

Fanni Trendl

The Wlislöcki Henrik Student College membership in 2013 and 2015

Translated by Regina Tóth

In 2013, a research group was formed to examine the Roma/Gypsy student college ("szakkollégium" in Hungarian) movement, notably the students participating in it. The research group performed this work from the application source of TÁMOP 4.1.1-D. Essentially, the research intended to measure all of the Roma/Gypsy student colleges, but with time, we faced significant difficulties and consequently research questionnaires were filled out only by students of the colleges of Pécs, Kaposvár, and Eger in 2013, and Pécs, Kaposvár, Eger, and Nyíregyháza in 2015. In the present study, the recorded data of the students of Pécs from 2013 and 2015 are presented.

The research group examined underprivileged students, studying in universities or colleges and mostly Roma/Gypsies, where they came from, what kind of support they need the most, and how they imagined their future. This topic is important because there is currently very limited scientific research that is concerned with underprivileged Roma/Gypsy students in higher education. The rather low number of this group at universities, as well as the fact that often students with these characteristics are invisible, in turn, justifies the low number of studies. In any case, the number of underprivileged – in most cases, multiply disadvantaged – Roma/Gypsy students in higher education has increased enormously in recent decades, but it still does not reach the rate of more advantaged social groups, or more specifically, the share of these groups in relation to the national rate.¹

In 2012, the European Union called for a proposal that envisaged the assistance of those student colleges that undertook the support of underprivileged Roma/Gypsy students in their foundational articles. The call for tenders created an opportunity also for the Wlislöcki Henrik College (student college, hereinafter referred to as WHC or College) working at the University of Pécs (PTE, Pécsi Tudományegyetem in Hungarian) to materialize a scholarship program for them.

The WHC was created with similar objectives by the Department of Romology and Sociology of Education working at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pécs (Trendl 2013).² Between 2002-2012, several researches, as well as professional and community programs were implemented by the organization, but this tender facilitated a complex service system in which more than 50 students, 27 tutors (university teachers),

1 http://nevtud.btk.pte.hu/files/tiny_mce/Romologia/Kiadvanyok/GS8.pdf 40. [Accessed on: 23 May, 2015]

2 http://romologiafolyoirat.pte.hu/?page_id=595 [Accessed on: 23 May, 2015]

and 20 more mentors (university students from upper-grades) participated. In the College, the program started officially on February 1st, 2013. The detailed and accurate description of the program is accessible on the project's website.³

The aim of the questionnaire survey of the research group is to measure basic demographic and educational data and the beliefs of the students concerning the college program. The questionnaire consists of several blocks. The first part entails questions that ask about the basic demographic data of the students and the education of their parents. In the second part, there are questions about the studies of the students, and in the third block, we asked about their experiences and suggestions related to the college program. In the fourth part, the questionnaire contained questions about the vision of the future and participation in public life. In the present paper, we strive to introduce the four parts along with the responses. In 2013, 14 people out of 18, in 2015, 24 out of 34 filled out our questionnaire. The results of these will be demonstrated here. Of course, among the respondents there are some who are included in both samples, as they currently are recipients of a scholarship in the program. Both times, the questionnaires were filled out during a professional community weekend, and students answered the same questions on both occasions. Nobody refused to give a response, but some questions were not necessarily answered.

Number of participants

In January 2013, the college announced a preliminary exam to the scholarship program for the first time. Then, the organization recruited every six months. In the first semester, 18 students managed to enter the program; from the second semester, the number of participants was already above 30. In the tender, the WHC undertook to support 28 people, but the number of candidates always exceeded this amount from August 2013, so everybody who met the formal requirements provided by the tender was added to the organization. Exclusively underprivileged students and mostly with Roma/Gypsy origin could be members of the scholarship program. The concept of being underprivileged is more broadly interpreted in this tender than in the higher education law of 2005; for instance, students having residing in underprivileged areas and living in single-parent households could also be added to the program. In the spring of 2015, the College had 34 members with scholarship.

Age

In 2013, the average age of the students who filled out the questionnaire was 22.2 and in 2015 it was 21.5. This data is important because it provides a point of comparison with Roma/Gypsy students attending university in the 1990s and 2000s. It was typical among Romology students to pursue their higher education studies while already caring for their family or with a few years of work experience.⁴ However, the current students begin their university or college studies immediately after graduation from secondary schools. This change is the result of important efforts of social and of course educational

³ <http://wlislocki.tamop.pt.e.hu>

⁴ http://nevtud.btk.pt.e.hu/files/tiny_mce/Romologia/Kiadvanyok/GS8.pdf 40-41 [Accessed on: 23 May 2015]

policy, along with other factors: in the decade that followed the regime change, Roma who wished to study in higher education attempted to accomplish their goals that were postponed for long decades. Students today, including the underprivileged ones, are characterized by the same aspirations as the members of the majority population.

Gender ratios

During the two years analyzed, there were far more women than men in the program. In 2013, the rate was still relatively balanced: 46% men – 56% women, but in 2015, only 25% of the respondents were men and 75% women. This change is also typical for the majority participants.

Ethnic background

In 2013, 12 people answered the questionnaire; at that time, among the respondents 5 people identified themselves as partly Roma/Gypsy, 2 people as “Lovari Roma,” and 5 people as Beás Gypsy. In 2015, the picture was more varied: 7 wrote that they are of Roma/Gypsy origin, 16 defined themselves as ethnically mixed (*félvér*). In the latter category, one of the parents is of Hungarian, Croatian, or Swabian origin, while the other parent has Roma/Gypsy family background. Another wrote that he/she does not know anything about this information. According to this, we can conclude that the membership is truly diverse (multicultural), and we can witness mixed marriages in many cases.

Residence

The membership of the College essentially consists of members living outside of Pécs. In 2015, most of them (17 people) were from Baranya county, but we could also find members from counties of Somogy (4) and Tolna (2), and even from Veszprém (1). Their residence was municipality, small village (in the case of 12 people) and city (also 12 people). 25% of the members live in Pécs, while the others are commuters, or they rent or live in dormitories.

The tender offered an opportunity to co-locate the students and to have shared dormitory rooms, as it is the case in most colleges. This question was raised in WHC already during the founding period, over one and a half years ago, but the students then, as in the recent program, did not agree with the idea of shared housing. The dormitory rooms are provided by the Márton Áron College. Many students from the college live here together, yet this cannot be called a classic “common college housing.” The College ensures that the students are spending time with each other by offering “stay-in” weekends each month in the dormitory of the Gandhi High School. Most of the professional and community programs are carried out at that time, too. In the everyday life, the club-room of the Faculty of Romology provides the possibility for accomplishing group or independent work that the students eagerly use.

Marital status

In 2013, the respondents were all single except one; one person was married. In 2015, 19 were single, four lived in a common-law marriage. One person did not answer. Those who listed common-law marriage were girls without exception. We also asked about the number of children: one person did not answer, and the others had no children. In this regard, too, the situation changed greatly compared to the status one decade ago, so in this aspect the current Roma/Gypsy college students do not differ from the majority either.

Parents' level of education

Considering the level of education of the parents, the picture is fairly diverse. The educational level of the mothers changed as follows: in 2013, 57% and in 2015, 46% of the students' mothers completed eight or less grades of education. The number of mothers with qualification as a skilled worker, or having completed a vocational school or technical college also increased: in 2013, 17% and in 2015, their share was 25%. The number of mothers with a college or university degree declined between the two periods of data collections. During the first period, the mothers of six students had college, university or higher academic degree, while in 2015, mothers of only three students had such qualifications. The educational level of the students' fathers did not change significantly. In 2013, 40% of the fathers had eight grades, 40% had the qualification as skilled workers, completed vocational schools or technical colleges, and 2 people had higher level of education. In 2015, 38% of the fathers had eight grades, 42% vocational school or technical college degrees, one had a high school degree, and two more graduated from university. Thus, we can say that except for four students, all will be the first in their families to graduate (Forray-Mohácsi, 2002).

The profession of the parents

Not surprisingly, the profession of the parents reflects their educational level. Most of them work in a field that requires skills: seamstress, nurse, social worker, mason, security guard, etc. However, what is worth mentioning is that apart from a very few exceptions (10%), the parents of the students do work: most of them as employees, few of them as contractors.

High-school graduation

When considering the type of secondary school education and graduation, the following emerges: both in 2013 and 2015, a significant part of the respondents graduated from high school, only two and one, respectively, completed vocational school, and one person each year finished a so-called "second chance" type of institution. Most of them graduated in the county town. It is important to emphasize that three of the members

graduated from Gandhi High School in 2013, and already four of them in 2015; moreover, there were a fair number of students (7) present from the Leówey Klára High School of Pécs in 2015. This data exposes the results of the Arany János Talent Development Program that exists in both institutions; I am not going to analyze the significance of the Program in this summary, but I consider it an important topic for discussion in the near future.⁵

Faculty, major

The WHC was open to students coming from any faculty of the University of Pécs already since its foundation. This attitude continues today, and the student body was thus very diverse in 2013 and 2015. In 2013, the number of students from the Faculty of Arts exceeded the number of others (seven people); there were also four people from the Faculty of Sciences, and three from the Law and the Adult Education Faculty of Health Sciences. In 2015, the number of participants was the following: two people from the Faculty of Law (paralegal), one from the Faculty of Medicine (pharmacy major), six from the Faculty of Humanities (Romology, pedagogy, liberal arts, history, communication), three from the Faculty of Health Sciences (nurse), five from the Faculty of Adult Education (youth worker, human resource policy), one from the Faculty of Business and Economics (finance and accounting), two from the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology (civil engineer, environmental engineer), one from the Faculty of Arts (music), three from the Faculty of Sciences (geography, biology). This means that the College has students from almost all of the faculties of the University, and consequently professors are also connected to the organization from almost all of the faculties. Professional bonding means personal support in this case. During the program, every student chooses a university teacher, preferably one close to the studies of the student, who pays attention to the student throughout his or her studies, and in case a problem arises, the teachers is able to give advice to the student.

Considering the variety of majors, we can confidently state that the previously observed phenomenon, according to which the underprivileged students mostly from Roma/Gypsy families, engage in helping professions, is less or even not applicable at all any more.⁶ The reason behind this is possibly the strong motivation to improve and support the poorer communities. Various programs in the nineties emphasized this, as the first special support programs for the Gypsy youth in these fields of training appeared. A lot changed since then, but the assistance of Roma/Gypsy students prevails even now in various forms. It is clear that the more than two decades of experience and social development made it possible for these students to choose courses based on their true interests.

5 <http://www.ajtp.hu/digitalcity/news/latestNews.jsp?dom=AAAANXBY&prt=AAAANXBF&fm n=AAAANXCL&men=AAAANXBG>.

6 http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszagi_nemzetisegek/romak/kisebbsegek_kisebbsege/pages/kk_12_kende.htm [Accessed on: 23 May, 2015]



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I wanted to become a student college member primarily because of the room in the dormitory, and it was granted to me. Actually, I was granted everything I asked for. My first conference was also organized by the student college, and I got a lot of experience, and of course we established new contacts. I really liked that I was able to go to the lake Balaton because that summer I could have not gone otherwise.

Level of training

Considering the level of trainings in university education in which the students participated, it is visible that after 2013, the number of students engaged in higher-level vocational⁷ education increased; those students who are learning at the Faculty of Law and Adult Education are learning exclusively in higher-level vocational education programs. Half of the students participate training leading to university degree (BA/BSC) and only two students in master's programs (MA/MSC). In 2015, there were nine graduate students among the respondents. Since the launch of the program, many acquired a diploma and acquired a job in the labor market.

Beliefs related to the College program

Earlier, we have reported that the students participating in the program are without exception underprivileged. Many of them are multiply disadvantaged, which is also demonstrated by the low level of education of their parents. From other research conducted in education sociology, we know that students coming from underprivileged families encounter serious difficulties during the completion of their university studies. These obstacles are not only financial but they are also caused by the lack of cultural capital. The College and also the current scholarship program were created exactly to compensate for these aspects. Bearing this in mind, it is worth examining factors that motivated students to apply to this program; additionally, it is also important that the beliefs related to the scholarship program should be examined in this light.

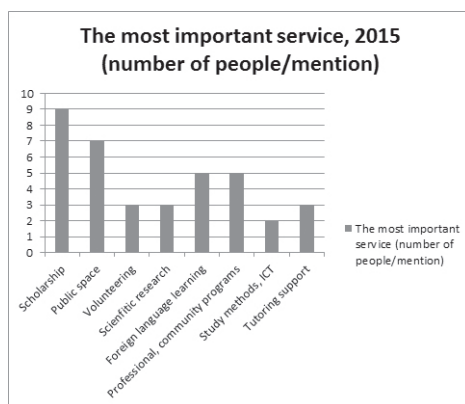
The WHC tried to advertise its procedure of preliminary examination as widely as possible and send the information to all of the students. To demonstrate its success, every semester there were more students included in the program than undertaken by the organization in the tender. The motivation of applicants in most cases was the op-

7 The Hungarian "felsőfokú szakképzés" refers to specialized training in higher education, rather than vocational training per se—ed.

portunity to receive support. In 2015, 19 out of 24 respondents indicated in one way or another that they were applying because of the assistance offered for their university studies. Besides, 50% of the students mentioned the importance of belonging to a community, six mentioned building relationships, and three indicated strengthening their identities as their motivations.

It is not our intention to examine whether these preceding expectations were met, but we present some results regarding the services and support that were the most important for the students in the College. First, we asked them to mark the most important service.

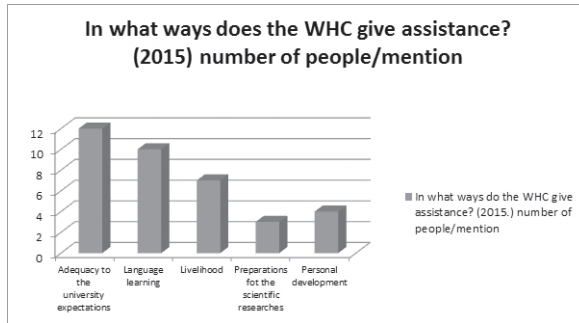
Figure 1.



In the figure above, we tried to reflect the frequency of respondents mentioning the different services. It is clearly visible that the financial support is the most important. This is evident not only because of the financial situation of the respondents' families, but also because of the demands of university life and the increasing demand of independence in general. After this, the community space and the professional community programs are the most popular, indicating that the College fills its intended role. This and the other most frequently chosen elements (language learning and professional, community work) are undoubtedly the positive sides of the college assistance.

In Figure 2 below, we can also see the frequency of answers related to the question "In what ways does the College give assistance?". From the answers, it is clear that the services most frequently mentioned by the students can be essentially summarized as support directed at their university studies. Since the scholarship program was basically founded to serve this goal, it appears that this function is fulfilled by the organization as well. The scholarship and language learning also appear on the list; besides, the personal development and the preparations for scientific work were also emphasized. Livelihood assistance was interestingly only on the third place: it was important, but not the most important factor that the college could provide. From this, we can draw the conclusion that without the scholarship, that is, without financial contribution, the program would also be successful.

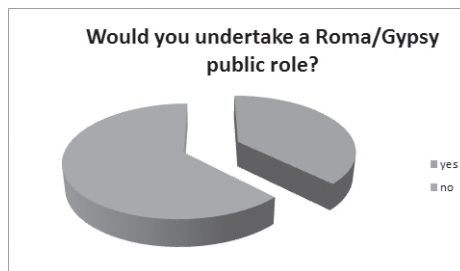
Figure 2



There was a change concerning the rates related to public roles: in 2013, 77% of the respondents would undertake a public role, but this declined to 42% by 2015.

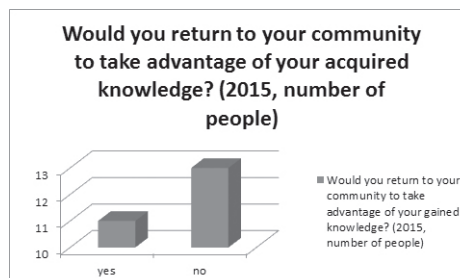
The following figure below illustrates the answers given to the question on public role in more detail. In 2013, 69% of the students with scholarship, and in 2015, 37.5% of them answered that they would undertake such a role. The positive responses should be analyzed carefully: it is possible that the motivation of the students changed, but we can also imagine that they did not feel it so important to give answers in favor of the supporting organization, the College.

Figure 3



The next figure tints the image further, which indicates how many people would return to their communities in relation to social roles.

Figure 4



In 2013, 62% answered that they would go back to their communities. This rate is only 46% now. Among the reasons, we found no significant difference, as were similar both years: closed community, few opportunities, and alike. However, those who would like to return mentioned assistance, setting an example, and understanding the community. A similar decrease was observed here as in the first question. We do not consider the interpretation of the answers as something that must be modified, unless we wish to emphasize it more strongly that our college students increasingly feel that they belong to the majority, and thus define their desires accordingly.

Vision of the future

The fourth part of the questionnaire was built up from questions asking about the future intentions of the students in the following manner: do they want to study further, how do they imagine themselves in five and ten years, and would they undertake a role in public life? We consider these answers important because the preparation for conscious citizenship and for participation in social roles was a significant part of the program. If we have a look at the answers, we may see some results. This is especially true when examining intentions of future academic career more closely. In 2013 and 2015, almost all of the respondents were sure that they would continue to proceed in their studies within their major in the BA, MA and PhD levels. We can find differences between students when examining the answers on the basis of faculties. Among the arts students, it is typical to prepare for the role of a teacher, a university professor, or a researcher; this process can be seen as natural according to the description of the majors. The nurses (three people) wrote about the possibility of working abroad; this appeared also in the answers of science students – and this is expected on the basis of statistics and analyses from recent years. But the desire to enroll in PhD studies also appeared among the answers.

Examining the five- and ten-year plans we can state that without exception, all students imagine themselves at a safe workplace, owning some property, and in a lasting relationship. Also noteworthy is that big city life appeared in 75%, working abroad in 30% of the answers. It is reassuring that 20% of the plans included further education or further training of professional qualifications. Assessing the mid- and long-term goals, there was a significant difference in terms of the desire to contribute to academia or the desire to join the scientific life, which appeared in more plans in 2015.

Summary

The study presented the results of two questionnaire surveys. The two surveys examined the membership of the same organization in two different moments in time. The questionnaire consisted of different categories of questions; initially gathering statistical data, it went on asking questions about beliefs and future plans of students. Aggregating the information and examining the answers we tried to present a picture about the scholarship program provided by the Wlilocki Henrik College of the University of Pécs.



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This is my third year at the university and it was the first time I had the opportunity not to work during school-time. I was able to attend a language course, I got into a community—this was the first time when I really felt that I can live a university student life because of the student college.

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