SOCIAL CONFLICT IN HIGHER EDUCATION. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS. STUDY CASE OF ROMA STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA - A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *This paper is concerned with establishing a theoretical frame for analyzing conflict situations in higher education. The practical aim of the paper is identifying the conflict situations in higher education regarding Roma students using a qualitative study conducted in the University of Oradea within the H.E.R.D. project entitled "Higher Education for Social Cohesion – Cooperative Research and Development in a Cross-Border Area".*

Keywords: social conflict, higher education, social inequality, social exclusion, Roma students, qualitative analysis.

Introduction

Sociology is rather familiar with the various inequality issues regarding higher education. Gender, race, economic status related inequality situations are intensely studied with significant empirical and theoretical results. Inequality it's a multifaceted theoretical concept which comprises the access to a place in a university (in a good university) or the access to educational resources and opportunities during the academic career of the student.

Roma students are particularly subjected to these issues because of their ethnic and racial belonging. Cultural traits or skin color are identifiers used by the non-Roma population to discriminate against the Roma and impose a complex social exclusion where the center piece is the educational system. This process is rarely an overtly aggressive form of social exclusion but it is more a latent conflict situation

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in which we found cultural barriers between the Roma and non-Roma population bolstered by centuries of prejudices.

From the theoretical standpoint this paper is not concerned primarily with the inequality problem but with social conflict which is determined mostly by inequality situations. I would refer to this conjecture later but first I would try to define the concept of social conflict.

The concept and types of conflict

Social conflict it's a phenomenon which characterizes all societies and social groups no matter the time or the cultural background were they functioned. Despite this all-pervading nature there is no fixed meaning of the concept of conflict in the literature. There are broad definitions of conflict such as "Conflict is the perception of differences of interest among people" (Thompson, 1998, apud. Rahim, 2001) or "a process of social interaction involving a struggle over claims to resources, power and status, beliefs, and other preferences and desires" (Bisno, 1998, apud. Rahim, 2001).

One important decision in treating the concept of conflict is to consider it an situation or a type of behavior (Rahim, 2001). We will adopt in this paper the situational approach, considering conflictual behavior as an optional manifestation associated with the conflictual situations.

Conflict can be defined as a process initiated by the divergence or the opposition of symbolic interpretation at individual or group level. First, we have to separate the main concept from the manifestations or consequences. A physical fighting it's a consequence of a conflict situation, which could deepen the conflict situation, but it isn't the conflict situation itself. The physical aggression is a consequence of the conflict situation which is defined primarily at the psychological, symbolic level.

In this respect, we can distinguish between latent conflicts and manifest conflict situations. The elements of the latent conflict persist usually in the manifest phase of the conflict so these factors have a stronger explanatory power than the manifest behavioral response in conflict situations. Latent conflicts can only be observed through interviews or questionnaires by attaining data regarding the attitudes, interests of the parties involved in latent conflict situations. In manifest conflict situations the observation method can be applied alongside questioning the subjects, by determining the behaviors associated with conflict situations.

The concept has many dimensions and it is studied by many sciences such as: anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics or political sciences (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2007). From the aforementioned group of sciences it is obvious that we can separate at least three levels of analysis for conflict situations:

o   At psychological (or individual) level we have an inner conflict or the early projection of a future conflict where the factors could have a sociological nature. Any type of conflict has a psychological level in a sense that the

conflict situations always have a psychological representation regardless their social impact. In this paper we are not concerned with purely psychological conflicts, meaning that the inner (psychological) conflict of the individual is not oriented towards social groups or is not, at least partially, sociologically explainable.

o   at psychosocial (or small group) level we found psychological and sociological factors interfering in conflictual situations

o   at sociological (organizational or society) level we explain social conflict by sociological factors

The level of analysis is derived further from the ideal structure of social conflict situations. At the sociological level we found configurations of the social structure that are conducive towards conflicts. Social inequality, scarceness of resources, cultural differences, creates patterns that can generate conflict situations.

The actors perceiving these social configurations are social groups or individuals that are members of different social groups. Part of this perception is not immediate, it's a mediated process through so called communicational mediators which are institutionalized and can control and change the message through ideological interpretation and thus they can be explanatory factors of conflictual situations. Even if the individuals make their own evaluations they are filtered by socially inoculated axiological (ideological) mechanisms. The aspects afore mentioned put the concept of conflict into the broader theory of communication as well as social integration.

A very important aspect that needs to be clarified it's the perceived character of the conflictual situations. This understanding is very important both in analyzing and resolving conflict situations. For example one side of the conflict can perceive that the other side follow the same goal as they and this can hamper or stop their success in attaining their goal. After an analysis it can be discovered a variable gap between the perceived situation by the actors and the reality of the actions. Manifest conflict situations can still occur regardless the gap between the perceived situation and reality.

To define operationally a conflict situation we need two ingredients: a difference in symbolic interpretation of communication; a goal, which is pursued by the actors, which is intertwined with the symbolic interpretation

Usually for a latent conflict is enough to have the two aforementioned elements. In a manifest conflict the actors will try to persuade the other part to accept or to impose on them their symbolic interpretation hence generating a manifest conflictual situation.

Conflict situations are very similar with competitive situations which are difficult to separate from the concept of conflict (Rahim, 2001). Competition seems to ensure conflict yet there are some attempts to separate the concepts. To explain this we can differentiate between zero-sum and nonzero-sum conflicts. Zero-sum conflicts are deriving conceptually from the zero-sum game theory where the loss or gain of

a participant in the game is compensated by the loss or gain of other participants in the game (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). In zero-sum games the nature of the situation inhibits cooperation between participants so latent conflict situations are created automatically. In nonzero-sum games cooperation is possible which dampens the latent conflict situation (created by competition) but I rather say that conflict persist in a more complicated form and less prone to transform in a manifest conflict situation.

A manifest conflict is differentiated from a latent conflict by a series of behaviors associated with the conflict situations. In general we can consider that this behavioral response is a form of aggressive behavior in response to the perceived aggression of the partner in conflict situations. This behavior is directed towards the opponent directly or indirectly and ensues an action-response cycle which could easily escalate (escalation of conflict) until the participants themselves or their environment don't intervene to make the situation compatible with certain social standards.

To transform a latent conflict into a manifest conflict we need to define the concept of threshold of conflict which I define as the evaluation made by an individual or group about the other competitor's actions when the perceived aggressive behavior towards them has to be countered with explicit measures. In this interpretation the threshold is representing the transition between latent and manifest conflict situations. At personal level the threshold of conflict is mainly a psychological concept although can be defined sociologically. In this paper we will approach the concept sociologically, considering the threshold as a concept determined by a complex of social factors that are belonging to the social environment of the organization. Concepts such as organizational culture, the hierarchical structure with decision-control mechanisms, the organizational possibilities of various subgroups and their mentality (inherited social attitudes) can all explain the transition from latent to manifest conflicts.

From organizational perspective conflict can be seen, in a broader sense, as a process that is a part of the organizational behavior, or, in a narrower sense, as an inherent part of the decision making mechanism (Rahim, 2001). The latter is the main element of the organization that shapes the organizational culture which contains a set of formal and informal norms that have a great influence on conflict processes that might occur in the organization.

There are many other aspects of conflict theory but here I emphasized the theoretical aspects used in this paper for explaining purposes.

Conflict in higher education

Conflict in higher education is a part of the more general analysis of organizational conflict. Educational institutions are special organizations given the fact that these institutions are created to serve a general purpose of giving society educated people that are capable of assuming responsibilities in society according to their qualification (university degree). Besides the afore mentioned goal of academic

institutions we can define further (secondary) goals that are belonging to the management's perspective and those whose living depends on the institution and from the perspective of the students. The academic staff has two main goals: their scientific interests (teaching and research) who are directly associated with the prestige of the institution and their economic interest which is associated with the number of the students enrolled and the quantum of the tuition fees (for Romania). On the other hand, the students have similar interests in a sense that they try to obtain the best credentials for their integration on the job market at the best value (cost of education) (Hatos, 2006). This interaction of goals in the university is mitigated through the process of selection of staff and students.

At this point I have to mention the non-intended function which educational systems fulfill in society: the distribution of social positions) (Hatos, 2006). The student selection made by academic institutions will determine, in a great measure, the distribution of status positions in society. Academic institutions (especially higher education) are the main mechanisms of establishing the social stratification in modern societies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Even if it's considered largely to be a meritocratic mechanism of social distribution, inequality problems persist in the academic environment regarding social aspect such as: race, gender or economic status. One of the conclusions would be that inequality in society is explainable in an important measure by the inequality in the educational system.

Selection in universities is no more controlled for factors such as gender, race or economic status. The result is that the student population is a mix of social groups. We all witnessed the shift regarding gender in universities in the past 50-60 years: today there are more women graduating from universities than men. In the literature there are numerous works that are tackling inequality related issues in (higher) education (Altbach, 1994; Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003; Coleman, 1990; Davies & Guppy, 1997; Sewell, 1971; Shavit et al., 2007). These works suggest that is an important relationship between academic achievements (or participation) and inequality factors such as race (ethnicity), gender or economic status.

In a previous quantitative study regarding the relationship between economic status, the rural origin of the student and academic integration I didn't found conclusive evidence towards a significantly weaker academic integration (academic participation), or, in other words, there was no proof of social exclusion towards this category of students (Chipea & Bottyan, 2012).

The differences between student groups such as race (ethnicity), economic status or gender are creating a social structure (stratification) which could generate conflict situations. As I stated above, there are some conditions that are necessary in generating conflict situations that are present in the academic environment: a difference in symbolic interpretation of communication caused by the economic status or ethnic divisions between students, and a goal, which is pursued by the actors (students) which consist in the degree obtained and other offerings from the academic institution. Heightened competition would elevate the probability of

conflict situations and is generated in institutions that have a strong selection process during the academic career of the student.

Another hypothesis is that the generation of conflict is influenced by the organizational culture. From this perspective it could be differentiated two orientations of organizational culture that influences conflict situations directly:

o   the functioning of the system towards the establishment of formal groups of representation of students (including groups representing disadvantaged students)
o   the functioning of the system towards the establishment of informal groups of representation of student's interest

In most cases universities have both type of student representations, formal and informal, but the situation could be influenced by the predominant characteristic of the system: a mostly formalized student interaction would limit the possibilities for conflict as an informal system that allows student stratification structures would heighten the risk of conflict. The explanation mainly lies in the influences that formalism has on the organizations, the main factor being the control of communication between the elements of the formal structures within the organization (Harris, 1993). A mainly vertical communication mechanism doesn't allow the forming of significant independent and divergent thinking of informal groups relative to the organization.

In conclusion regarding the above stated, to analyze conflict situations in universities we have to understand some characteristics of the organization such as selectiveness which is associated with institutional prestige, the distribution of the student population regarding conflict sensitive variables such as (religion, ethnicity and economic status, we have to identify the student organizations and the structures within the university that are designed to solve student problems and conflict situations.

We observed that conflict can develop in educational institutions between staff (teachers or auxiliary personnel) and some specific student groups. The student integration in the academic environment is conditioned by the attitudes of the staff (teachers) towards students with certain social characteristics which are sensitive in a broader social context. In Romania, for example, we considered that economic status, ethnicity or race (in the case of Roma students) are relevant issues regarding discrimination in universities. In this regard, is important to understand the process of integration in education of Roma students from the lower levels to high education. Conflictual situations can occur early in the Roma student's educational career which can determine, by acquiring prejudices, certain their attitudes towards conflict situations.

Roma students in higher education in Romania

There are no reliable data on how many Roma students are enrolled in the Romanian higher educational system. The enrolment rate of Roma students in higher education is staggeringly low compared with other ethnic groups which hint

towards of series of systemic deficiencies in the Romanian educational system that disadvantages the Roma students. In 2009, the data shows that only 0.6% of the Roma population from the age group 25-29 graduated comparatively with the same Romanian age group from which 24.2% graduated from higher education and Hungarians with 18.7% (UEFISCDI, 2013).

The low enrolment rate of the Roma students is partly explainable by their educational careers prior entering in university. Roma students have by far the greatest drop-out rate, only 3.4% of them graduated from high school in 2010. In Bihor County, where the University of Oradea is located, Roma students share are above the national average having 10% of the total primary and secondary education population. Their enrolment rate drops from 19.4% (class I-IV-primary education) to 1.7% (class IX-XII-high school).

A barometer, regarding higher education in Romania, measured the tolerance towards different groups and the results indicated that Roma students are negatively referenced by 55% of the students from the public founded universities and by 50% of the students from privately founded universities (ARACIS, 2010). The numbers reflect the responses to the question regarding if the respondents don't want the members of a particular group as their neighbors. The attitude towards Roma students is in line with the general attitude towards the Roma community in the Romanian society which is strongly negative.

In 2012-2013 were 555 places allocated specifically for Roma students in the Romanian universities within a larger social policy envisioned to bolster the Roma presence in the Romanian universities. This positive discrimination policy would be the source of some latent conflict situation between Roma and non-Roma students.

Theoretical considerations. Methodology

Since the beginning of the transition towards a capitalist and democratic society in Romania, the Roma minority went through several changes as well as the Romanian society. There are two aspects that are changing more slowly in the case of the Roma community: poverty and traditionalism. There are many Roma communities with specific traditions especially in the rural areas that are in many cases contradicting with the culture of the majority population.

The quantitative study mentioned above conducted in the University of Oradea regarding the relationship between the economic status, the rural origin of the student and academic integration didn't measured the situation of Roma students because their proportion in the general population of students is very low.

Regarding the enrolment of Roma students in the University of Oradea there are 59 students of Roma origin enrolled during the 2009-2011 period in different faculties, but the majority of them were enrolled in faculties such as law and administration, economy or social work. The preference of the Roma students for the aforementioned faculties is determined largely by two main motives. First, we

can assume that the Roma students follow the general trend of the student population that is enrolling in the faculties that offer the best perspective for the job market. Secondly, it can observe that they are enrolling in the biggest number in the social work faculty for reasons that exceed their expectations towards the job market. The second motive can be described as inclusive organizational environment which favors the integration of disadvantaged groups and is opposed to the meritocratic environment with significantly higher selectivity. This second motive influences not only the selection of the faculty or specialization but mainly influences the persistence of the student in university.

The main mechanism of selectivity of the students it's through the admission criteria and, during their academic career, the selection is done through grades (the severity of the examination process) and by the difficulty of the study subjects. From this perspective, the social work faculty offers a more inclusive environment for disadvantaged students, including Roma students, than more competitive faculties such as economy or law. The courses in a social work curriculum are less difficult in a sense that there is quantitatively less to learn and the learning process needs less prior knowledge from the student. The student evaluation is less severe, the grades are higher comparatively with the learning requirements. This academic environment encourages student persistence and creates a (disadvantaged) student friendly institutional image which is important when Roma students are pondering their choices concerning faculty selection.

I mentioned above one important characteristic of the Roma community: poverty. Regarding poverty in Roma communities we can point out that poverty is widespread throughout the Roma communities, especially in rural areas, and we found often severe forms of poverty which determines, with almost certainty, the social exclusion of those affected. Besides the obvious influence on the material needs of education, poverty is an important factor in shaping the attitude of the Roma families and communities towards education. Poverty makes education seem like an expensive endeavor with little benefit for the families or the students so it's a strong explanatory variable for the high dropout rate for undergraduate Roma students (Ivan & Rostas, 2013). This translates at community level which has a strong influence on the Roma individuals and families.

At this point I need to bring in discussion the second fundamental explanatory factor which is the traditionalism of the Roma community. Obviously, in the past two decades there were a lot of changes that happened in the Roma community but, mainly in rural areas, the Roma communities are still traditionalist, very poor and with a high degree of social exclusion.

Roma traditionalism has two main components: the patriarchal organization of social relations and the strong ethnic identity which is enforced as much as by the preservation of cultural traits as by the social exclusion of the Roma. Patriarchy is generating a superior status for the male individuals in the Roma families and communities. A focus group that we had with representatives of the Roma communities in Bihor County confirmed that there it's reluctance towards the

education of women (girls) in the traditionalist Roma communities which is related, inter alia, to the marital customs within the Roma community.

Communities aren't such an important factor for non-Roma students because they don't live in "communities" in a sociological sense but rather in neighborhoods which have an indirect and limited influence on families and their individual cultural and social choices. These neighborhoods are very diverse from social status point of view, the Romanian society is less divided spatially on economic criteria this being the legacy of communist egalitarianism. Things are changing under post-communist Romanian capitalism, the society is becoming more divided economically but this is not converted yet in a significant spatial segregation. On the other hand, Roma communities tend to be segregated from the majority population especially in rural areas which ensures that these communities have a greater influence towards the families and individuals.

Social exclusion is generating another pervasive attitude in the Roma community that is a distrust towards public institutions such as the educational system. One of the hypotheses that guided the construction of the instrument used in the qualitative analysis is that poverty, traditionalism and social exclusion creates an unfavorable attitude in the Roma communities towards education.

The above mentioned factors are part of an inequality mechanism that is closely linked with various forms of conflict. Regarding academic selectivity the conflict situation ensues upon the meritocratic nature of the place that the Roma student occupies in the university. As I mentioned above, in Romania, there is a positive discrimination program that allows Roma students to continue their education in universities on publicly founded places. There is a potential for conflict because of the cost of the studies on privately founded places which are available for non-Roma students based on academic merit.

Traditionalism is another factor that is potentially creating conflict situations between Roma and non-Roma students or academic staff. Peculiar behaviors of the Roma students can generate communicational difficulties which could create or enhance conflict situations.

The study was conducted within the H.E.R.D. project entitled "Higher Education for Social Cohesion – Cooperative Research and Development in a Cross-Border Area". We choose a qualitative study of the problem because the Roma students' number is too low and we weren't able to integrate the Roma issue in the sample used in a quantitative analysis. We used an interview guide with 41 open questions organized around two distinct themes (with a series of subthemes): their experience in undergraduate school and their experience in the faculty. These two stages of the academic careers of the students are interdependent because most of the attitudes of the Roma students towards the academic environment are formed in undergraduate school. The subthemes comprised the economic conditions of the student, the relationship between the student's family and community and the educational institutions. Regarding their experiences in the academic environment we had a series of subthemes (sets of questions) regarding their relationship with

their colleagues, teachers (academic staff) and their participation in academic activities.

We had a sample of 14 students (9 male and 5 female) from a total of Roma 59 students (25 male and 34 female) in the University of Oradea. We had two limiting factors when we tried to interview the Roma students: some of them rarely attend academic activities and some of them refused to answer because they feared some negative consequences.

Results from the study

We presented the overall results of the study in an article that focused on the issue of the integration of the Roma students in the academic environment (Bottyan & Chipea, 2012). Here I would emphasize the potential conflict situations that resulted from the responses received from the Roma students.

Institutional selectivity and organizational culture

From the theoretical framework presented above first we have to characterize the academic environment of the University of Oradea. The University of Oradea is a public university formed in 1990 which have a lower prestige comparatively with older universities, which is associated with relatively lower student selectivity. In 2011, in Romania was established an official ranking of universities in which the University of Oradea was positioned in the second tier of the universities, which includes universities "centered on education and research" above the tier three which contained "universities centered only on education". In conclusion, the University of Oradea is a relatively low prestige academic institution with low student selectivity which ensures a moderate climate regarding competition between students and lower learning requirements. There are differences between faculties; some of them have higher selectivity than others: the Law, Economy and Psychology faculties have a higher level of selectivity compared to Social Work or Environmental Protection faculties which have a low level of selectivity. In the 2009-2011 period the majority of Roma students (37) enrolled in faculties with low selectivity faculties while 22 students were enrolled in faculties with higher selectivity. The faculties with higher selectivity have higher requirements in learning and have a higher attrition rate because of this. Take in account the above stated we can consider that the academic environment of the University of Oradea has an overall inclusive climate which have an inhibitory effect on conflict situations.

From the perspective of the organizational culture the University of Oradea has student organizations formed at the department or faculty level and doesn't have informal or formal student groups that are representing the interest of the Roma students. This type of organizational culture will ensue that possible conflicts will remain at the individual level, but if conflict becomes manifest this type of organizations are less able to cope with the situation.

Economic and educational inequalities

With the aim of understanding the influence of inequality on conflict situations between Roma students and other groups in the university we aimed to understand the differences between the majority non-Roma population of students and Roma students from economic and educational point of view. We found out that Roma students distribution was similar with the non-Roma students regarding their economic situation (6 of the students questioned lived in poor or very poor conditions and 8 of the students had medium to good economic conditions). This is somewhat different from what we can found in the general population where the Roma people are significantly poorer than the non-Roma population, but the difference it's explainable with the significantly higher dropout rate of the Roma population prior to higher education partly because of the very high poverty rate of the Roma population.

The Roma students that were subjected to economic difficulties reported that they have to work while attending classes. All of the students interviewed considered working as an important factor limiting their educational results. Besides working, the Roma students funded their education with social scholarships, with money received from their parents on N.G.O's.

Regarding the education level of the parents, which greatly influences the student general behavior and attitude towards academic participation and learning, we found out that there was a clear gap between the two populations, Roma students having parents with a much lower levels of education. The parents of the Roma students, albeit supportive towards their children education, don't have a significant influence on the educational choices of their children and they are less involved in their children education especially at upper stages of education. From the responses, we found that Roma families have two main influences on their children education: through an emancipation attitude that alleviates the negative influences towards education of some Roma communities, especially in rural areas, and through the economic situation of the family.

Roma students acknowledged that their non-Roma colleagues are better prepared and they graduated from better schools and with better grades. They considered that the university learning requirements are considerably higher than upper secondary school and they have difficulties in learning and they are facing problems participating in activities such as seminars or research projects.

Regarding questions about their persistence in higher education all of the students questioned said that they want to finish their studies. They enumerated some factors that hamper their participation such as discouragement by teachers or economic difficulties.

Most of the students questioned had poor academic results but they said that they have little time for studying because they are working to sustain themselves. The students who reported good academic results were from urban areas and they didn't work.

Conflict with the community of origin

We asserted above that the community has an important influence on the lives of Roma individuals. We found a difference between the Roma communities in urban areas which have a more positive attitude towards education but in rural areas, the community has a rather negative attitude towards education especially at education at higher levels. About half of our respondents reported that members of their community expressed attitudes of envy, futility of education and even mockery towards them. The explanations for these attitudes are rather complex but I would underline two aspects that emerged from our research on the subject: negativity towards education (higher education) in Roma communities is rooted in traditionalism (e.g. marital customs that inhibit, especially for women, to pursue higher education) and social exclusion that translates at the level of the Roma communities as "knowing their place in society" which doesn't includes workplaces or money making activities that requires higher education. Taken in account the above stated we can define the first latent conflict situation between Roma students and their community of origin which are negatively biased towards higher education.

When asked about how their parents and communities valued their participation in higher the majority of students said that the community doesn't influence their choices, some reported envy and amazement as the main reaction of the community at their enrolment in higher education.

Ethnic identification. Discrimination in higher education

We asked the students if they perceived that they were different from their classmates and about half of students reported differences from non-Roma students such as language peculiarities (specific Roma accent) that influenced their educational participation. These differences were confirmed for secondary school and higher education.

We questioned the Roma students regarding their prior experience of conflict situations during secondary school. Most of them identified a tension regarding their ethnic identification which underlined the existence of an inherent latent conflict situation. About half of the Roma students questioned declared that they didn't want the other students to know that they were of Roma origin. Those Roma students who affirmed that their colleagues didn't know their ethnic origin said that they didn't experienced conflict situations related to ethnic differences in secondary school. Those students who were identified as Roma said that they experienced conflict situations, especially with their classmates and were subjected to discriminatory practices by teachers in secondary school. We observed that female students reported more conflict situations than male students.

From the answers received, the attitude of Roma students towards their ethnicity remains the same in higher education, Roma students would rather hide their ethnic origin in the university. Because of administrative reasons, their ethnic

appurtenance becomes more public because of the publicity of lists of students that were enrolled on special funded places for Roma students.

Although the Roma students mentioned various motivators for acceding in higher education most of them conceded that they benefited from a non-discriminatory policy which assures several publicly funded places for Roma students but they didn't considered it an important motivator for the decision of continuing their education at university level.

This positive discrimination policy was subject of a latent conflict between Roma students and non-Roma students on meritocratic grounds. Some of the students questioned who benefited from this policy related that they felt some resentment from non-Roma students. The fact that there are many poor non-Roma students who are better prepared academically than the Roma students who received tuition free places in the university is an indication that there is a latent conflict surrounding this policy.

Another explanation of the attitudes towards the positive discrimination policy of Roma students could be that the non-Roma students don't understand the difficulties faced by Roma students in the educational system. The students questioned didn't related significant discriminatory behavior from their colleagues but some of them confirmed that were situations where teachers made them uncomfortable because of their race and ethnicity.

Conclusions

The main conflict lines regarding Roma students in higher education are drawn in relation to their communities that doesn't value their involvement in higher education and to the positive discriminatory policy which is contested on meritocratic grounds by non-Roma students. Another conflict situation is generated by the cultural differences which are interpreted by some teachers as non-adequacy of the Roma students in the academic environment generating discriminative behavior towards Roma students.

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