

Horst Friedrich Rolly¹

Ethnicising the educational disadvantage - demand for programmes for the participation of Sinti and Roma in education and training²

Introduction

The German Sinti and Roma are aggregated as an officially recognised national minority in the Federal Republic of Germany. However, their social composition is very heterogeneous in respect of cultural, commercial, education-specific and regional criteria. The generalised documentation of the German Sinti and Roma in the media and even in research, especially with regard to their collective status as an underclass, does not correspond to the reality of their everyday life. The recognition of their complexity is a prerequisite for differentiated promotion according to their needs and potentials. These considerations also reflect the rights of minorities within minorities and the thereby associated demand for individual self-determination. The conventional attribution of homogeneous characteristics is probably largely due to the fact that Sinti and Roma are not or rarely included in decision-making processes and the linguistic formulation of public documents. Therefore:

1) German Sinti and Roma must be adequately involved in bodies and public offices which have to make decisions on educational and socio-political questions for the benefit of their ethnic group. This demand is in conformity with Article 15 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which provides for the creation of the "conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities ... in public affairs, in particular those affecting them".³

Social scientists have carried out various studies on Sinti and Roma, but so far no study of the Roma has been compiled by their own ethnic group. Research results concerning Sinti and Roma which were not obtained using a participatory approach, have the air of having been drafted from the outside and run the risk of leading to misunderstandings. A study on the concerns, existential situation, quality of life, senses of perspective and needs and potentials in education, economy and society carried out only by Sinti and Roma with a self-selected research approach would therefore appear to be more productive.

The difference between participation as a means to an end and participation as an end in itself is of significance for the term participation with regard to research. Participation which involves Sinti and Roma in the implementation of a prestructured research design and therefore as a means for the assigned purpose of collecting specific data should be differentiated from an essentially open partici-

¹ Horst Friedrich Rolly is Professor of Comparative Education at the Friedensau Theological Seminary.

² A statement which was presented in the discussion group of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma and the Minorities Council under the aegis of the Home Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag on 26th October 2011 forms the basis of this article. The subject of the technical discussion was the "EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 - Participation with equal rights for Sinti and Roma in Germany."

³ Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, ETS No.: 157 of 1st February 1995 <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/ger/Treaties/Html/157.htm>, last accessed: 14.12.2011. The demands and requirements for programmes for the participation of Sinti and Roma in education and training are numbered from 1 to 11 in the following. In the light of the experience gained with programmatic demands, these make little sense if they cannot be represented with objectifiable targets which are implemented with instructions for action within a time frame and can be subsequently evaluated. Some of the demands are therefore underpinned by measurable performance indicators. At the preliminary stage, of course, one must be clear about the realistic assessment of attaining a catalogue of demands furnished with numerical measured variables.

pation which leaves the research design and contents, method and collection and validation of data to the Sinti and Roma themselves. Admittedly, the "participatory appraisal" or "participatory learning" method already established in international social research is not an easy undertaking for the scientific recording of the lifestyle situation of the Sinti and Roma on the existential bases of self-determination. Nevertheless, it appears to be of the utmost importance for the publication of an internal perspective which does justice to the heterogeneous reality of the life of Sinti and Roma in Germany. In addition to an existentially founded collection of data on lifestyle situations, participatory research essentially concerns the self-determined potentials of the preservation of the desired and the change of the no longer desired positions of these lifestyle situations and therefore - at least for some of the Sinti and Roma - the self-motivated paving of the path towards social and economic upward mobility, which is still broken to some extent.

For the stated reasons,

2) The support of a study on the social and economic situation, culture and education of the Sinti and Roma supplemented by the subject area of racism and the causes of marginalization in civil society and the state carried out by Sinti and Roma using participatory and quantitative and qualitative methods of social research seems appropriate owing to its high exploitation interest. Within the framework of applied social science, the study could provide research results with some practical guidance for improving the opportunities of the ethnic group.

Support in the area of education

In particular, the above mentioned heterogeneity applies to education and access to and exclusion from primary and secondary schools and institutes of higher education which is influenced by various factors. With regard to support policy which addresses the complexity of the point of departure, it should initially be noted with reference to society as a whole that the equal treatment of unequal social groups reproduces inequality. The goal of an egalitarian social structure can only be reached under democratic auspices through unequal treatment of unequal groups, e.g. the support policy practiced in the USA with respect to education or other internationally known compensatory measures.

According to international criteria for the protection of minorities with respect to education, measures for a specific or compensatory support policy are justified primarily as a result of the demand for compensation for the historical injustice suffered, as is also the case for the enslavement of the Afro-Americans. The national minority of the German Sinti and Roma suffered persecution and genocide under the National Socialist tyranny, which strongly influenced the ethnic and cultural memory. The lack of recognition and repeated unfair treatment in the post-war period caused many persons belonging to the minority to retreat to the traditional security system of the family and evoked a distance to state institutions. For this reason, children of the Sinti and Roma minority are disadvantaged compared with children from the majority population when it concerns gaining a foothold or being successful in a school system which is extremely selective by European standards, in some cases on a massive scale.

It is therefore desirable that all German Sinti and Roma of school age are in school and gain educational qualifications. Access to secondary school to gain a university entry qualification and to higher education should be facilitated for talented and academically interested Sinti and Roma. The general

integration of the parents in educational processes, for example through the establishment of a specific parents' association, should be stepped up. Sinti and Roma must be able to recognize that they are offered serious support in their educational efforts. The regional associations could determine the requirement for support services on the basis of regional educational studies and supervise and evaluate their implementation.

The following demands seem appropriate:

3) The support and institutionalization of a monitoring system locally managed by regional associations of the Sinti and Roma in the Federal states, nursery school attendance, school enrolment and, if necessary, the special support of schoolchildren supervised and influenced by volunteers. The regional associations and the subsumed regional offices have the possibility of establishing parental interest groups in their sphere of influence among Sinti and Roma who identify themselves with the minority and who have expressed a desire for specific supervision and support of their children during pre-school and school socialization. School support also includes help with homework, remedial teaching and support for gifted learners, which should be provided locally under the aspect of individual and/or gender-specific support in collaboration with the schools.

4) The use of independent and neutral mediators (according to the principles of the Council of Europe's ROMED Training Programme for Roma Mediators of 2011) could be appropriate if a need is indicated or relevant requests are expressed. Teaching assistants have proved to be important, particularly in the schooling of Roma children from refugee or migrant families.

5) The targeted support of at least 100 Sinti and Roma in secondary schools up to Abitur (high-school diploma) by the year 2015.

6) Access to institutes of higher education must be facilitated for German Sinti and Roma through the:

a) Suspension of the numerus clausus

b) Provision of special scholarships for 100 Sinti and Roma

c) Promotion of the exchange of information and experience between Sinti and Roma students (network for mutual motivation).

7) Parental education: various studies⁴ have demonstrated that a successful school career substantially depends on the level of education of the parental and grandparent generation, as is also the case for educational climbers among the Sinti and Roma. It is therefore important to promote the interest of the parents in education through various adult education measures, in order to be able to include them more in the education process of their children. Promotion of adult education for Sinti and Roma by means of courses at adult education centres or other educational institutions which are specially developed and tailored to their needs and potentials with the input of the regional associations is therefore appropriate.

⁴ Baumert, Jürgen/Stanat, Petra/Watermann, Rainer (eds.): *Herkunftsbedingte Disparitäten im Bildungswesen: Differenzielle Bildungsprozesse und Probleme der Verteilungsgerechtigkeit* [Ethnic disparities in education: differential educational processes and problems with equitable distribution], Wiesbaden 2006; Becker, Rolf/Lauterbach, Wolfgang (eds.): *Bildung als Privileg* [Education as a privilege], Wiesbaden 2007; Büchner, Peter: *Stichwort: Bildung und soziale Ungleichheit*. In: *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft* [Topic: Education and social inequality. In: *Journal of Education*], 6 (1) 2003, p. 5-24; PISA 2009 Results: *Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes* (Vol. II) OECD 2010.

8) Positive balances: individuals from the Sinti and Roma minority who have had a positive or successful educational career at school could provide an effective role model for imitation because of their inside view and help to break down external prejudices of a conventional nature. Support for a respective long-term biographical study of educational climbers from the minority is therefore recommended.

9) Teacher training: it makes sense to devote more space to the subject of minorities in the Federal Republic and their history in the teaching degree programme. Specific further training courses on the subjects of minorities, stereotyping and the Sinti and Roma in more specific terms are advocated by the majority of teachers (according to a survey carried out by the Documentary Centre). The Conference of German Ministers of Education and the Arts should consider the concerns of the national minorities and especially of the Sinti and Roma as part of teacher training and further training. On this score, binding standards should be introduced which enable systematic verification of the achievement of goals. The standards should be developed in collaboration with representatives of the minority.

10) Curriculum: the status as a national minority on the basis of the European Framework Convention and the Language Charter obligates the signatory state of Germany to provide information about the history and present-day situation of the minority in its educational institutions. Many textbooks have serious deficiencies with regard to the subject of Sinti and Roma and national minorities. The Conference of German Ministers of Education and the Arts could use its influence to ensure that the ministries of culture and education of the Federal States consider the subjects of national minorities and Sinti and Roma to a greater extent in their educational recommendations (curricula) than in the past or include them in their central educational standards. As a result, the educational publishers would also be obliged to adapt their materials accordingly. The Minorities Council or experts from the organizations of the minority should also be included in the development of the curricula.

11) Education fund: if they are not covered by self-generated funds or other subsidies, the projects and local measures could be financed by an educational fund for Sinti and Roma which is centrally administered by a recognised institution, such as the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" (EVZ).

A further point, which was not mentioned in the statement presented at the technical discussion but which makes perfect sense in retrospect as a national and European strategy for promoting the education of the Sinti and Roma in the European context of the Bologna Process, is the systematic and structural support of Sinti and Roma for courses of studies at European institutes of higher education, with respect to student exchanges and the transfer of credit points, amongst other things. A suitable funding measure would certainly comply with the ideals of European integration.

The educational support policy poses the problem of how to define the criteria for eligibility. Conventionally, proof of ethnic affiliation to the German Sinti und Roma minority is enough to claim state funding provided that, pursuant to Article 3.1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the individual has a self-determined choice to be treated or not to be treated as a member of the minority.⁵ In any case, ethnic or cultural identity may not be systematically assigned externally against the will of the individual. However, since some individuals have attempted to ob-

⁵ Article 3.1 of the Framework Convention: "Every person belonging to a national minority shall have the right freely to choose to be treated or not to be treated as such and no disadvantage shall result from this choice or from the exercise of the rights which are connected to that choice."

tain state funding by fraud using forged papers, clearer criteria for defining ethnic affiliation as proof of eligibility are required. Ultimately it is left to the self-assessment of the people coming into consideration as to whether they wish to provide the credentials to obtain funding in accordance with the specified criteria. Otherwise, there is a procedure which is adequate in principle and which was also applied in the German Federal Armed Forces for exemption of the descendants of the victims of National Socialism from mandatory military service. Appropriate documentary evidence, e.g. from the compensation records, would suffice.

Examples from European contexts provide evidence that the individual right to self-determine ethnicity was used in different ways. Time and again, it was found that members of the Sinti and Roma did not wish to reveal their ethnic identity in public for fear of discrimination. Roma were sometimes prepared to change their name, in order to be treated as part of the majority population. It is of course regrettable that the discriminatory practice of dominant majority cultures potentially paves the way for the abandonment of ethnic or linguistic identity. Finally, it must be remembered that apart from ethnic identification other (cultural, class-specific or lifestyle-related) attributions circulate among the majority population, which as a rule are not suitable for extending the catalogue of criteria for the definition of minority identities. In conclusion, it should be noted that the offer of state aid in the education sector can only take place on the basis of specified criteria for minority group affiliation, and that it is left to the individual right of ethnic self-determination to make use of this offer on a voluntary basis.