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From the Ghetto to the University.
The Impact of CampusRom, the 1st Roma University Network of Catalonia

Abstract

Situation of Roma (Gypsies) people is still visibly alarming in all Europe. In Spain, only 1% of them arrive to the university, while 35% of the rest of the population have a university degree (Damonti & Arza, 2014). This gap is being reduced thanks to several efforts, especially thanks to the Integrated Plan for Roma People (Catalan Government). However, Roma university students has exponentially increased since the creation of CampusRom, the first Roma University Network of Catalonia. This network was created as a result of implementing a Successful Educational Action (SEA) called "Family Education" (Flecha, 2015). This paper examines the impact achieved by CampusRom, using the findings obtained in two qualitative researchers developed in Spain, and particularly in Catalonia.

1. Objectives or purposes

This paper is aimed at collecting the social impact of CampusRom, the first Roma University Network of Catalonia. This network is contributing to increase the number of Roma university students in Catalonia.

2. Perspective(s) or theoretical framework

Situation of Roma (Gypsies) is still visibly alarming in all Europe. In Spain, only 1% arrives to the university, while 35% of the rest of the population have a university degree (Damonti & Arza, 2014). Some non-Roma academics who call themselves "experts" in Roma education, are arguing that Roma People do not access higher education because of their culture, or because they do not want to study, nor access stable jobs, among other occurrences. This example of anti-Gypsyism coming from the Academia is based on the stereotypes and prejudices that still persecute this community. In fact, many Roma academics are actively rejecting and overcoming these anti-scientific manifestations, using research evidences (Jiménez-González, 2017; Macías-Aranda & Redondo, 2012).

In this sense, educational research has already demonstrated that this educational gap between Roma and non-Roma is because multiple factors, but mainly because Roma People faces educational practices not based on scientific evidences (occurrences). These practices are not allowing the equalitarian participation of Roma in education. Among the most common non-evidence-based practices are:

1. the low social and educational expectations of the professionals toward Roma students and their families (Macías-Aranda, 2017);

2. the concentration of Roma students in "Ghetto" schools with low academic performance, usually located in disadvantaged neighborhoods with a high concentration of Roma population, and where the curriculum is drastically reduced (Santiago & Maya, 2012);

3. the concentration of Roma students in specific classrooms with low educational level, in which very often they do not learn the necessary skills to successfully complete the educational stage (Aubert, Duque, Fisas, & Valls, 2004); and

4. the curriculum reduction/adaptation of specific students, under the premise that, since they are Roma students, they will not be able to follow the ordinary curriculum because their "capacities" (Macías-Aranda & Flecha, 2013).

Fortunately, to overcome this situation and reduce the university gap between Roma and non- Roma, the Integrated Plan for Roma People in Catalonia (IPRP), coordinated by the Catalan Government, is implementing Successful Educational Actions (SEAs), which has been identified by INCLUD-ED project (Flecha, 2015). One of these SEAs is called "Family Education". According to the literature review, improvement of the educational level of everyone who interacts with children has a positive impact on the children learning process (Díez, Gatt & Racionero, 2011; Flecha & Soler, 2013; García, Girbés, & Gómez, 2015; Rogoff, Turkanis, & Bartlett, 2002; Wenger, 1998). Besides, improving the educational level of families and other community's members can also have a positive impact in their own social inclusion, for instance by bettering their employability and their labour options (Flecha, 2015; Girbés, Macías, & Álvarez, 2015). The impact of the SEA Family Education on Roma inclusion has already been demonstrated by the educational and social research (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Girbés-Peco, Macías-Aranda, & Álvarez-Cifuentes, 2015; Sordé- Martí & Macías-Aranda, 2017).

In this regard, since 2012, the IPRP is being developing the GAU25, a Family Education program aimed to prepare Roma over 25 to overcome the Official University Entrance Exam (Department of Labour. Social Affairs and Families, 2014). Even the GAU25 was contributing to increase the number of Roma university students, this improvement was slow. For this reason, in 2016, a group

of Roma teachers and students decided to create CampusRom, the first Roma University Network of Catalonia. This decision was motivated because the major part of the Roma over 25 who were attending the GAU25, faced the impact of the non-evidence-based educational practices mentioned above. CampusRom born to help these Roma over 25, and to accompany any other Roma in higher education. CampusRom works as a mutual support network among Roma, being role models and having a very positive impact in the educational success and social inclusion of its members. The power of the role models within minority groups has already demonstrated by educational research (Antronette, 1998; De Clerck, 2009; Epstein, 1983; Evans, 1992; Maylor, 2009; Pozdnyakova & Moiseeva, 2008; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010).

3. Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry

This paper is based on two researches: the first one (2013-2016), developed at the University of Granada (Spain), and the second one (2014-2017), carried out at the University of Barcelona (Spain). These researches studied and analyzed the process through which the Roma People becomes an active agent and protagonist of its own social inclusion thanks to its participation in Successful Educational Actions (Flecha, 2015), as the family education, or thanks to its participation in Public Policies addressed to Roma communities (García, Santiago & García, 2019).

Both researches have been developed under the guidelines and principles of the **Communicative Methodology (CM),** used for the analysis of phenomena, situations or social interactions, and focused on the components that generate social exclusion and on those that contribute to overcome it (Pulido, Elboj, Campdepadrós, & Cabré, 2014). CM provides effective solutions to address the real needs and problems that affect social groups, especially the most vulnerable (Gómez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011). Roma People claims interventions and researches with social utility, where their voices are tacked into account and the research findings are responding to solve their reals needs and improving their social situation, going beyond prejudices and stereotypes (Amador, 2016, Hancock, 1988, Macías-Aranda, 2017; Macías-Aranda & Redondo, 2012, Vargas & Gómez, 2003).

Specifically, this paper includes the results obtained through two case studies. The first one was the Family Education program GAU25, implemented by the Integral Plan for the Roma (Catalan Government). And the second one was CampusRom, the Roma University Network of Catalonia. In each case studies, qualitative

techniques with communicative orientation have been used.

4. Data sources, evidence, objects, or materials

This paper uses evidences from a total of 46 techniques, distributed as follows:

- **Documentary analysis** of 22 secondary sources (reports, minutes, internal monitoring and evaluation documents, and reports from the Catalan administration);
- 5 **in-depth interviews** with communicative orientation, carried out to professionals (4 Roma and 1 non-Roma);
- 11 **Communicative Daily Life Stories** carried out to Roma over 25 enrolled in the GAU25 and also members of CampusRom; and
- 8 **communicative observations** made in the GAU25 (5) and CampusRom (3).

5. Results and/or substantiated conclusions or warrants for arguments/point of view

Research findings show that in 5 years (2012-2016), only 8 Roma over 25 successfully overcome the Official University Entrance Exam. According to literature review, part of this low success is because the negative impact of the non-evidence-based educational practices (Macías-Aranda, 2017; Santiago & Maya, 2012; Aubert, Duque, Fisas, & Valls, 2004; Macías-Aranda & Flecha, 2013).

Josué is a Roma man. He is 31 years old, and he is married and has 2 daughters and 1 son. He was student in the GAU25 in 2015 and 2016. He finished his compulsory studies in the school of his neighborhood, a "ghetto" school, but he recognizes that, even he graduated, he did not graduate with the appropriate level, because the school gave him the "title" simply for attending the classes:

> "I did not have homework, nor did anything in class. I was just sitting there. Sometimes we drew. other times we watched movies, but never did activities to learn. You know? That's why when I arrived at the GAU25 I did not know anything about it. It hurts me to say it, but they gave me the title" (Macías-Aranda, 2017)

Like Josué, who is currently studying social work at the university, the major part

of the students did not have an appropriate level to their age and therefore to be available to overcome the university entrance exam. In this moment born CampusRom. The main activity that they started to do was the "working groups". These groups helped them to continue learning and to understand some contents that they did not understand well during the lectures of the GAU25. Moisés, another Roma man who attend the GAU25 in 2015 and 2016, and who is currently studying sociology at the university, says that thanks to these "working groups" he could learn much more, and thanks to this, he could overcome some subjects as Catalan language or History:

> "I did not know anything about Catalan, English or History when I arrived to here. I remember myself so confuse in the GAU25 classes. When we created CampusRom, and the "working groups" started, I began to understand some concepts and ideas. And after 1 month, I remember that I was so happy, because I started to follow well the GAU2 classes" (Macías-Aranda, 2017)

In this regard, the impact of CampusRom was evidenced quickly. As we noted, in the first 5 years of the GAU25 (2012-2016), without the existence of CampusRom, 8 Roma overcome the exam. In 2017, in only 1 year, 7 Roma successfully overcome the Official University Entrance Exam. In the following 2 years (2018 and 2019), a total of 20 Roma students have overcome the exam (see image 1) (Department of Labor, Social Affairs and families, 2019).

This data is regarding the Roma students enrolled in the GAU25, but as has been mentioned before, CampusRom born to help any Roma student who is trying to go to the university. In this sense, the impact of the network is going beyond the GAU25. In 2017, 7 Roma more under 25 (non-enrolled in the GAU25), accessed to the university thanks to the help of the network. In the 2018 were 12 and in 2019 were 14 (see table 2) (Department of Labor, Social Affairs and families, 2019). Silvia is a Roma woman. She is mother of a daughter. She was not enrolled in the GAU25. She explains to us that CampusRom was crucial to her, because thanks to the network and its activities, she could overcome the University Entrance Exam (other kind of exam, different for people like her that did not fail in the compulsory education):

> "when I met CampusRom network and I knew that I could go to the university was like a dream for me. I thought that it (university) was not for women like me. I explain them that I finished my VET course and they told me that I had the possibility to overcome an exam and go to the university.

They help me a lot with the working groups but also giving me a crucial support. Now I can say that I am studying social work. I am so happy. Like a dream come true" (CampusRom, 2019)

As a summary, research evidences show that in 3 years (June 2016 – June 2019), the existence of CampusRom (together with the GAU25 efforts and other public policies and practices, as specific fellowships for Roma), has contributed to allow the access to the university of 60 Roma students. It represents an increase of 650% in only 3 years (CampusRom, 2019).

Finally, besides to increase the number of Roma students at the universities, CampusRom is also having a significant impact on the social and educational situation of these students, but also on their families and communities. They are now acting as a role models, being a positive example for other Roma like them, and for the whole society, overcoming stereotypes and prejudices and specially fighting against anti-gypsyism (García, Santiago & García, 2019).

6. Scientific or scholarly significance of the study or work

Findings provided in this paper demonstrate its social impact in terms of increasing the number of Roma who participates in Higher Education, but also in the improvement of socio-economic living conditions of Roma people. This is also contributing to fight against xenophobia. Specifically, against the stereotypes and prejudices that still affect Roma (Anti-Gypsyism).

This paper shows also how this evidence-based experience is contributing to the development of United Nations - Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), such SG1: No Poverty, SDG4: Quality Education and SDG10: Reduced Inequalities.

This scientific significance allows education researchers are not merely scholars, being also citizens of the places in which our scholarship is produced, disseminated, and implemented.
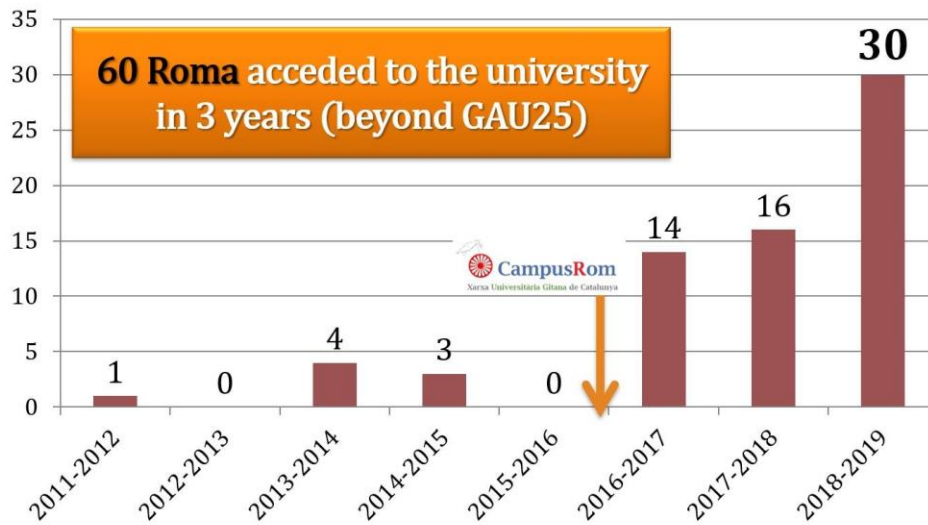
7. Images

Image 1
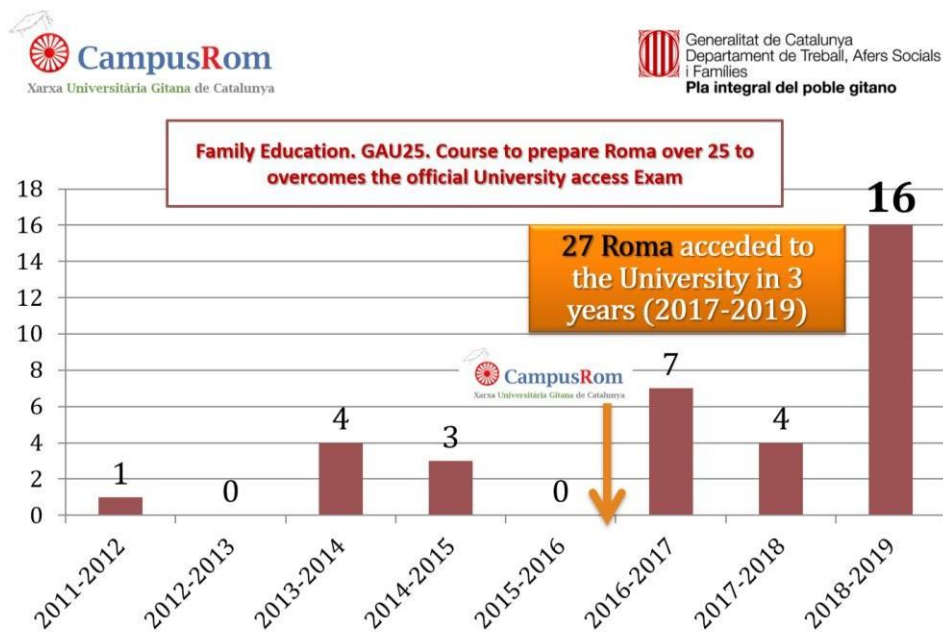
(CampusRom, 2019; Department of Labor, Social Affairs and families, 2019)

Image 2

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(CampusRom, 2019; Department of Labor, Social Affairs and families, 2019)

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