin Roma leven, de sociale praktijken die vorm geven aan de onderwijspraktijk en relevante beleidsmaatregelen. De implicaties van deze verschillen werden geëxpliciteerd en vertaald in enkele suggesties voor beleid en praktijk. De vraag 'hoe het nu verder moet' is daarmee ten dele beantwoord. Het besluitende hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift gaat verder in op deze kwestie. Ten eerste—en vooral relevant voor beleid en praktijk— wordt de vraag hoe deze groep te benaderen verder verfijnd. Een belangrijke uitdaging voor praktijkwerkers om de zo vaak aangehaalde kloof tussen 'wij' en 'zij' te overbruggen, is het werken aan vertrouwen in maatschappelijke instituties. Een inzicht in de collectieve en persoonlijke geschiedenis van Roma maakt dat wantrouwen begrijpelijk en verduidelijkt dat een gebrek aan inspanningen en engagement niet zomaar kan geduid worden als onbereidheid, luiheid of desinteresse. Ondanks de noodzaak van inspanningen in twee richtingen, verdient het bieden van een perspectief op de mogelijkheid van een andere en betere toekomst alle prioriteit. Pas als dat vertrouwen is hersteld, kunnen verwachtingen worden gesteld. De voor-wat-hoort-wat

logica die een rechten-plichten denken typeert, kan misschien wel positieve effecten opleveren op korte termijn (mensen doen inderdaad dingen als ze daarvoor 'beloond' worden), maar lijkt in de gegeven situatie desalniettemin onwenselijk. De nadruk op voorwaardelijkheid dreigt het bestaande wantrouwen en mogelijke tegenstellingen te benadrukken en te vergroten eerder dan ze op te heffen. De gevonden succesfactoren in *hoofdstuk negen* sluiten aan bij deze stelling: zowel het ontgrenzend werken vanuit een leefwereldgeoriënteerde benadering als de nadruk op persoonlijke betrokkenheid op families zijn nauw verbonden met het opbouwen van een vertrouwensband.

Die eerste stap is natuurlijk onvoldoende en vergt een hierop afgestemd beleidskader. Vanuit de vaststelling dat de spanning die besloten ligt in de dominante focus op 'Roma inclusie' (dat wil zeggen, in een doelgroepgerichte inclusieve aanpak) heel wat problemen met zich meebrengt, wordt in de breedte een geradicaliseerd inclusief beleid bepleit dat zich niet richt op vooraf gedefinieerde (etnische) doelgroepen. Zoals eerder gesteld, leidt die laatste strategie onvermijdelijk tot onwenselijke vormen van homogenisering. Als het gaat om *sociaal beleid dat expliciet gericht is op het aanpakken van sociale problemen* (bijvoorbeeld de bestrijding van armoede of criminaliteit, het aanpakken van huisvestingsproblemen of onderwijsproblemen zoals spijbelen en onregelmatige participatie) is er bovendien een gevaar tot identificatie van deze doelgroepen met de sociale problemen die zich stellen (zie *hoofdstuk vijf*). Dergelijk beleid dient te focussen op de problemen die het wil aanpakken, eerder dan op etnische doelgroepen; in zoverre het dat wel doet, is de impliciete veronderstelling dat de betreffende groep samenvalt met het sociaal probleem. Dat is niet alleen feitelijk onjuist maar ook onwenselijk: dergelijke vormen van maatschappelijke verbijzondering, problematisering of zelfs stigmatisering zijn onverenigbaar met de doelstelling om vertrouwen in maatschappelijke instituties op te bouwen.

Een mogelijke 'uitzondering' hierop zijn *beleidsmaatregelen die gericht zijn op non-discriminatie*. Hier blijft gerichtheid op Roma of andere etnische groepen legitiem, ook al gaat het bij discriminatie eveneens een 'sociaal probleem'. Meer genuanceerd richt dit soort beleid zich op collectieve identiteiten die op problematische wijze sociaal geconstrueerd zijn en op vormen van uitsluiting en racisme ten aanzien van deze groepen. Hun inzet is het bijsturen van de manier waarop die identiteiten worden geconstrueerd om gelijke behandeling en kansen te waarborgen. Het label 'Roma' wordt vaak geïdentificeerd met negatieve stereotypen en is een voorbeeld van een dergelijke identiteit. Dit 'sociaal construct' (eerder dan een feitelijke etnische groep) is het voorwerp van non-discriminatie beleidsmaatregelen; dit is legitiem omdat Roma hier niet *geïdentificeerd* worden met het betreffende sociale probleem (ze vallen er niet mee samen) maar er *aan onderhevig* of zelfs *slachtoffer* van zijn. Ook al brengt een veralgemeende slachtoffering van Roma andere problemen met zich mee en lijkt ze vanuit die optiek onwenselijk (Guy, 2013), met betrekking tot non-discriminatie lijkt de identificatie van deze 'doelgroep' als sociaal construct onvermijdelijk en zelfs noodzakelijk.

Sociocultureel beleid tenslotte zet in op het creëren van een ruimte waarin mensen

hun eigen (groeps)identiteit kunnen beleven. Als dergelijk beleid inzet op vooraf gedefinieerde groepen, riskeert het om bestaande (positieve) vooroordelen te bevestigen en versterken. In het geval van de Roma verwijst men vaak naar muzikale, dans- of culinaire vaardigheden. Die beeldvorming kan weliswaar bijdragen tot een meer positieve beeldvorming, maar blijft uitgaan van vooroordelen die een groep 'stigmatiseren'. Het suggereert dat dit is 'waar Roma goed in zijn' en trekt de aandacht weg van het feit dat Roma ook goed kunnen zijn in vaardigheden die niet 'typisch' zijn voor hun cultuur of dat sommige Roma mogelijks ook helemaal niet over deze vaardigheden beschikken. Dit neemt niet weg dat het creëren van een ruimte om zelf de eigen identiteit te beleven centraal staat binnen socio-cultureel beleid; maar onder welke noemer dat gebeurt, is een verantwoordelijkheid die beter wordt overgelaten aan de betrokkenen. Een ruimte voor zelfidentificatie en zelfdefiniëring lijkt hier dan ook wenselijk. Of mensen zich dan verenigen onder de noemer 'Roma' of een andere, is hun eigen beslissing en een oefening die niet dient te worden voorgestructureerd door het beleid.

Naast de vraag hoe de groepen waar het over gaat te benaderen, gaat de conclusie van dit onderzoek ten tweede ook dieper in op de implicaties voor pedagogisch onderzoek (voortbouwend op de ideeën uitgewerkt in *hoofdstuk zes*) door een aanzet te geven tot de ontwikkeling van een *pedagogie van verscheidenheid*. Op het eerste gezicht lijkt de vraag naar 'erkenning' binnen de bepleite radicaal inclusieve aanpak naar de achtergrond te verdwijnen. Het vertrekpunt van de hier verdedigde benadering is een *ethische sensitiviteit* en *responsiviteit* ten aanzien van de mensen en situaties die zich aandienen. Daaruit bleek dat het erkennen van de individualiteit van Roma iets anders kan betekenen dan 'hen erkennen als Roma' of 'hun positieve eigenschappen herkennen en bevestigen'. Erkenning veronderstelt met andere woorden noch dat verschillen worden benadrukt, noch dat deze worden ontkend of overkomen. Het antwoord op de vraag 'hoe we verder moeten' *kan* er in bestaan meer of minder aandacht te geven aan groepsverschillen, maar dat is niet noodzakelijk het geval, laat staan op een eenduidige manier. Het is hooguit een mogelijk antwoord naast vele andere.

Dat inzicht sluit aan bij het theoretisch kader over sociale praktijken zoals dat in de *inleiding* en *hoofdstuk één* werd toegelicht. Voor een onderzoek dat op zoek gaat naar 'hoe we verder kunnen' is kennis over 'wat is' hooguit een vertrekpunt. Sociale praktijken zijn geen vaststaande entiteiten. Het onvermijdelijke gevolg daarvan is dat kennis per definitie partieel en tijdelijk is. Die veranderlijkheid is essentieel vanuit pedagogisch perspectief. De vragen die centraal staan binnen dit onderzoek hangen dan ook samen met de kenmerken van initiatie en de transformatie die daarin besloten ligt en creëren een ruimte om op zoek te gaan naar de grenzen en mogelijkheden om 'verder te gaan'. Die kwestie ter sprake brengen in termen van sociale praktijken verduidelijkt dat het recht op onderwijs geen eenduidige betekenis heeft en dat die betekenis kan verschillen al naargelang het betekenisgevend referentiekader. Meer nog: waar veel bestaande benaderingen op hun grenzen stuiten, biedt het een kader om deze moeilijk te bevatten verschillen ter sprake te brengen. Een grondig inzicht in en begrip van deze

verschillen is van doorslaggevend belang om een zinvol antwoord te geven op de vraag hoe het recht op onderwijs kan worden gerealiseerd. Impliciet stelt het een voor de hand liggende performatieve interpretatie ('welke middelen moeten worden ingezet om alle kinderen toegang tot de school te verlenen?') in vraag en vervangt die door een interpretatie die erop gericht is onderwijs tot iets betekenisvol te laten worden voor de betrokkenen ('wat moet er gebeuren zodat het recht op onderwijs betekenis zou krijgen voor de mensen tot wie het zich richt?'). Die interpretatie is ingegeven door de vastgestelde verschillen; daaruit blijkt dat iets altijd betekenisvol is *voor iemand* en dat dit anders kan zijn van persoon tot persoon. Pogingen om het recht op onderwijs te realiseren verliezen inderdaad hun betekenis als ze niet als betekenisvol worden ervaren door de mensen die dit recht toegekend krijgen. De uitdaging om hier aan tegemoet te komen is des te moeilijker in het geval van mensen met zeer 'afwijkende' sociale praktijken. Hoe groter het verschil, des te groter ook de kans dat wat er voor 'hen' toe doet iets anders is dan wat 'wij' belangrijk achten. Dit theoretisch kader laat de mogelijkheid van wederzijds begrip open en zet de stap voorbij een zich al te gemakkelijk neerleggen bij vermeende onbereidheid of de onmogelijkheid om met dergelijk extreme verschillen om te gaan. Door een epistemologische en een ethische positie samen te brengen schetst het op zijn minst de mogelijkheid van een open toekomst waarin samenleven wel degelijk mogelijk is, zonder weliswaar andere mogelijkheden of perspectieven uit te sluiten.

De meerwaarde van het theoretisch kader is er daarmee niet alleen in gelegen dat het bepaalde elementen over het onderzoeksonderwerp aan het licht brengt; het biedt daarnaast een perspectief op de inzet van sociale wetenschappen en pedagogische wetenschappen in het bijzonder, en dientengevolge ook op de rol en positie van de onderzoeker. De rol van pedagogisch onderzoek wordt dan geherinterpreteerd in samenhang met de eerder vermelde responsiviteit. Dat is niet alleen de rol van de praktijkwerker; de pedagoog-onderzoeker heeft op zijn beurt een stem in het debat, niet alleen op basis van de onderzoeksbevindingen, maar ook als iemand die de stem van anderen kan meenemen om in het licht te stellen 'wat mogelijk is' (zie *hoofdstuk zes*). Door het samenbrengen van een wijsgerig-pedagogische positie met empirische bevindingen, worden maatschappelijke vraagstellingen opnieuw opgenomen, geherdefinieerd en 'teruggegeven' aan de samenleving. Daarbij dient de onderzoeker zijn rol voortdurend te herdefiniëren binnen het maatschappelijk debat waar hij middenin staat. In dit geval gebeurde dat onder andere door presentaties te geven op studiedagen voor veldwerkers, te participeren in stuurgroepen van projecten, beleidsadvies te verlenen, opiniestukken te schrijven in dagbladen, interviews te geven, toegankelijke publicaties te schrijven voor veldwerkers en beleidsmakers en mee een Romaorganisatie op te richten. Deze taken maken geen deel uit van het wetenschappelijk werk, maar kunnen daar evenmin strikt van worden gescheiden. Het is onmogelijk de rol van een neutrale observator op te nemen bij veldwerk; de onderzoeker is deel van de onderzochte praktijken en kan dus niet 'geen positie innemen'. Wat hij doet is mee geïnformeerd, geïnspireerd of zelfs gemotiveerd vanuit

het wetenschappelijk werk. Maar ook omgekeerd beïnvloeden deze activiteiten het onderzoek. Ze geven er antwoord op en—om terug aan te knopen bij het theoretisch referentiekader—ze leiden het onderzoek in de richting van 'wat er toe doet', 'wat er moet gebeuren' en dus 'hoe we verder kunnen'. Daaraan zijn zowel voordelen als nadelen verbonden. Betrokkenheid in het veld schept mogelijkheden om mensen en situaties 'zichtbaar' te maken in maatschappelijke discussies, niet door hen 'een stem te geven', maar wel door dingen te tonen en de aandacht te verschuiven naar specifieke situaties of elementen. Dat maakt het mogelijk om op een andere manier naar Roma te kijken: het belicht situaties *op een bepaalde manier,* in dit geval door vrij expliciet mee vorm te geven aan de initiatie van sociale verandering. Omgekeerd brengt die 'bepaalde manier' beperkingen met zich mee: sommige zaken worden niet ter sprake gebracht en andere antwoorden op de vraag 'hoe we verder kunnen' waaraan wordt voorbijgegaan, zijn mogelijks ook waardevol. Binnen een dergelijke opvatting *toont* onderzoek niet alleen dingen (dan zou het gaan om de reproductie van 'kennis over') en beperkt het zich evenmin tot het oproepen van de vraag 'hoe we nu verder kunnen', maar engageert het zichzelf bovendien in pogingen om die vraag actief te beantwoorden. Daarbij gaat het niet om een 'toepassing' van onderzoeksbevindingen, maar eerder om een vorm van responsiviteit ten aanzien van de situaties en sociale problemen die zich aandienen. De vraag 'wat er nu moet gebeuren' wordt mede beantwoord door pedagogische processen op een welbepaalde manier te initiëren in de samenleving. Een *pedagogie van verscheidenheid* 'voedt op': voorbij de beschrijving en analyse van verschillen zet ze ook de stap naar het beantwoorden van de vraag hoe we met die laatste kunnen omgaan. Deze benadering kan niet alleen leiden tot een hernieuwde opvatting over interculturele pedagogiek, maar zelfs over opvoeding in brede zin. Of het nu in culturele of andere termen is, ervaringen van 'verschil' en 'andersheid' zijn intrinsiek aan elke pedagogische context, en de hier voorgestelde positie kan ook aanknopingspunten bieden om met andere vormen van verschil om te gaan. Dat veronderstelt verdere verfijning van de positie van de onderzoeker, en dan vooral van de mate en vormen van diens betrokkenheid en engagement. Dat is hoe dan ook een centrale opgave voor wetenschap: om de wereld rondom ons evenals onszelf te bevragen, om te onderzoeken hoe we ons tot die wereld verhouden en dat te blijven doen. Voorliggende studie gaat die uitdaging alvast aan en hoopt op haar beurt vormen van transformatie te initiëren, om voorbij 'wat is' het mogelijke zichtbaar te maken.

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