

# RENÁTA ANNA DEZSŐ

## GandHistory – The Beginning

**Abstract:** The Gandhi Secondary Grammar School and Boarding (Gandhi School) in Pécs, Hungary is a unique educational setting: a Romani/Gypsy national minority school, which celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2014. Between 1999 and 2004 the venue of the study served as a workplace for the researcher. During this period publications in European (Van Driel, 1999) and American (Katz, 2005) journals were published that reported on the pioneer institution. Via the present paper the author aims at contributing to the academic interest concerning the early years of the school. The investigation of the first few years of an innovative school is processed in an innovative way: this contribution summarises the institution's representation in relevant articles of local and national papers from the founding years (1992–1993) to 1997. What and how papers represent of a challenging minority's educational efforts in the first period of the transition years is well worth looking at deeply today.

**Keywords:** secondary education, school organization, institutional mission, Gandhi Secondary Grammar School and Boarding, educational innovation, written media representation

### 1. Introduction

Being born as a Rom or Gypsy has never been an advantage in our society although we have been living together for centuries (Crow, 1995). During the transition years, it seemed for a while that the Roma will gain their appropriate role in the Hungarian society, at last. The Minority Act of 1993 proclaimed the Gypsies as a national minority and in this way a door opened for this people to establish their institutions on a legislative basis similarly to other national minorities, such as the Germans or the Croats.

One of their first minority institutions was a school: the Gandhi Secondary Grammar School and Boarding – the Gandhi School. The school celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014, so it is timely to think about its history. As the institution is still the only school of its kind, investigating its story, its representation and the lessons it can teach us is well worth doing. The investigation this case is being done through an analysis of national and local papers, the tools of written media that reach out to the most people countrywide.

First I introduce both my primary and secondary sources: the papers themselves and the sources where the collections of these papers can be found. Next I give an overview of papers that have been dealing with the school, followed by an outline of focus points of the school's history that are represented in the news. Finally I emphasise a series of articles on a still relevant issue: the exact concerns and nature of Gypsy/Roma national minority education.

My study is a combination of content analysis and explanatory text conversion: I summarize the explicit and implicit messages of the “Gandhi story” represented in the media.

Due to the complexity, heterogeneity, self-identification and differences of those concerning students studying at the Gandhi School representing the groups of people described as Roma, Gypsy, Travellers, Sinti etc. in the present study the terms Romani/Gypsy (adj.) and Roma/Gypsies (noun pl.) are used interchangeably without negative connotation (see Ries, 2008).

### 2. Background of the study

It is almost a cliché that the role of media is becoming more and more determining regarding public opinion. Papers influence and manipulate our interests, our ways of thinking and our judgment making ideas. Framing and shaping our attitudes is partly the responsibility of journalists. The “Roma picture” suggested by the papers in Hungary was first investigated in the late 80s (Hegedűs, 1987). The author analysed more than two hundred articles written in the country's press in 1985–1986. Later a new

generation of academics investigated the representation of the Gypsies in the media (Bernath & Messing, 1998). While these studies show Roma representation in general, the innovative approach of the present study is that it seeks for the story of one single institution of the Gypsy people.

## 2.1. Primary Sources

There have been four quality national daily papers in Hungary for many decades after the Second World War: *Népszabadság* (Liberty of People), *Népszava* (Words of People), *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation) and *Magyar Hírlap* (Hungarian Newspaper). The profile of these papers have changed a lot during and after the transition years but the “great four” remained the leading dailies for a long while concerning the number of people read them (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Number of readers of Hungarian Dailies (thousand)

Daily	1995	2002
Népszabadság	836	671
Magyar Nemzet	106	248
Magyar Hírlap	173	139
Népszava	173	109

Source: Juhász, 2003

*Népszabadság* used to be the paper of the Hungarian Socialist Labour Party before the political changes of 1989–1990. This daily is still the most read quality paper, up till today it reserved its leftist profile. *Magyar Nemzet* used to belong to an organisation (Hazafias Népfront: Popular Front of Patriots) that was created to unite progressive intelligentsia, those not belonging to the state party but still acceptable in times of “soft socialism”. The paper became a liberal one during the transition years but changed its profile to a radical rightist one during the second conservative governance between 1998 and 2002 and so it continues since then (Rádai, 2004). *Magyar Hírlap* was concerned as a semi-official paper of the government before the political changes and after the system change it took a liberal profile as well. Later on this daily vanished for a while but by today it reborn as a conservative paper. *Népszava*, the once daily of trade unions has become the smallest national paper by today. Amongst regional papers my main source is (*Új Dunántúli Napló* (<New> Transdanubian Daily)). This paper, which is read mainly at the South Western part of Hungary is more popular than the national *Magyar Hírlap* or *Népszava*: the number of its readers reached 160 thousand by early 2008 (*Nemzeti Média Analízis*, 2008).

## 2.2. Secondary Sources: Collections

Collections always mean tremendous help to researchers as they save a lot of time that otherwise would be spent in the archives. On the other hand collections, most of the time, have more or less significant incompleteness as they are created by human beings who by nature are never perfect. During my research I could rely on four collections, different in size, time period and type of collectors. Two of these sources can be connected to the employees of the Gandhi School, whereas the other two are those of outsiders’.

The smallest, still important source I used is a thick folder belonging to one of the first teachers of the Gandhi School, who today is the head of the Department of Romology and Sociology of Education, Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pécs, Dr. Anna Orsós. Her folder contains only the most important articles from regional and national papers concerning the publicity of the Gandhi School and those relevant in Roma educational policies from the earliest time of my interest up till today. My second source is the relevant collection of the Library of the Gandhi School. According to the librarian, Ms Pallos, this folder is a database that has been created by teachers of the school in a very simple way: “whoever whenever sees whatever in the written media that can be connected to the school brings in the original copy of it, a photocopy is made and put in a file in order of appearance”. This collection started as early as 1992 (therefore it is the richest source of mine regarding the first five years) and has been expanding since then.

The most significant shortcomings of these sources are that the exact dates of the articles are not referred to in most cases and the pages of publications are missing most of the time. When authors or other publication details (i.e. dates) are unknown I indicate it with 'n. d.' (no data) in my references. In some other cases only the initials of the authors may be found as references of the articles. Still, the folder of the Library of the Gandhi School is an essential source concerning the early history of the institution.

As for the outsiders' collections the most complete relevant one is the Minority Informative (*Kisebbségek Baranyában: Tájékoztató a kisebbségekről általában, valamint a Baranya megyei kisebbségekkel foglalkozó sajtóközleményekről, cikkekről, könyvekről*), a monthly published prospectus of the Baranya County Library (*Csorba Győző Baranya Megyei Könyvtár*). The history of this collection was recalled in an interview with a retired librarian of this institution, Mr Surján who used to be in charge of the periodical. Due to a local act issued on the situation of Baranya County minorities, (172/1995. XI.4.) the library started to create a database from 1997. Their intention was to collect the bibliography of all relevant articles, studies and books and publish those in a monthly prospectus from the time being. The collection contains information about all national minorities that have their own self-governments in Baranya County: Bulgarians, Gypsies, Greeks, Croats, Polish, Germans and Serbs). Generally one unit contains 70–100 items, each one with a short annotation in Hungarian. In the time of the research the source could have been reached from the homepage of the library in pdf files. When searching for the history of the Gandhi School the researcher could find the relevant articles through reading the annotations concerning the Roma national minority.

The other subtype of the outsider's sources is the online archives of the national and regional dailies examined. These archives are different in accessibility (data valid August, 2009) regarding the starting date they are available from and the quality of search possibilities they offer. The homepage of Népszabadság offers its archive only since January, 2008 and word search is more efficient here than that of phrases. Népszava sells its digital archive from January 2004, one cannot get access to the paper's articles online published before the particular week s/he is doing her/his search. The online archive of Magyar Nemzet is available since April, 2000, search possibilities here are complex and reliable. Magyar Hírlap offers its archive online from January, 2000 though the collection of the printed articles contains a selection of articles only. From January, 2002 the online archive of Dunántúli Napló is accessible as well, search for words is a better option for researchers in this collection than that of phrases.

### **2.3. Written Media about the Gandhi School in General**

While writing this study I have examined more than a hundred articles. Among these articles there are publications of numerous genres: interviews, reports, coverage, panels and messages. There are several forms of press releases that have been focusing on the school and the events that can be connected to this institution since the intention of starting the school became public (April, 1992) up till today. Amongst this written media we can find Hungarian: weeklies, such as *Heti Világgazdaság* (Weekly World Economics), *168 óra* (168 Hours), *Magyar Narancs* (Hungarian Orange), *Hetek* (Weeks); educational journals, as *Köznevelés* (Public Education), *Fejlesztő Pedagógia* (Conducting Education); University and youth papers: *Faktum* (Facts), *KIDS*, *Pécsi Campus* (Campus of Pécs); national minority papers: *Barátság* (Friendship), *Amaro Drom* (Our Road), *Világunk* (Our World); national monthlies, such as *Kritika* (Critics) and *Beszélő* (Talker); and a county paper of Baranya: *Diskurzus* (Discourse).

One can also find articles published in English, German and French both in and outside Hungary. The ones in English are published in educational journals such as *The American Educator* and the *European Journal of Intercultural Studies*. Articles in French and German appear in dailies or weeklies: *Le Monde*, *Der Spiegel*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Budapester Zeitung*, *Pester Lloyd*, *Budapester Zeitung*.

Though the sources are rich, in the present work we concentrate on the most read Hungarian papers described as primary sources. Articles examined can be listed according to particular focuses such as the following themes and topics: formation of the Gandhi Foundation (1992); finding a place for the world's

first Roma national minority school (1992–1993); “school start” (1994); the Gandhi Foundation becoming a Public Foundation (1996); financial issues; philosophies behind the institution; portraits of the teachers of the school; necrology of an emblematic director, Mr Bogdán (1999); initiation ceremony of the gymnasium of the school (1999); first secondary school leaving exams (2000); opening ceremony of the real school building (2002); 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school - library extension (2003); everyday life of the school; the school as a (mostly symbolic) venue; complaints of citizens living in the neighbourhood of the school; debates about the school’s directorship in the 15<sup>th</sup> school year (2009).

Due to extension limitation in the present work we are not dealing with the details of each of these events, however the list gives us a framework of the history of the school that can be traced back when one is reading the relevant articles. This time our focus is on the beginning, our concern is the school’s story until 1997.

## **2.4. Educational Index of the Roma in Hungary in 1993**

There is nation-wide research outcome evidence (Kemény, Havas & Kertesi, 1997) that proves what an urging issue the education of the Roma was right after the political changes of the 1990s. The researchers repeated the survey they had carried out in the early 1970s as a scandalous act of social studies at those times. In the year of the research the studied population did not participate in higher education at all concerning the age group below 30. The highest rank of college or university degree was 0.6% among the Roma aged 40–49. The most typical education was eight completed primary classes among the age group 14–49. Completed vocational training was highest (14.5%) among 20–29 year olds, whereas those who took the secondary school leaving exam (known as GCSE in the British education system) were almost not represented at all. Roma aged 30–39 had the most significant representation amongst those who completed secondary grammar education – still the highest rank in their case means 2.5% (!).

The significance of secondary grammar schools is obvious. In Hungary if one cannot complete a secondary school where he or she can take the secondary school leaving exam (that enables you to continue your studies in higher, tertiary education), the person is almost a hundred per cent lost in the labour market. As a Hungarian economist suggests (Kertesi, 2005), secondary education offering GCSE is a cut off point between those who will always be left behind and those who get chance to integrate as useful members of our society. Realising the significance of this statement we cannot have a doubt of the importance of establishing a secondary grammar school for the Roma as one of the first intentions of a new democracy in the early 1990s.

## **3. Articles Well Worth Examining**

As the extent of the present work is rather limited I only concentrate on the starting point of the school and topics that seem not to have changed during the past two decades. The following issues are investigated in order of logic not necessarily in order of appearance of the articles.

### **3.1. An Idea is Born**

The original dream of “a school for the Gypsies” came from the mind of Mr Ignác (Scipiades, 1994) in the autumn of 1991. Ignác, a Gypsy citizen himself lived and worked as part of the local intelligentsia in Besence, a tiny village of 50 houses of the Beash Gypsy minority in the South West of Hungary. The father of the idea worked as the pub keeper of the village, with an excellent reputation among his villagers as he had completed the GCSE and could also speak English – the language that he learnt at secondary school. He mentioned his idea to a young teacher Mr Derdák, who lived in the same village from 1988 as he was teaching French to Beash Gypsy children in the neighbouring Magyarmecske. Mr Derdák became a Member of Parliament of the Liberal Democratic Party after the first free elections in 1990 so he had the political connections that started to help Ignác’s dream come true.

In April, 1992 reports on establishing Gandhi Foundation, the association of numerous private persons, organizations and institutions that aimed at setting up the network of Roma/Gypsy national minority educational institutions appeared both in regional and national papers (Bozsik, 1992a; Bozsik

1992b; Dési 1992a; Dési 1992b). The initial plan to realise was to open the first Roma national minority secondary grammar school in the world in the near future. Dési, one of the journalists authoring these articles was among the founders himself, so the media representation of the foundation could have been there at first hand. Investigating these articles we can conclude that one of the greatest expectations of the founders was a highly qualified and motivated community of teachers who would be able to educate the future intelligentsia of the Roma. The founders articulated that the future teachers would be able to recover all the knowledge and information gaps that the target group of children would possibly have because of their social and economical handicap. These most excellent educators would also have to facilitate and process the history, culture and language of the Gypsies – a fabulous professional package for pioneer teachers, though more than idealistic.

*Népszabadság*, the most read national paper also published (this source can be found in the collection of the library of the Gandhi School and unfortunately does not indicate the exact date of appearance of the article – still, one can estimate that the year is 1992) about the first plans, interviewing the would-be director of the school, Mr Bogdán (Csalog, 1992). The young Gypsy man is a philosopher and a teacher of history and Hungarian. Talking about finding future colleagues he proclaims that one's professional and national identities are not interchangeable or converging. The structure of the secondary grammar school he is thinking of is that of a six graded one specialising in humanities, starting on the seventh grade of public education to be established in Pécs, the centre of South West Hungary. Also, Bogdán mentions an additional institution to be introduced in Kaposvár, the county town of Somogy, with an emphasis on organic agricultural studies. The young director candidate understands the institutions being born as prototypes for further, similar schools. He is aware that not all of their future students would return to their home communities after their education would have been completed as leaving one's original surroundings is a typical feature of first generation intelligentsia all over the world. It is more than painful that such a talented young Rom could not see his prophecies come true – the young director died in a car accident in January, 1999 (Dési, 1999). He was only 36 years old.

### **3.2. From Struggles to Start**

From July, 1992 we can read about the uncertainty of establishing the institution in Kaposvár in local Pécs and Kaposvár dailies as well as in national papers (Troszt, 1992; Varga, 1992a; Varga, 1992b). According to these articles though the local government of Somogy county town voted for a building to be given for the purposes of the Gandhi Foundation, the members of the board and the citizens of the town were resisting. Several members of the local council articulated critiques, citizens organized a referendum against establishing any kind of educational institution for the Roma – their contras were endless: segregation is not a solution for the educational challenges of the Gypsies; the particular building was found inappropriate to function as a school building for a vocational medical school – how come the Roma would still get it; they have five secondary grammar schools already – why on earth would they bother with a sixth one; Kaposvár does not want to tolerate the presence of large Gypsy families that would be certainly there at times of school ceremonies; Gypsy mafia would educate their offspring in this school; Beash Gypsies from Romania would want to come here to study and once they are here they would come up with territorial demands; the whole Europe would ridicule Kaposvár as everywhere in the continent the Roma are rejected except for the town.

The examples above show the prejudice and xenophobia of our society very well. In April, 1993 at last the citizens of Kaposvár could have taken a deep breath: the decision became final – there would be no Gypsy school in the town (Dési, 1993a). According to the proclaim of the deputy major no one from Gandhi Foundation had called the town council about the building nor had they received a letter from them. It was exclusively up to the disinterest of the foundation that they could not obtain the property. The first Roma nationality grammar school in the world was finally offered an estate in the suburbs of Pécs, Baranya county.

Money of course was a crucial issue when the founders started to realise their ideas of setting up the school. Though a dozen of organizations and citizens donated smaller amounts (Soros Foundation was the most generous donator) to the foundation (Bednárík, 1993; Dési, 1993b), without the help of the state the dream of the school could not have come true. Later, in 1995 because of the very same financial supporting argument Gandhi Foundation became a Public Foundation (Troszt, 1995), and since then the school has been a background institution of the government.

During the summer of 1993 the readers of both local and national papers (B.A., 1993; Erdei, 1993; n.d., 1993a; n.d., 1993b; Troszt, 1993a), could gain understanding of how the pupils of the school were selected. After the future teachers of the school had contacted three hundred primary schools in Baranya, Somogy, Tolna and Zala counties they personally travelled to 47 institutions and tested talented Roma pupils on the fifth grade in their home school environment. They choose the brightest candidates with the help of a game that measures the logical thinking of children. The most gifted ones were invited to a campsite in the South West Hills, Sikonda, where seven of the future teachers tested them during a week of challenging educational games and cooperative exercises. Six months later, in the end of January, 1994 the school opened with a “0<sup>th</sup>” spring semester, where 56 pupils started their studies (Bencze, 1994; P.E., 1994; Troszt, 1993a; Troszt, 1994 Ungár, 1993). Six and a half years later in June, 2000 one third of them, 18 students passed their maturity exams most of whom (16) continued their studies in higher or tertiary education (n.d., 2000; S. Kállay, 2000).

#### **4. A Debate Still Up to Date**

In the spring of 1997 a rather challenging series of articles (Horváth, 1997; Józsa, 1997a; Józsa, 1997b; Krémer, 1997) appeared on the pages of Magyar Hírlap. Although more than a decade passed since that date, the debate articulated by the authors of the articles still echoes in public speech when it comes to the issue of national minority education of the Roma/Gypsies.

##### **4.1. Critical Thoughts**

The journalist, who authored the first piece, Józsa, finished her secondary grammar school studies in Cluj, Transylvania as a member of the Hungarian minority in Romania. Although usually we do not consider the curriculum vitae of journalists in dailies I believe this background information of the author cannot be neglected this case as we may get deeper understanding of her motivation of writing about Gandhi’s spirit and the challenges of the trustees of the public foundation named alike.

In the focus of the essay the reader confronts an unfulfilled promise of the government: creating the network of national minority educational institutions of the Roma/Gypsies. When talking about this minority the journalist outlines that the majority of policies, general opinion, and representatives of national minorities other than the Roma/Gypsies as well treat, think and talk about the Roma as a people who has subordinated values and worth less than others: in this way stigmatising the Gypsies as a lower status minority. In Józsa’s opinion both for educational decision makers and for the general public being a Gypsy person is a sociological category. Therefore the challenge of Roma education gets articulated as a motivation problem or a task of development. The journalist criticises boarding schools that aim to help Romany students because in her opinion these institutions are pseudo ones that phantasm important issues happen connected to national education although they do not offer quality education, but “a place to stay” for teenagers. Józsa claims that supporting national minority boarding schools are cheaper than building schools and developing national minority educational programmes.

Financial issues and political interest concerning the work of the Gandhi Public Foundation are also examined carefully. The author believes that the amount the public foundation operates with annually (two-three hundred millions of Hungarian forints from the state budget at that time) is enough to generate lobbies and transform the organisation into a cash box instead of a centre for supporting the development of Gypsy national minority educational programmes. As the trustees of the public foundation are responsible for the finances, electing the trustees becomes a political issue. According to the memorandum of the association, nine trustees make up the board. Six trustees are elected by the founders but two of them are delegated by

the government (one by the National, Ethnic and Minority Office and another by the Ministry of Education) and one by the Gypsy National Minority Self-Government. It is also the government who nominates the Supervising Committee of the public foundation. Therefore, along Józsa's logic in case of any dysfunction it could become the interest of the government to hold the trustees or the school director responsible while malfeasance seems to occur as a necessity due to the inextricable operation of the organization.

#### **4.2. Segregation or Integration**

The answer from one of the representatives of that time government was not late in the paper. Krémer, an advisor from the Ministry of People's Welfare did not reflect on Józsa's political and financial interest raising ideas but focused on the issue of national minority boarding school network contra network of national minority educational institutions.

Scepticism of the latter concept is evidently the author's personal conviction. Though a Gypsy national minority institution is understood as a stigma by Krémer, he theoretically would trust Romany/Gypsy parents to decide whether to educate their children in a national minority institution, which for him equals a form of segregation or integrate into schools of the majority of the society. He argues for the network of boarding schools and also praises teachers who created the Gandhi School with the intention of quality education in mind. Krémer's emphasis is primarily on quality, regardless of the nature of national minority education, as such.

For Krémer the "Gypsy issue" is a sociological one, as he claims. He believes this minority has different genetic, ethnic and cultural makings, as the Roma are extremely poor, uneducated, unemployed, their living and health conditions are striking and their norms are distant from those of the majority of the society. In case there are no other significant differences of the Roma why would one bother with defining the characteristics of this national minority?

The most serious challenge according to the author's opinion is the undefined nature of an educational network that is a Gypsy national minority one, when no one is certain of what the contents of this concept is. Concerning self segregation (which is called separation in educational literature) his warning is that "ghettos can be locked from the inside as well" so establishing other "romantic reservations" alike in his opinion is not desirable. He argues that segregated institutions are also the interest of the middle class of the majority of the society – in case national minority institutions are set up for the Roma, middle class citizens can avoid Gypsy company in educational institutions. Krémer's last argument is that one cannot multiply a model until its efficiency and effectiveness is examined and he suggests to avoid social-political risk taking (which for him is a natural necessity of building schools alike the Gandhi School).

#### **4.3. Equal National Minority Existence**

Józsa's reply is quick, short and straightforward. She clarifies that the network of Gypsy national minority education is a question of legacy as well. As the Minority Act of 1993 declares the right for national minority education for all national minorities recognised living in Hungary, Józsa is concerned that the government acts malfeasance when it neglects its own assignment considering the foundation of networks of national minority educational institutions. Concerning the non-existing national minority educational programmes the journalist views those as challenges to overcome not as barriers. Anti segregation slogans for Józsa are simply restraints of interest vindication – she reminds her readers of the unification of Babes and Bolyai universities in Cluj.

Horváth, the newly elected (February, 1997) trustee of the Gandhi Foundation in charge also publishes his additional comments. The front line fighter of the Roma civil rights movement argues that discussing the topic of poverty versus "the Gypsy issue" is more than a mistake, in his opinion it is a sin. Horváth reminds his readers of the "Gypsy resolution" of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Working Party in 1961, which considers the Roma as a social class to be eliminated. He emphasises that a slightly existing social policy cannot be compared to a non existing anti-discrimination national minority

programme because poverty is not an exclusive category for the Gypsies whereas everyday discrimination is not an exclusive challenge of the poor.

In Horváth's opinion the excessive support of the Roma is a myth whereas the idea of equal national minority existence is desirable to be spread in our society. He argues for the necessity of establishing Gandhi-type schools although he agrees that the value of national minority and majority education should equal. According to the trustee chairman deciding between integration to majority classes or national minority schools for (not only) Roma individuals should be a possibility of one's free choice.

## 5. Far from a Happy End

Several interesting events have taken place in and around the Gandhi School since 1997, however our investigation is coming to its end as the goal of this contribution is to outline the beginning of the "GandHistory".

Today, in 2013, 21 years after the formation of the Gandhi Foundation we neither have a network of boarding schools nor that of national minority educational institutions for the Roma. The scandalous debates about the school's directorship in the 15<sup>th</sup> school year (Cseri, 2009; Ónodi-Molnár, 2009) neither did any good to the reputation of Roma national minority education. Since October, 2011 the Gandhi School has been run by a "nonprofit public utility" (n.d., 2011) consequently the Gandhi Foundation came to its end in its original form after 19 and a half years of operation.

Though one of the priorities of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) is education in the European Union, secondary education of Gypsy youngsters, regardless its nature remains a challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century both in Hungary and beyond.

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