



**Renáta Anna Dezső (2013): Twenty years after:
The Gandhi School and Beyond. Pécs:
Virágmandula Kft.**

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The Gandhi Foundation School in Pécs is a very famous school (not only) in Hungary: It is a model project, the first secondary school for Roma children in Europe. Roma are the most disadvantaged minority in Hungary (and in the whole European Union as well), which “face prejudice, xenophobia and injustice both in public speech and at various levels and forms of institutions” (pp. 11). The Gandhi Foundation (named after Mahatma Gandhi) was founded 1994 by János Bogdán with the aim to enable a sophisticated education and a high school graduation for Roma children and to help them to preserve their cultural identity as well, giving them a chance for social integration, a way to go on more successfully at the labour market and/or to further education (pp. 55). They should become a new Roma intellectual elite, which could help to realize the empowerment of the whole minority group. The Roma languages and Roma culture are compulsory courses and the children live during the week in a boarding school. The first year finished their high school education in 2000 and 50% of them went to university. In the school year 2013, the school had 174 pupils. Since 2002 there has also been an adult education department to give people a second chance. Until today there have been 400 pupils and 300 adults, who have completed their high school education.

The author Renáta Anna Dezső is an English-teacher at the Gandhi School, who – based on her PhD research about the challenges of the Roma minority in the secondary education in Hungary between 1989 and 2009 – invites the reader to a “colorful journey” (pp. 69) of the Gandhi School. She describes not only the aims, the history and the education of the school, using the results of her own empirical studies, but also gives glimpses from the inside, showing how she tried to create motivating English-classes for disadvantaged children. Methodologically Dezső places herself in the tradition of the triangulation and applies a multidimensional approach. She uses literature reviews, document and statistical data analysis, self-analysis of her teaching classes, questionnaires and interviews “to discover, whether the goal of the founders of the Gandhi Foundation succeeded by 2009” (pp. 17). These mixing of methods and perspectives – historically and currently, scientifically and practically, theoretically and empirically, socially and privately, description and analysis – is characteristic for the book and enables the author to show a differentiated picture of the Gandhi School.

In the first chapter she describes the educational situation of the Roma minority in Hungary during the so called Transition years, from 1989/90 to 2009 beginning with the regime changes from the Socialist Era to a democratic republic. In those years the educational situation can be called as very disadvantageous. Dezsó and shows the development of the idea of the Gandhi School to make an upward social mobility climbing for members of the Roma minority possible – with the help of the education system, – but without their cultural assimilation.

In chapter two she describes briefly the challenges of the educational policies and the model institutions for the empowerment of the Roma minority. In the 1990 there was a shift from catch up-programs to integrative and inclusive programs. She rates the Hungarian Act of the Rights of the National and Ethnic Minorities (1993) including the Roma as an important milestone for the minority nationality education.

According to Forray and Kozma (2001) there are two main streams of educational policies supporting the Roma in Europe: 1) one of them recognizes the Roma as a group with a social handicap and uses education as a means for socio-economic equality, 2) and the other (i.e. the so called “nationality education”) wants schools to develop their cultural identity by conveying and disseminating their cultural heritage (see pp. 21). In Dezsó's opinion the latter concept is to be realized in the Gandhi School. But she states with Pulay and Benkó (2008) and Forray (2009) that the two types of educational policies concerning the Roma minority in practice cannot just follow the district approaches, because the concept of separation is also essential – not only as an answer to the segregation tendencies of many Hungarian public schools to give their children protection from hostility and allow them equal opportunities (ibid). She introduces briefly eight so called “model institutions” to support Roma children and finds the biggest challenge in their constant struggle with financial issues and in their tendency of self separation.

In chapter three Dezsó describes the history of the Gandhi School with the help of newspapers and folders – containing articles, studies and books. The idea of the Gandhi School was born in the Roma intelligentsia in South West Hungary and was developed as a bottom-up project. The author describes very interestingly and informatively, how first the Gandhi Foundation was established, than the School itself and how these events were reported in the media.

In chapter four and five Dezsó describes two main factors of the Roma nationality minority education; teaching Roma languages and national minority consciousness. In Hungary there are two Roma languages spoken: Boyash, an archaic version of Romanian and Romani, an Ind language, internationally recognized as “the Gypsy language”), both could be learned in some schools and at the University of Pécs (pp. 43). She comments on the achievements of the regular and the adult education and shows the Gandhi School as an integrative and innovative institution (pp. 67).

In chapter six the author reports and reflects on her own teaching experience as an English teacher, including some evaluation from her students. She describes very lively how she organized an English drama group, so that the reader would like to be there and be a part of it.

In the last chapter Dezső asks the question “Alls is Well the End’s Well?” (pp. 89) and summarizes her deliberations with the sentence “Far from the happy end” (pp. 92). There are still big challenges for the education policies (not only) in Hungary to realize a more integrative (or shall we humbly say: less segregative) education for the Roma minority, preferably still before the end of the Decade of Roma Inclusion of the European Union.

Renáta Anna Dezső creates in this book a colorful mosaic of the Gandhi School, showing this extraordinary project from different angles. It is warmly to be recommended for all people who would like to know more about it, not only from a scientific perspective but also from the insight of a motivated teacher, who identifies herself with the aims and methods of the school. She published this book for the twentieth anniversary of the Gandhi School to draw up a balance sheet. In this sense her last sentence can be interpreted as a question about the long-term success of projects like the Gandhi School to create a more equal society: “Martin Luther King had a dream in 1963 and the United States of America has an Afro-American president today, in 2013. Shall we have a Prime Minister coming from the Romani/Gypsy minority in the forthcoming years?” I would like to answer this question with a definite “yes”. And it is more than likely, that this future Prime Minister will have been educated in the Gandhi School.