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## Strengthening Identity and Social Responsibility among Roma University Students\*\*

### Summary

The aim of our research is to present how the identity and social responsibility was strengthened by a Roma Student College in Higher Education. We rely on the literature of equality and equity, which is examined in the context of empowerment, resilience and intersectionality (Varga, 2017). Our research sample consists of the community members of the diverse (Roma, non-Roma, disadvantaged students) Roma Student College of Pécs, Hungary. The sample university students are considered resilient (Masten, 2008), as they have overcome the hardships of their family background and study now in Higher Education. Our study gives an analysis and highlights of 27 biographical interviews from the perspective of their pre-university years and the years spent as Student College members. The summary of the grant period between 2016 and 2018 will reveal the diverse programs, which were available for students in the Student College and can be divided into three main groups. The positive role of some of these and the Student College community appeared in the narratives as a strikingly relevant factor.

**Keywords:** Roma, higher education, intersectionality, empowerment, resilience, inclusion

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## Introduction

According to the 2010 census, 317,000 people declared themselves to be of Roma origin composing 3.17% of the total population of Hungary. Various research studies and Roma organisations estimate this number to be between 650,000 and 1 million (Cserti Csapó & Orsós, 2013). The Roma population is concentrated in the northeastern and southwestern regions of Hungary, and they are overrepresented in the villages of less developed regions and segregated environments. Nevertheless, the Hungarian Roma community belongs to the lower segments of society during state socialism based on their social realities and external perceptions of them (Kemény et al., 2004).

After 2011, the horizontal axis of the EU education strategy became the reduction of early school leaving and defining the expected indicators, which in turn influenced the focus points in the education system (Fehérvári, 2015). In this context, a smaller part of the EU funding sources was labelled for education development (EFOP) as compensation for disadvantages students. Such funds helped the establishment of student colleges for advanced studies to mentor university students and the after-school tutoring cooperatives. In these two programs, Roma students appear as the directly targeted minority group in the grant applications. Both types of programs (“after-school tutoring co-ops” and “Roma Student College mentoring programs”) have been included in the state support system, and their operation has been funded from this system. There are currently more than 300 after-school tutoring co-operatives functioning in the country, mainly supporting disadvantaged Roma primary school students.

The establishment of the Roma Residential College network is a key education policy decision for the betterment and empowerment of the Hungarian Roma (Forray, 2015a). The network of 11 Student Colleges – funded by either Higher Education institutions or Church – spreads across the country, supporting almost 300 disadvantaged, mainly Roma higher education students (Biczó & Szabó, 2020). In domestic and international academic life, we are increasingly confronted with research on the Roma intellectuals (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2017; Bhabha et al., 2017; Durst & Bereményi, 2021; Forray, 2015b; Kende, 2005; Lukács, 2018; Messing-Molnár, 2011; Szabóné, 2012). It is worth examining, beyond individual life paths, whether a type of institution that fundamentally affects the Roma intellectuals of the rising generation, works along which principles and goals, and whether it already has results.

Our study is scientifically located on the personal side of Roma students in the concepts of intersectionality and resilience, while on the community/organisational side it can be discussed in the context of empowerment and inclusion. Relying on these four scientific approaches, we focus on a specific Roma Student College<sup>1</sup> community. Based on the life-path interviews of the Roma Student College students, we sought the answer to how their intersectional situation and identity had changed, and what influenced the change, especially in relation to the Roma Student College years.

## **Literature Review**

### **Roma intellectuals and university students in Hungary**

The formation, characteristics and condition of the intellectual layer of the Roma population in Hungary have already been studied by several researchers. The studies so far are mostly based on in-depth and life-path interview analysis of graduates who claim themselves to be Roma. Research was focused most on finding answers in individual life paths to how they managed to get a degree, what difficulties they face in achieving social status, and how their identity (belonging to the Roma community) was shaped. Judit Szabóné Kármán (2012) summarises this research in her doctoral dissertation and notes at one point that the results in many cases suggest that becoming an intellectual is associated with the damage, weakening and loss of Roma identity (Szabóné, 2012). At the turn of the millennium, Forray (2003) examined what characterises Roma youth entering higher education. In terms of their family background, they have identified three groups: “members of the Roma middle class, Roma from socially marginalized groups, and young people brought up in foster care” (Forray, 2003, p. 262). For the latter two, she pointed out that they are usually older than their university peers because they often get back into higher education by restarting their school career. The way to higher education is too long and rocky for these students. Their

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<sup>1</sup> Student College is kind of a unique establishment in the Hungarian Higher Education. It is group of students, who not necessarily live together, but work together on their own professional life paths. For example, support each other's scientific research or do common research and publications. So, it is not an individual organisation, but operates within a university or a college.

educational decisions are influenced by school failures, lack of information, lack of self-confidence, and are often limited by the guidelines of their teachers. The analysis also discusses the lack of material conditions and the importance of scholarship support. She mentions that at the time of the study, a large number of Roma students chose correspondence trainings in order to be able to fend for themselves and their families, as in many cases they already had their own families to take care of. She also takes note of the fact that it is necessary to examine the socialisation processes of young people who did not bring patterns of becoming intellectuals from their homes, and to get a clear picture of how they relate to their peers, their own community, and to see their relationship with the entirety of Hungarian society (Forray, 2003). Moving towards our narrower target group and research question, it is worth mentioning further research. Bigazzi and Bokrétás (2015) studied the identity problems of Roma university students in Pécs in the 2000s. They conclude that in order to avoid an identity crisis, these young people can benefit from building a strong, realistic self-image and the widest possible network of contacts (Bigazzi & Bokrétás, 2015).

### **Roma Student College Network**

The establishment of the Roma Student College Network is a key education policy decision for the betterment and empowerment of the Hungarian Roma (Forray & Boros, 2009). The network of 11 Roma Student Colleges – funded by either higher education or churches – spreads across the country, supporting almost 300 underprivileged, primarily Roma higher education students. It is important to see that the support they receive from the college provide relevant answers to personal life situations and community needs. It is also necessary to think about the pedagogical principles and goals of the institution that provide a home-like educational center for the Roma intellectuals of the next generation (Varga, 2018a).

There are currently 11 institutions in the network, in 11 different parts of the country. A comprehensive, questionnaire-based survey conducted in 2020 provides an accurate picture of membership in student colleges. 78.5% of student college students are between the ages of 18 and 24, and most of them have entered Higher Education immediately after high school. 69% of them declared themselves to be Roma, 52% of them have official documents

proving their disadvantage. About half of the students (47%) are rural<sup>2</sup>, and only a fraction (14.5%) come from a larger city. Thus, settlement disadvantage can also be assumed for the majority of students. Regarding the family background, it can be seen that only a few of the parents do not have eight general primary school qualifications (father 7.5%, mother 9.5%), primary education characterises 28% of fathers, 31% of mothers, 35% of fathers and 22% of mothers have a trade, 16% of fathers and 21% of mothers have a high school diploma, and 9% of fathers and 15% of mothers are graduated. In terms of the labour market situation of the parents, 17% of fathers and 10% of mothers are unemployed, and the employment relationship (fathers 60%, mothers 68.5%) is overrepresented. In other words, Roma Student Colleges are mainly communities of students who, due to their family background, need fair support for their mobility through Higher Education. Among student college students, teacher and teacher training was over-represented (30.5%), which was followed by economic (12.5%), social (11.5%), humanities (9.5%) and medical and health science (9%). Almost two-thirds (63.5%) of the students are BA students.

### Field of study

When the Henrik Wlislöcki Student College<sup>3</sup> (WHSz) was established at the University of Pécs in 2002, its aim was to provide a scientific community for Roma<sup>4</sup> and non-Roma students interested in Romology/Romani Studies. The Student College was launched with the help of a significant amount of European Union funds (Phare), then, from 2004 to 2013, with 10–12 students per year, it ran on university support. From 2013 onwards, it expanded its range of activities and student base with the support of the European Social Fund (TÁMOP) – and it joined the network of Roma Student Colleges. At the time of the research, it also implemented a European-funded (EFOP) complex program, which was launched from 2016 to 2018 with the participation of 28–35 students.

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<sup>2</sup> This means they come from villages whose population is between 1 and 20,000 people.

<sup>3</sup> The Henrik Wlislöcki Roma Student College is an Academic Student College within the University of Pécs with a mission to mentor Roma students through academic projects and field research, and to support the process of inclusion by organising forums and community-building activities for Roma youth and allies.

<sup>4</sup> In the research presented in our study, we have classified students who consider themselves as Roma.

Table 1. General goals of the Roma Student College

General aim	Principles – activities	Relates to Roma identity and social responsibility
Building on active community (peer-help and empowerment)	<p>The operation of a student college is embedded in a community that is characterised by self-activity. Members of the student college develop their cultural and community programs into which they are incorporated by their interests. Part of this are the programs aimed at strengthening identity – considering the Roma community as a positive value and internalisation of being an intellectual. The mentoring system ensures individuality. Older and more experienced student college members as translators, are the driving force of the community, helping to increase the activity of their younger peers. Mentors also gain self-confidence, personal empowerment (self-help mechanism) through successful community actions.</p> <p>The students do their voluntary work in different organisations where they mostly work with Roma and disadvantaged students and their families. Their main task is usually to help them in different school subjects and organise extracurricular activities outside the classroom. These activities can strengthen their positive identity development. They can become role models for the pupils and important helpers for the host organisations. During these activities – which enhance their social responsibility – their social capital is broadening, and their self-confidence is increasing. Many of them may find themselves in a pedagogical situation during volunteering that they would not be able to experience during university training, so they can look forward to their teaching practice more confidently than their groupmates. At the same time, getting acquainted with the work of the host organisations, they can see examples of civic, civic self-organisation, which was unknown to many of them so far.</p>	<p>A community of actors and active people, where internal commitment develops, social responsibility is strengthened towards Roma communities. Resilience is maintained through empowerment. (Table 2)</p>

Inclusive/ equitable support and maintaining resilience	One of the pillars of personal care is the tutoring system. Teachers recognised in higher education (university professors) will assist students personally and individually to help their advance. This role has a bearing on commitment of the tutors to make the university environment more inclusive. On the other hand, personal care means that student college members seek/receive services from external experts tailored to the individual needs, including support with academic studies, personal problems and language studies. The efficiency of individual care is enhanced by the fact that student college members develop their career plans with their own tutors, choosing from offered options. The interactivity of their support is enhanced by the fact that students record their progress in their portfolio and reflect on their development.	Personal successes are linked to a positive Roma identity and become credible role models for their community.
Capital accumulation and strengthening Roma identity	In the field of higher education, academic advancement gives student college members a cultural capital that can be used on the labour market later on. They receive coaching, as well as several other options to practice. They can receive support for individual and small-group student research, may participate in joint research with teachers. The research topics take a different approach, but are related to Roma community, so students form an opinion on this issue with an “external eye” beyond their personal history, which helps them become Roma intellectuals responsible for their community.	A scientific, critical, intellectual approach to the subject.

In this grant period from 2016 to 2018, the diverse programs in the Henrik Wliskołki Student College can be divided into three groups. Above (Table 1) we have summarised the general goals of the organisation, the principles behind it, the activities that build on it, highlighting how it is all related to Roma identity (Pedagogical Program, 2016).

## The group in focus

The majority of Roma students in Hungary are in a situation that is described by the literature as a phenomenon of intersectionality. The results of the study presented above – which covers the entire Roma Student College Network – show that more than two-thirds of the students profess to be Roma and more than half of them are disadvantaged<sup>5</sup>. In addition, approximately 90% of them are the first in their family to graduate, thus they are considered first-generation intellectuals. Their settlement disadvantage and/or parents' lower educational attainment need fair support for their mobility through Higher Education. Unfortunately, the research does not reveal what proportion of Student College members suffer from two or more disadvantages at the same time, but it is likely that their higher proportion is characterised by intersectionality. Intersectionality, as an intertwining of two types of inequality situations (Asumah & Nagel, 2014; Sebestyén, 2016) for students in Roma Student Colleges is the sum of the mutually reinforcing effects of the lack of the various capital gaps (financial assets, cultural, social, and symbolic capital) (Bourdieu, 1978, 1997; Coleman, 1997) and negative social perceptions (latent or discriminatory), which reinforce each other.

The establishment of the Roma College and the definition of its target group were largely influenced by the fact that in Hungary there is a large overlap between social disadvantage and belonging to the Roma community. Several research studies have shown in the past decades that social disadvantages in Hungary are exacerbated by the negative social prejudice associated with the Roma minority group (Cserti-Csapó & Orsós, 2013; Forray & Hegedűs, 2003; Forray & Pálmainé Orsós, 2010; Neményi, 2013). Educational focus studies have provided data that failure at school is a common phenomenon amongst disadvantaged and Roma students, so educational issues related to these characteristics cannot be separated (Fehérvári, 2015; Híves, 2015). When discussing the educational situation of the Roma, the researchers have been reporting gradual improvements, but it was also found that the distance (gap) did not shorten from the non-Roma population (Havas & Liskó, 2002; Kemény

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<sup>5</sup> The present regulation (Law1997/XXXI, 67/a.) requires the low financial position of the family and plus at least one additional feature of disadvantage to fall into the legal category of disadvantaged position. The law defines three areas where additional disadvantages occur: the low educational levels of the parents, their long-term unemployment, residence in segregated or derelict areas, inadequate residential conditions.



et al. 2004; Zolnay, 2015). This is also reinforced by the fact that Roma students are more likely to be early school leavers or to choose shorter education paths (Liskó, 2003; Mártonfi, 2013, 2015). Today, more research has pointed out that the deterioration of Roma students' school performance is exacerbated most by the coexistence of poverty and ethnic segregation (Fejes & Szűcs, 2017; Kertesi & Kézdi, 2012).

The institutional spaces of Roma Student College help to acquire various – cultural, social, symbolic – capitals and by contributing to capital acquisition they make access to social benefits easier. Another important area of intervention is related to belonging to a minority group and includes actions building on cultural values and fighting against racial prejudices (Arató, 2007; Bigazzi, 2013). The community of Roma Student Colleges aims to strengthen their personal and social identity. Processes aimed at identity development are embedded in services that assist both the competence development of college students and the establishment of resilience and empowerment. At the same time, all these things have an impact on the sensitivity of the social environment and prejudice reduction.

## **Methodology and Methods**

All members of the Student College (32 people) were interviewed in the autumn of 2017, and 27 interviews were used for the analysis presented in the study. The in-depth interview includes the students' life history, family and school memories. It took note of the circumstances and experiences of going to a college, with particular regard to the services provided by the college, and their views on identity, voluntary work and the community.

The interview questions were aimed at exploring the external and internal effects and factors of the students' lives that can be linked to their successful educational progress. What role did their intersectional position and Roma identity play in all this? What role does the inclusive environment of the Henrik Wlisslocki Student College currently play in their lives and in the development of their identity? Can the impact of the Student College and the volunteer work in Roma communities and organisations be felt in the development of resilience and empowerment?

The interviews were processed qualitatively, with narrative content analysis – using a pre-defined code system. For the analysis of the interviews,

the data of the interviewed students related to college membership were also used: their age, place of residence, their undertaken identity, their social status, time of their college membership, their higher education degree, and their grades, which were treated as independent and dependent variables in the analysis. In the study from the interviews, we highlighted short details that bring the general findings to life. Because of the small number of interviews, we highlighted just the typical points of the life stories.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **General characteristics of the examined group**

Almost half (11 persons) of college students who were interviewed in the autumn of 2017 are characterised by intersection. So they are both Roma and also in disadvantaged social situation. A further 8 people identified themselves as Roma, but no documents related to the legal criteria for the disadvantaged status were submitted. Overall, 70% of the respondents are Roma.

It is worth noting that social disadvantages for some Student Colleges are so severe that there are students for whom college means, among other things the following: “I have not been hungry for the past half year”. The following quote reflects similar difficulties:

I have just recently taken one of my friends to our place. So far, I've taken five or six people to home all together. Well, they were shocked, that is for sure. The last friend I took home said that ‘this is rock bottom’. But I think rock bottom is having absolutely nothing in this world. (WHSz member, Life Interview Excerpt, 2017)

### **Pre-university years**

Every fifth student spoke of an exclusionary event related to poverty or “Gypsyism” during primary school. The stories are not just “joking” events, but there are some blatant accusations rooted in prejudices, all of which have left a profound negative effect on student college members self-confidence and dignity.

One of the turning points in elementary school was when one of the PE teachers called me ‘little black’. That is when I realised something being different with me and the rest.

And then I finally asked, but they did not make a big problem about it. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt, 2017)

We couldn't play with toys in pre-school because we were Roma. That's why we changed our last name over time because we were Lakatos originally. And many times, the police mixed us up. They came to see about a fight looking for the wrong Lakatos family. And I was just a little kid around the age of 10 back then, and the police realised they are looking at the wrong place. Primary school was even worst. There teachers told me that nothing would become of me, I will become a con, yes. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt, 2017)

Many have also mentioned support programs or organisations that have helped their school careers and prevented them from dropping out. The János Arany Program and study room like civil society organisations were mentioned in the interviews.

My mother and my father were both serious alcoholics, but luckily we went to school and did not drop out and lucky there was the study room. I was in seventh grade when I started to go there. It gave me and my brother a safety net so we didn't drop out but other young people in our neighbourhood, the same age, their life did not go towards learning, but shady business, illegal stuff. Fortunately, since we did not go home after school, but stayed in study rooms, we didn't really meet these people. Yes, and then, after all, my years went by parents being heavy alcoholics, but still me doing very well at school. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt 2017)

In our high school there was the János Arany Program. And more Roma students choose that instead of other high schools, I think, because those who want to study further are the ones coming here (János Arany Program), but without the supporting background, money, or financing. And this what the János Arany program is about, teachers there helped me a lot. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt, 2017)

In several interviews, we could see how the narrator had chosen a strategy against initial difficulties, most of which were exclusion or failure at school. A common point in them is the conscious will to change, the intention of proving themselves to the social environment, as can be seen in the following interview section.

I don't care about it anymore, I rather listen to some good music and try to prove them wrong. Now, I have not gone back to primary school yet to tell them that I have graduated since then, and that I'm going to college now. Somehow I dare not to go there yet. I am not sure why. Although it would feel good to get back at them, look at me now, who became what. Because there is a classmate from that time who is not a Roma, and they all

had high hopes for him and now he is in prison. And now I would just get back at them, who ended up in jail and who has gone how far. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt, 2017)

Barely half of the students experience a strong sense of identity in their family (e.g., parents). Also, they rarely mentioned preserving traditional Roma habits or using Roma language at home. In most cases, the question of identity has not yet appeared in children who attend elementary school. Public education was considered generally neutral by them in relation to their identity. The reason behind it is the phenomenon of ethnocentrism. The individuals do not feel discrimination based on their identity, since the hegemony of the majority culture is considered natural by them, for example in educational content. As a consequence of implicit impacts on the individuals, such as colour-blindness, the sense of assimilation grows stronger in them. Later this sense gets broken down every time the individuals are discriminated against because of their outer racial features. And since they have formed an ethnocentric identity in the school system, they typically do not have the means to respond constructively, either based on positive identity or self-defence mechanism (Arató, 2012).

I was teased a lot in elementary school. They weren't that rude to me, but I was hurt pretty bad still. So I had friends but they made fun of me anyway. Because of my skin, because I'm a Roma. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

This mechanism is supported by the life path interviews, as we encountered one or two similar examples to the ones mentioned above. However, in the narratives, the student college members say the issue of identity mainly appears during high school and it is associated with implicit or explicit racist attitudes. Also, nearly all of them could list occasions of discrimination based on their race but some of these stories were affecting their environment rather than them. This mechanism typically appears in research dealing with the strategies of the minority shifting towards assimilation, which ultimately contribute to the maintenance of racism (Arató, 2012).

### **Student College membership period**

The interrelations of inclusivity and resilience have shown through the stories of the Student College members. In the following, we try to present the activities through which the Student College contributes to strengthening the minority identity and the commitment to social responsibility, and how

the students experienced this, and in which form they plan to carry it on in their lives. However, the mutually reinforcing effect of these two processes is multiplied as the individual becomes more and more active, and in addition to his or her own interests, the interests of his or her community are considered. Empowerment, identified in the field of social policy and social psychology, is the process of gaining power, during which the individual and later the community becomes capable of self-determination and formulation of their common objectives. The individuals recognise their position of power and have the courage to use this power for the sake of the community. They also have the power to change their own and their community's social inequality situation and turn their life around for the better (Adams, 2003; Lakatos, 2010). During the development of empowerment, the individuals gradually recognise the factors of power structure affecting their circumstances in a negative way and they use support tools to bring about change, acquire elements of competence and organise community activities. The resulting minority influence rewrites the mechanisms of the reproduction of social inequality and gives a chance to share social goods, despite structural vulnerability.

The environment of the Student College that builds upon self-creation and cooperation, presupposes the goal of achieving the resilience of people within it. The positive experiences of cooperation (gaining motivation and competence), contribute to the inner integration and maintenance of empowerment on a personal level.

Consequently, empowerment is a process (Table 2), the first stage of which takes place on the individual level and extends from self-respect to the formation and maintenance of resilience. This leads to the evolvment of the sense of responsibility for the community, the actual action, and the resulting changes (Travis-Bowman, 2015). Community empowerment also has an impact on resilience, as bearing responsibility for others encourages self-help mechanisms (Varga, 2015a).

Table 2. The framework of personal and community empowerment (Travis-Bowman, 2015)

Personal empowerment			Community empowerment	
SELF-RESPECT	RESILIENCE	DEVELOPMENT	COMMUNITY	CHANGE
<i>Feeling better</i>	<i>Doing better</i>	<i>Being better</i>	<i>Better sense of belonging</i>	<i>Better community conditions</i>

In the case of the examined Student College the commitment to the Roma community and the related social responsibility (as a component and the highest degree of empowerment) starting point is the attitude towards one's own identity. Diverse attitudes were found related to this question among the students who considered themselves to be Roma (19 persons) (Table 3).

It is also important to see that two thirds of the respondents highlighted as one of the virtues of the Student College that there is an opportunity to experience a positive Roma identity in this community.

I dared to take it (that I'm a Roma) before (the Student College) but now it feels better to say it out, because I see that we're in this together. And I was brave enough to say it out even when I was judged because of it, but now it feels so much better to do so in the Student College because it is ordinary and accepted here. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

Social psychological studies of empowerment have demonstrated that the positive experience of group identity reinforces the sense of belonging to a group, which is the first level in the development of empowerment (Travis and Deepak, 2011).

Table 3. The life path details of the studied group – identity (N = 19)

Topics mentioned			Number of people	%
Relation to Roma identity	Family	strong	8	42
		weak	8	42
	Public education	positive	2	11
		neutral	13	68
		negative	1	5
	Individual	positive	14	74
		neutral	5	26
Discrimination of Roma group		school	10	53
		labour market	2	11
The positive identity forming role of WHSz			13	68

The years of membership at the college is evenly distributed among the examined persons: nearly one third are new entrants and one third are old

members. The “core” (more than a third) has been in the community for 2–4 years. By examining the duration of the membership, it is apparent that the newer members are more “identity-neutral”, who do not neglect their minority identity but consider it a barely determinant factor. In their case it is more noticeable that they are performing excellently in other areas (e.g., learning) as a form of compensation. The “avoidant” attitude can also be observed, which is more negative than identity-neutrality, often appears in the form of denial. In this case, the compensation mechanism is prominent as well.

Actually, it wasn't specifically stressed for us that as Roma, so we should do this or so that. There was one thing they I was told to pay special attention to. It has always been emphasised I should be aware of the fact that compared to others I always have to go the extra mile for the exact same thing. I've always been a little angry about this. I think it is unfair that because I'm a Roma, or perhaps someone else, I have to do more to prove myself. Now I can understand why, one can see the reasons, of course. And now I think it was completely alright, they were right and everything. So I accept that this is public opinion but I also see my mother, what she does, how hard she works for everything. I know that it was the same for her as well. She has to work twice as much to get what she wants. I've gotten used to it through all those years while I was at home with her. She talked about these things and I saw how things are so it became obvious to me that I need to do the same. The fact that it annoyed me is a different story. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

However, the importance of belonging to the community of young people of similar background is expressed by almost everyone, which is the sign of the strength of their social identity. Some members, who have been at the student college for two years or longer, are somewhat more conscious of their Roma identity, and they are also involved in shaping the future values of the student college community.

One of the ways to inspire social responsibility in the Student College is to support children by doing voluntary work in Roma communities, institutions, elementary and high schools. The majority of the student college members was first involved in voluntary work through the college. However, there is no difference in the age of membership when assessing the necessity of volunteering – all respondents consider this duty important and useful. Some of the interviewed members mentioned that they were initially frustrated and afraid of volunteering but along with his personal experience, ultimately this feeling has transformed entirely.

And when I got into the student college, the immediately sent me to a study hall, dropped me right into the deep end, when I had to tutor children instantly, especially

unprivileged ones. Actually, I really enjoyed doing it, those children truly have become dear to my heart. And now that I'm out in the ghetto, where we have 20-30 children with especially disadvantaged backgrounds, I would not only like to tutor them, but also mentor them. To talk about things, organize different programs, because I know well that if I had such opportunity, I would have taken advantage of that. I could have used a study hall-like program similar to this one. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

Three-fourth of the students would like to do voluntary work in some form even after graduation. The answers of the student college members reflect that they are committed to volunteering in Roma communities and most of them explicitly formulate their own role for others to follow.

With my current knowledge and mindset, I think I want do voluntary work in places where my presence is needed the most. To show the majority of Roma children that they can do it... Because I could do it. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

The newer members can only use volunteer opportunities offered to them by the Student College, whereas the older ones, based on their own decision, are allowed to take on duties in other places as well. This shows that, despite the assimilative resilience of the community, as a positive effect of the Student College, the undertaking, preparation and imprinting of the role of the translator takes place. The role of the translator was discussed in a multicultural approach in the diverse society of the United States. The differences of family and school socialisation, named as bicultural socialisation, have been defined by characters and actions to help overlap the two socialisation spheres. The person who succeeded in school from a minority environment and became a credible mediator for his community in the middle-class culture, was called a translator (Adler, 1975).

## Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to show mostly the positive impact of a programme on students' identity and social engagement. This programme was supporting disadvantaged, mainly Roma students in Higher Education in Hungary. In this paper, we have analysed the interviews in order to find out how students' identities and attitudes towards social engagement changed during the course of the programme. Our findings, supported by quotes, show that



students have become more confident in their identity and more inclined to take an active role in society during their time in the organisation.

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