The Power of Community: Supporting the Learning Path of Roma University Students

Aranka Varga[1] & Anikó Fehérvári[2] & Fanni Trendl[3]

Abstract

In some European countries, the educational attainment of the Roma population is very low compared to the majority society. This study focuses on what supports the higher education pathways of Roma youth by using empirical data. Thirty-one Roma students, whose academic advancement was supported by a Roma Student Society, and ninety-three students who did not receive support participated in the study. The students in the control group got further subdivided into three groups based on their socioeconomic backgrounds, so four groups in total were included in our analysis. The research was conducted using mixed methodology: we analyzed the texts of reflective essays and data derived from a questionnaire. The results show that the students in the support group have significant external and internal capital in all areas, except for financial capital, which is offset by the social capital provided by their schools and university. It is important to highlight the supportive role of family, in which there is no difference between the Roma Student Society members and the students in the control groups with higher socioeconomic status. In the control group, a minority group emerged with a similar social background as the supported focus group, and they noticeably remain invisible to the institution. Our research also draws attention to the importance of creating and developing an inclusive learning environment that results in significant social capital, not only to retain low socioeconomic groups but also to retain groups with higher social status.

Keywords: Higher education, inclusion, resilience, Roma students, social mobility.

Introduction

Today, Roma students in Hungary, but also in other EU Member States, have substantially lower chances of being admitted to higher education institutions than their non-Roma peers. This is especially true for those youth with intersectional identities, for example when minority status and social disadvantages are intertwined. We have known for a long time that higher level of

---

[1] Assoc. Prof., Director of Institute of Education, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary, Head of 'For Educational Opportunities!' Research Group, MTA-PTE, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0864-7952, varga.aranka@pte.hu

[2] Full Prof., Director of Institute of Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary, member of 'For Educational Opportunities!' Research Group, MTA-PTE, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4477-7682, fehervari.aniko@ppk.elte.hu

[3]Assist. Lecturer, Institute of Education, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary, member of 'For Educational Opportunities!' Research Group, MTA-PTE, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5495-0402, trendl.fanni@pte.hu

educational attainment likely secures higher standard of living, better health conditions, a more decent life lived with dignity, and hopefully also results in a society with social justice. The inclusiveness of an equitable social and school environment is also indicated by its ability to adapt supportively to the needs of those who are passing through junctures of multi-stage mobility. It is therefore important to see what kind of external support young people receive, who are the first ones from their family circle to obtain a high school diploma and a higher education degree, and how such support systems are linked to the mobilization of inner strengths and the success of their personal life path.

In this paper, we combine theories and concepts from the fields of education, sociology and psychology and put them into practice to analyze how the disadvantaged, mostly Roma, students in our study reflect on their mobility process from their own individual perspectives.

Scientific Frameworks

Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education

The expansion of higher education, the diversification of applicants and participants is becoming more and more common around the world. Diverse student groups all have in common that the socio-historical context influences the growth of their numbers in higher education and the ways in which their mobility is experienced personally and socially. Their underrepresentation in higher education is underpinned by both structural oppressions and the differences of the capitals they have access to. Increase of diversity is both a consequence of the transformation of higher education and a generator of its development (Naudet, 2018). Through development approaches and practices aiming inclusion are spread more and more in Higher Education. Institutions that take steps for the greater involvement, successful progress and successful graduation of underrepresented student groups are considered inclusive.

There is an abundance of research and developments that explore the inclusiveness and best practices of higher education as an organization (Cooper, 2012). Among the higher education development strategies to increase inclusiveness, there are elements related to the transformation of the educational space, the change of teaching attitudes (Vaccaro, 2022), the broadening of activities and the continuous improvement process (Nolen & Targett, 2017).

Resilience and Capitals

At the center of resilience research is the investigation of the phenomena that lead to the discovery of successful coping and adaptation despite adverse circumstances in an individual's life (Masten, 2001). Research on successful coping with adversity includes low socioeconomic status, poverty, and traumatic life events as external risk factors, which can be interpreted as capital deprivation. When examining resilience, research mapping environmental (external) influences have identified the different spaces of socialization – family, school and peer group – as key determinants of resilience. These spaces, and the attitudes and actions by agents within these spaces, can be seen as risk factors when they are dysfunctional and thus have a negative impact on the individual. Their protective nature is perceived when they are supportive, accessible and have an overall positive influence on the life of the individual. Accordingly, external protective factors, with a focus on successful progress at school, include a caring, motivating family environment, mentoring teachers and an inclusive peer community. Decisive human relationships that can be associated with deviance and lead to rejection can be identified as external risk factors. In addition, the lack of essential human relationships and attachments or the absence of expected support is also considered to be a risk factor (Masten, 2007). The external factors of resilience can be captured in the human network of relationships, so social capital, or the lack of it, is crucial. By social capital we mean the type of relationships from which productive benefits are derived. Its main dimensions are trust, rules, norms, types of action, and networking characteristics and resources (Putnam, 1995). Social capital thus includes both the network and all the resources that can be mobilized through it.

In order to maintain an individual's resilience, it is necessary that external supports are complemented by internal forces. By psychological capital, the following 4 factors influencing the effectiveness of an individual are considered: self-confidence, hope, optimism, realistic view of possible achievements. (Luthans et al., 2004)

Coutu (2002) also points out that resilient people can accept reality, have value-based beliefs, and to improvise and adapt to significant changes. Resilience is the characteristic of people involved in social mobility and cultural integration, but the elevated degree of the above the above-mentioned dimensions of psychological capital places the mobility process in a positive perspective that encourages self-efficiency and self-efficacy.

Hungarian Context

The study undertakes Roma students, as they are one of the largest and most underprivileged minorities in Europe. In some European countries, an estimated Roma population of 1% to 4% obtain a higher education degree, which makes this minority one of the most underrepresented groups on the tertiary level (The Velux Foundation, 2019). According to the most recent data, this gap has not decreased in recent years in Hungary: in 2017, the proportion of Roma aged 15–24 participating in higher education was only 0.8%, while the figure for non-Roma youth of the same age was 19.3% (Bernáth, 2019). It is also important to see that the situation of Roma groups is historically defined, which is described by the literature as a phenomenon of intersectionality. If young Roma people are to embark on a path of social mobility, they will have to overcome the disadvantages of poverty and their minority status to obtain a higher education degree.

In Hungary there are many formal and non-formal school settings where teachers consciously or unconsciously but remain present as supporting actors along with organizations that recognize the aspirational capital in youth or that capital within their families, so they motivate and help students progress through school to the labor market. Research on social mobility has long explored the hidden costs of this process for the individual – especially when mobility is a multi-stage process. The "hidden costs" as referred to in international literature, can be shown to be present for Roma youth coming from low-educated families (Durst & Bereményi, 2021).

According to the results of a systematic research referring to Roma in Europe, there is a lack in supporting systems that follows through the whole advancement of Roma children, students (Rutigliano, 2020; Lauritzen & Nodeland, 2018). Hungary is an exception: at the time of the millennium, support of Roma youth begins, including interventions at early childhood, at elementary and high school, initially in the civil sector and later within the higher education sector as well. The Network of Christian Roma Student Societies was established in 2011 with EU funding drawing on the experience of these initiatives. During the Pandemic years and today, the network has been expanded to include further student societies and they are by now all state-funded, helping around 300 – mostly Roma – university students in 10 locations across the country to obtain higher education degrees (Dunajeva, 2023).
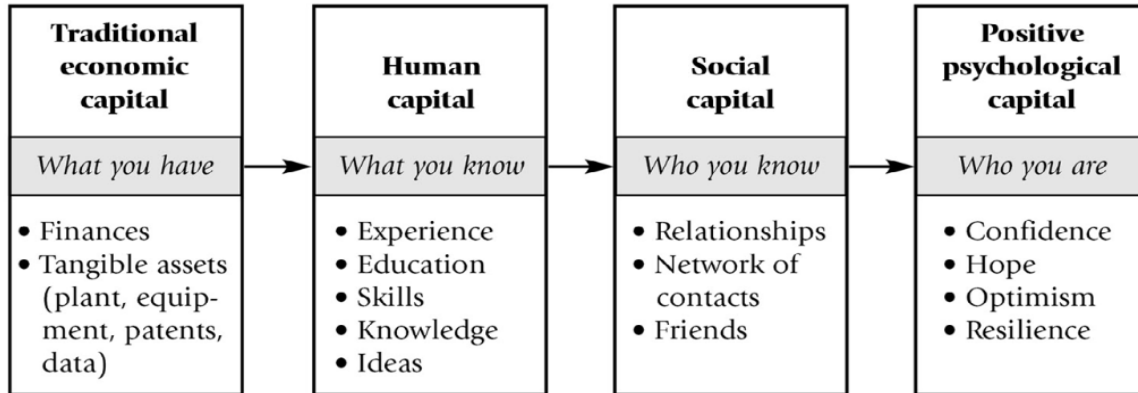
This study takes our readers to Hungarian university, University of Pécs is one of the 4 major universities in Hungary, with approximately 22 thousand students in 10 faculties. Many students come from the vicinity of the university, others arrive from other regions of the country, and almost

a quarter of our students are international. Even if segmented, there are support programs targeting groups of disability, foreign, disadvantaged and Roma students (Vitéz, 2021). These include the 20-year-old Wlislocki Henrik Roma Student Society, which attracts mainly disadvantaged and Roma students, an organization that became a member of the Christian Roma College Network in 2011. The church-maintained Roma student society, which has been operating since 2018 and whose students we focus on in the present research, "grew out" of this student society.

In our study, we "follow" the students through the socialization arenas (family, school), but we focus on the opportunities and disadvantages of individuals to better understand inclusivity. We look at the ways, possibilities and needs of individuals at different stages of their schooling and how they collect, mobilize and redeem capitals (material, cultural, social and psychological – Figure 1). In the study, we also consider the theory of resilience in relation to the theories of capital. By combining capital theories and the four-element approach to resilience, we emphasize and explore how external supports (Simić et al., 2019) and internal knowledge, as well as drivers (cultural and psychological capital) (Luthans et al., 2004; Yosso, 2005) play a role in the successful coping with one's difficulties, both external and internal. Our research focus is on the positive external and internal resilience factors, as we seek to identify what kind of personal inclusive strategies and external reinforcing conditions can be found on the path to social mobility. We think that, beyond the fact of mobility, its hidden costs are determined by the accumulation and conversion of various capitals. An inclusive environment is characterized by a network of supportive human relationships (social capital) through which a safer mobility path can be assumed. There are personal capital conversion processes embedded in this process that can be captured by the development of an individual's psychological capital. We want to capture the mobility path, its efficiency, and its cost from the individual's point of view by looking at the evolution of the individuals' capitals. Therefore, in our analysis, we consider the different capitals as variables that play a role in their social mobility and resilience-building. Among the capitals, we pay special attention to the internal factors (psychological capital) and the external support (social capital) that positively influence resilience in the context of inclusion – both from the individuals' and from the organization's standpoint.

Figure 1

Expanding capitals for competitive advantage (Source: Luthans et al., 2004).

Traditional economic capital	Human capital	Social capital	Positive psychological capital
What you have	*What you know*	*Who you know*	*Who you are*
• Finances • Tangible assets (plant, equipment, patents, data)	• Experience • Education • Skills • Knowledge • Ideas	• Relationships • Network of contacts • Friends	• Confidence • Hope • Optimism • Resilience

Along the above dimensions, our study shows the differences in the learning paths of students from different ethnic and social backgrounds.

Our research sought to answer the following questions:

What school-associated, family-related, and individual factors helped or hindered the progress?

Which resilient life-path strategies can be identified in terms of available, used, or converted capitals? What 'price' do these strategies put on mobility?

To what extent do the observed mobility pathways appear stable or vulnerable?

Method

Research Design

Our research was conducted at the University of Pécs in the spring of 2022. Our study was linked to the two-semester university courses organized by PERSZ-E, which were compulsory for all students in the college. The aim of the course was to address issues related to Roma communities and the relationship between social differences and schooling, and to examine them from an academic standpoint with disadvantaged, mostly Roma students from the student society. By approaching these issues from the perspective of the equal opportunity framework, students can take a critical and reflective view of their own situation by analyzing the components of identity, resilience and inclusion, and the processes taking place in the society around them. The principle

of this course is that students should be able to talk about social issues – regardless of the subject they are studying.

The courses were delivered in two semesters, with a thematic sequence that built on each other. Our research started in the second semester of the course, after students had participated in a round table discussion presenting an academic study. The roundtable discussion speakers reported back with results from the life path interviews with individuals who came from disadvantaged Roma and non-Roma families and now define themselves as intellectuals, and shared the difficulties and support they have encountered, the costs they have paid for their multi-stage mobility, and the positive aspects interviewees mentioned (Boros et al. 2021; Durst & Bereményi, 2021). The socioeconomic characteristics of the participants in their presented research were very similar to those of the student society members: they have a higher level of education than their parents, they are likely to find jobs with better living conditions, they come from closed communities and municipalities, etc. The major difference is, however, that in our study we looked at young people who are still in the process of completing tertiary education, so we are dealing with a younger generation that has more recent experiences of their schooling.

Population and Sample

Two groups participated in the research, all the Roma student society members (N:31) and other university students (N: 93). The control group was also selected from the students at the University of Pécs, in such a way that students from the Roma student society asked their peers to fill in the questionnaire (snowball sampling). Thus, the age and composition of the control group is approximately the same as that of the students.

Data Collection Tools and the Data Collection

The process of the research was structured in the following way: (1) Roma student society members were asked to write a reflective essay about their experiences. Students were asked the following guiding questions based on the Durst & Bereményi (2021) and Boros et al. (2021) research studies: 'What and who has helped you so far to succeed in your studies (from primary school to university)? What difficulties did you face in getting to university? What have you "sacrificed" and what do you believe you are currently sacrificing to attend university? What/who

helps you experience the difficulties that come with social mobility in a more positive way?" (2) The control group participated in questionnaire-based data collection, which instrument was compiled based on the categories of the qualitative analysis.

The essays based on the above questions were run through content analysis. Coding was performed by two independent coders to avoid possible bias. The categories were developed deductively, based on the theories discussed above. That is, we looked for the emergence of resilience factors as different types of capital (Figure 1). The inductive nature of the categorization was because the texts of the analyzed essays further specified the subcategories. In coding, we only marked if any of these categories were mentioned in the essay by the respondent (the number how many times it was mentioned did not count). Subcategories were created by analyzing the corpus of the texts written for each question separately. Out of the four text corpora, two were related to the past and two were related to the present, and, according to the theory of resilience, they also represented aspects of supportive and hindering conditions. Accordingly, the past was also categorized in terms of the support and difficulties encountered during their learning path from elementary school to university studies. The present refers to their university years, where we categorized the supportive conditions under the collective noun 'support', and the negative side in this case represents the 'cost' of learning under the collective noun 'sacrifices' (Table 1). The analytical categorization developed for the four different text corpora was thematized deductively, based on the theory of resilience, to see whether they describe external influences from a socialization field or internal, personal factors. We consider the influences from family as primary and treat the institutional socialization elements separately, which build on them. It is in these institutional spaces where the network of human relationships can take effect, to some extent and with a certain impact as social capital. From the perspective of the individual, it has always been important to examine psychological capital, and to identify its components. Thus, we have placed the life paths in the four-element framework analysis of resilience (external and internal, supportive, and hindering conditions) by matching the subcategories to the different types of capital – giving priority to the social and psychological capital. This helped us explore the ways in which successful life paths accumulate capital, which help us gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between resilience and inclusive environments.

Table 1

Categories and subcategory codes based on text corpora

	PAST		PRESENT	
	Support	*Difficulty*	*Sacrifice*	*Support*
Capitals in the family environment (as primary socialization)	family's motivation and patterns	family problems	absence from family	family's motivation and patterns
	family support for learning		being away from friends	friends
	adequate financial support	financial problems	lack of financial security	
Capitals in the school environment (as secondary socialization)	an inclusive school climate	movement between social strata		university scholarship
		fear of the unfamiliar community		the positive pattern seen in the environment
		moving from village to town, or to dormitory		
	supportive teachers (elementary level)	discrimination by teachers		university faculty members
	supportive teaches (high school level)			
	supportive friends and classmates	discrimination by peers (being ostracized)		university peer group
Personal, intrinsic motivation (psychological capital)	personal interest and motivation	lack of faith or motivation, low self-esteem	postponing personal plans and starting a family	
		finding ways in learning, coping alone	lack of more frequent, close human contacts	
	own diligence and perseverance	difficulty with curriculum or graduating	more studying, less me-time	own diligence and perseverance
		illness		

The categories and subcategories developed in the content analysis of the student essays were used to create a questionnaire to collect data from the control groups. Accordingly, the control groups received the categorized answers from the surveyed students as multiple-choice questions. The four questions about the supportive and hindering conditions of the past were asked in the same way, as well as the questions regarding the supportive conditions and "sacrifices" related to the degree they study for in the present. For each question, the subcategories that were identified from the graduate students' essays were given as answer choices (0-no – 1-yes), with the option to provide more than one answer if anyone wished by simply adding "other."

Using the numerical data obtained from the coding scheme described above, descriptive statistics were generated, and a chi-square test was performed for measures of effect size to determine how strongly two categorical field are associated as indicated by Cramér's V. The results and correlations captured in the figures are illustrated with quotes highlighted from the students' essays. We also analyzed the responses of the students on their own, but it was important to examine them in relation to the control groups as well.

Data Analysis

For the analysis, students in the control group were divided into smaller subgroups based on the educational attainment of their parents because our aim was to see if we can find any differences between the different social, economic and ethnic groups. For this we used the parents' educational attainment as a variable and also the T-tests approved the subdivision. In the analysis it seemed necessary to divide students from the control group into smaller sub-groups, because the responses of the whole control group had showed high standard deviation. However, when we examined correlations within the individual responses, the T-tests indicated a strong correlation with the parents' education background. Therefore, all students whose parents did not have a degree or high school diploma were included in the first of three control groups. We also carefully selected a few students into the same group whose parents graduated from high school or earned a university degree so that the educational composition of the parents in Control Group 1 (C1) would be like the parents in the focus group. In addition to the parents' educational attainment, we also considered the place of residence, and where it was possible, the faculty and year of study, to bring the "Student Society Members" and C1 as similar as possible. As for Control Group 2 (C2), half

of the students' parents earned a high school diploma, while one-third of the other half earned a university degree, and the other two-third of the other half has vocational qualifications. The parents of the students in Control Group 3 (C3) are mostly graduates: more than half of them have two parents with tertiary education, the rest have at least one parent with a university degree, and some have a high school diploma. In other words, the three control groups represent increasingly higher social status in terms of parental education, with C1 being the closest to the characteristics of the focus group from the student society. The educational composition of the parents in C1 was the same as that of the parents in the focus group.

The three control groups are included as described above and, although the sample is not representative, we aim to group them to represent an increasingly higher social status – mainly based on the educational attainment of parents. Details in Table 2 confirm the noticeable differences in social status and stratification between the student society members and the control groups (1, 2 and 3).

Table 2

General characteristics of the respondents (n:124)

		Student Society Members		C1		C2		C3	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender	Men	16	51,6	7	22,6	9	29,0	12	38,7
	Women	15	48,4	24	77,4	22	71,0	19	61,3
Social status	Disadvantaged	7	22,6	6	19,4	1	3,2	0	0,0
	Disadvantaged & Roma	24	77,4	2	6,5	0	0,0	0	0,0
Parents' education	Mother elementary	16	51,6	6	19,4	0	0,0	0	0,0

		vocational	10	32,3	21	67,7	0	0,0	0	0,0
		high school graduation	5	16,1	4	12,9	20	64,5	6	19,4
		college or university degree	0	0,0	0	0,0	11	35,5	25	80,6
	Father	elementary	13	41,9	6	19,4	0	0,0	0	0,0
		vocational	10	32,3	18	58,1	20	64,5	0	0,0
		high school graduation	7	22,6	6	19,4	11	35,5	4	12,9
		college or university degree	1	3,2	1	3,2	0	0,0	21	67,7
Place of residence	village		22	71,0	13	41,9	12	38,7	4	12,9
	small town		7	22,6	12	38,7	11	35,5	7	22,6
	city		2	6,5	6	19,4	8	25,8	20	64,5
Year in university	first (freshman)		14	45,2	15	48,4	9	29,0	11	35,5
	second or higher (sophomore, junior or senior)		17	54,8	16	51,6	22	71,0	20	64,5

Limitations of Research

One limitation that needs to be mentioned is that the data collection from students was limited to a course in this study. It is considered somewhat of a limitation due to the fact that not everyone had the same amount of time to complete the questionnaire in great details and write a longer essay, which was exposed in the content analysis. We considered adding an additional survey to

our research materials in Phase 2 of processing results (when we plan to analyze the parts which was not included in the current analyses).

Another difficulty was that we started data collection from the control group at the end of the exam period, so our sample was smaller than originally planned. The difficulty in completing the questionnaire also meant that we were unable to achieve a balanced male-female ratio similar to the ratio in the student society membership, so we cannot yet address gender differences in our analysis. We plan to expand this sample in the next phase of the research to be able to complete a gender-based analyses.

Findings

Presenting our data, we nuance the differences expressed in quantitative data between the three control groups and the student society members by characterizing the groups in the context of several coding categories. We do this by highlighting the life situation of the students and supporting our findings with qualitative data. The first research question aimed to map the (school, family and personal) factors that supported or obstructed the learning paths of the examined university students. Firstly, in the analysis we have explored the factors supporting resilience and capital accumulation resulting from it. The categories indicate the evolution of individuals' capitals over the elementary and high school period and indicate who and what helped our respondents succeed in getting admitted to the university.

The first noteworthy result is that more students in the two control groups with the higher socioeconomic status and the student society member group have selected family's motivation and patterns as support for learning similarly high, while this support was surprisingly low for those in Control Group C 1 with the most similar socioeconomic background to student society members' (Figure 2). Student society members have written about this as in the following:

"My parents motivated me to study as long as I could, even though they could not stay in school, and they supported me however they could. They taught me never to back down if I was subjected to atrocities or mistreatment in my life."

"Because of my mother's strict upbringing I'll be grateful for the rest of my life, because if she hadn't raised me like that I might not be here. I always knew that learning was the way to achieve anything. He taught me that work, love and learning are the most important things in life."

Figure 2

Factors supporting the learning path according to the respondents, %
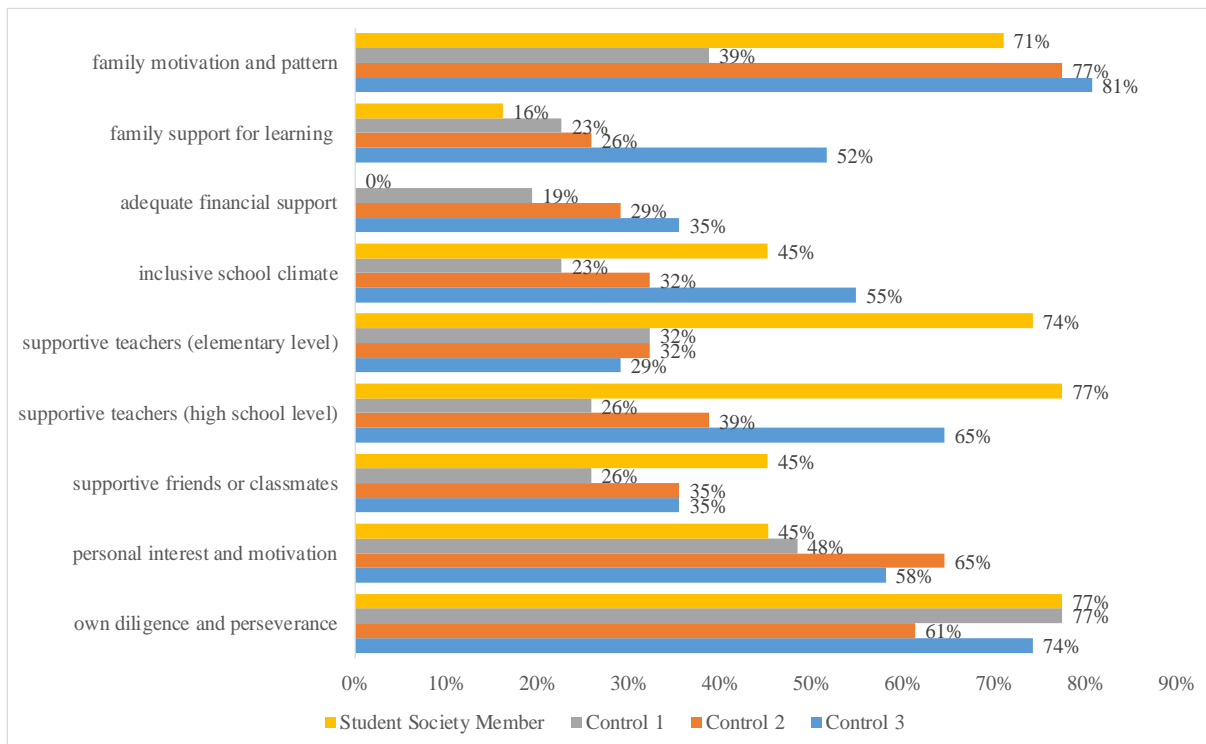
No significant correlation was found between the presence or absence of family motivation and the strength of school support. There are two significant differences between the groups in the category of motivating, supportive teachers (Table 3). The third Control Group (C3) in addition to the highest number of them reporting family motivation and academic support as cultural capital, more than 50% of them perceived the school atmosphere inclusive, and they are also the least likely to experience a discriminating classmate or teacher, and the most likely to succeed with learning (Figure 2). Members of Control Group (C1) whose social status was similar to the students of the student society, barely indicated outside support from teachers. Both at elementary and at high school levels, Roma student society members mention a strikingly higher level of support,

which is only approached at high school level by the C3 group, while the other groups range from 25.8% to 38.7% on average for supportive teachers. (See Figure 2).

Table 3

Factors supporting the learning path according to the respondents, % (only significant answers are presented)

Groups	family motivation	good school climate	supportive teacher (elementary)	supportive teacher (secondary)	adequate financial resources	family support for learning
Student Society Member	71,0	45,2	74,2	77,4	0,0	16,1
C1	38,7	22,6	32,3	25,8	19,4	22,6
C2	77,4	32,3	32,3	38,7	29,0	25,8
C3	80,6	54,8	29,0	64,5	35,5	51,6
Chi-square	15,559	7,886	17,752	20,667	13,432	10,960
p	,001	,048	<,001	<,001	,004	,012
Cramér's V	,354	,252	,378	,408	,329	,297

Two student society members recall the role of supporting pedagogues and inclusive school environment in the following way:

"In primary school, it was probably my math teacher who influenced me the most, but of course also the school itself. Free time activities in the afternoon, games and time spent with my friends all got me to like the school system. Teachers in my secondary school also made a big impression on me. I was able to live my life in a very good atmosphere and my personality developed. I loved having big lunches with my friends and all the great conversations! I appreciated our freedom to make decisions. It helped that I could make mistakes and learn from them."

"But I didn't know which institution to apply to and which profession to choose. Since high school was not an option at home, I had to choose a vocational school. Nevertheless, my class master recommended … the Arany János Talent Support Program at the dormitory of the nearest High School, which I really liked. So, I applied, and they made peace with my choice at home."

There are no significant differences between the groups in the categories of own diligence, supportive friends, and classmates, or in personal interest and motivation. Supportive friends were

mentioned the most by student society member, and the least in the C1 group, which indicate the differences in social web between the two groups of similar backgrounds.

Respondents were also asked about their present situation. What and who supports the respondents in their progress in higher education, meaning what resources and capital they can mobilize (Figure 3). It is an interesting result that family support for higher education becomes reduced in the narratives of student society members, as their response shows a strong significance compared to the other 3 groups. There is a moderately strong significance in the category of university peer group, but our student society members noted this as a determining factor for success in greater number than all the other control groups. (Table 4.) The 58.1% rate student society members mentioned university peer group as significant asset indicates that support from peers make up for the lack of family motivation. In the C3 group, we can see again that strong family support is complemented and further reinforced by peer support groups.

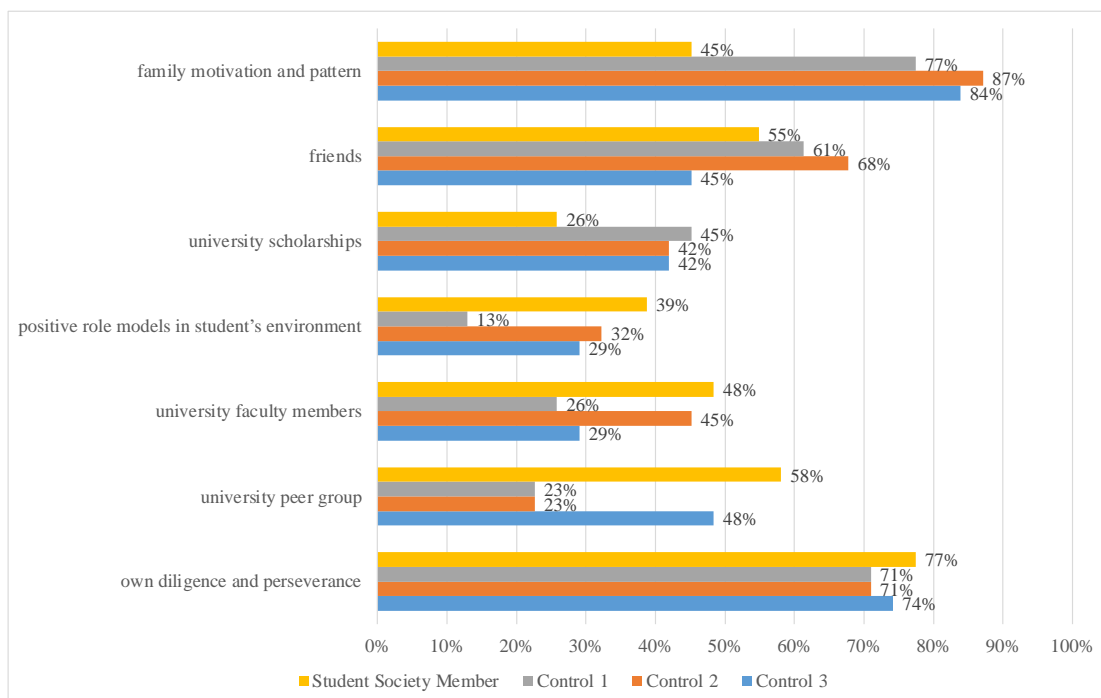**Figure 3**

Support in higher education, %.

Table 4

Support in higher education, %.

Groups	Family Motivation & Pattern	University Peer Group
Student society members	45,2	58,1
C1	77,4	22,6
C2	87,1	22,6
C3	83,9	48,4
Chi-square	17,632	12,986
p	<,001	,005
Cramér's V	,377	,324

Respondents' difficulties during elementary and high school were displayed here. Based on the results, both internal and external barriers hindering resilience were analyzed, looking for capital deficiencies. In this part of our study, we can only report statistically significant differences between the groups in the category of 'financial problems' (Table 5). The other categories, such as discrimination by peers and teachers, or the personal fear of mobility did not appear as significant for students (contrary to expectations), which suggests that the lack of financial capital was compensated by other capitals (Figure 4).

Figure 4

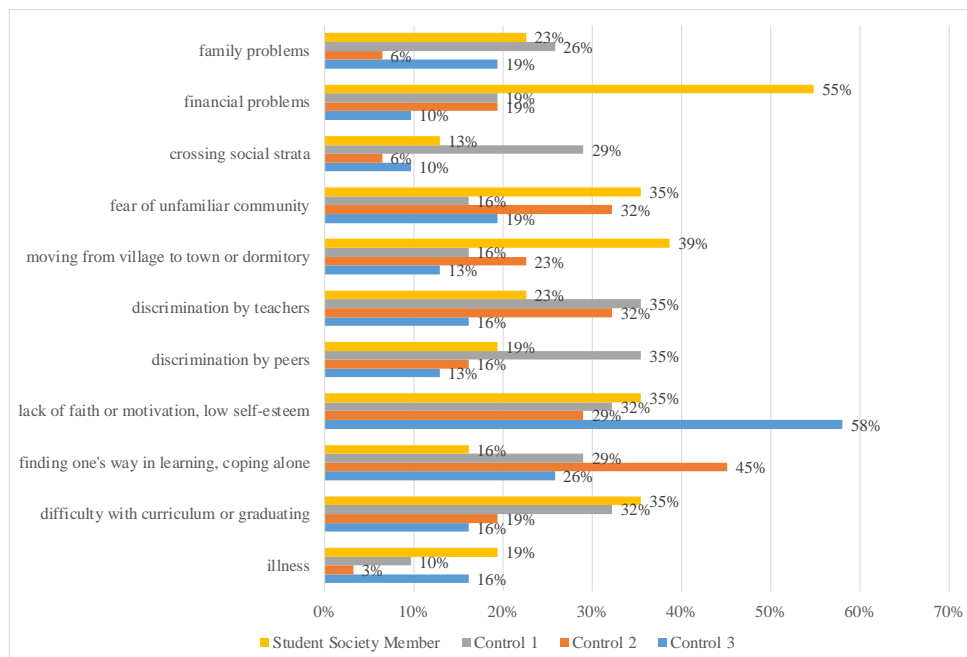*Factors obstructing the learning path according to the respondents, %*

Table 5

Factors obstructing the learning path according to the respondents, %

Groups	Financial Problems
Student society members	54,8
C1	19,4
C2	19,4
C3	9,7
Chi-square	19,207
p	<,001
Cramér's V	,394

Even when looking at people of Roma origin separately, we found hardly any mention of school exclusion or discriminatory life events. The main problem for them was poverty. We cannot ignore the fact that the lack of financial capital is a major determining factor in one's learning path. Not only the sheer number of times it was mentioned, but also the stories coming from the essays indicate the perceptible experience of social disadvantage.

"...I also had to face limitations of our financial circumstances. For example, there were times when I couldn't go to school because I had no money to get to school. The next day we would receive family allowance, yet we couldn't borrow from anyone else in the village because everyone was poor. I couldn't bring food from home because there was hardly any. I also remember times when I got home from school and had to go down to Grandma's, or could only study at home, if it was light outside or until my phone's battery could give me a flashlight. Otherwise, we could not see to study because we had no electricity, because we needed money to charge the meter, and we didn't always have enough money to recharge it..."

In addition to the material constraints, students reported other complicating factors such as the fear of a different, strange environment (e.g.: moving from a village to a city), difficulty of study materials, and lack of self-confidence. These are all natural consequences of social and geographical segregation, indicators of the lack of cultural capital and change of culture that is the prerequisite of mobility.

"I encountered many difficulties, mostly due to the fact that I never ventured outside of my village. City life was scary, the crowds, the hustle and bustle. I remember having problems travelling at first, but I was motivated to set out on my own, be resourceful and learn the new rhythm..."

Our second research question concerned resilient life path strategies that can be identified in terms of available and used, converted capitals. In this context, we analyzed how the external support resulting from capital or the lack of it affects personal (psychological) capital.

There is no significant difference between the groups in terms of the components of their psychological capital being intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, neither in the past nor in the present. It is an insightful result that students of the third control group (C3) are endowed with a wide range of capitals in all the socialization domains, students surprisingly mentioned lack of self-confidence a great number of times, at least three times more than their peers mentioned any other factor that hindered school success. In this case, presumably the high expectations and patterns weaken self-confidence.

To answer the questions, the comparison between students from the student society and the C1 group is emphasized, since they are the ones who are considered to be resilient based on their social situation. Based on the perception (mentioning) of different capitals, two types of strategies were identified. Both strategies are based on intrinsic drive. The amount of psychological capital manifested as motivation in the student society member group was very similar to that of the first control group (C1).

However, most of the C1 group members experienced their learning paths in which they progress with little support from the outside and overwhelmingly relied on their very own strengths and efforts. This group appears to be the counterpoint to both the high social status group and the student society member group of similarly disadvantaged social background. The responses of students from C1 reveal a different life strategy, a rather lonely individual mobility path, relying mainly on self-sufficiency and a strong psychological capital. They identified little to no support in their social network, named numerous obstacles, however compensation for the family difficulties was almost absent in terms of school support. Their mobility paths are presumably very 'fragile', as they are unable or unwilling to rely on social capital as a resource. Self-motivation and hard work stand out as two characteristics of their learning paths. This is confirmed by the fact

that, in the category 'other', one fifth of them further elaborated on self-reliance ('I grew up, so it was my own decision', 'Solved it on my own'); personal drive for aspirations ('I want to break out of poverty'); or actors involved in self-affirmation ('I had to keep my mind busy because of a family tragedy, and our priest suggested it, I accepted it and we made the right decision", "A youth support program, and the people I met through this program helped me").

In contrast, Roma student society members claim that the power of support was coming from the surrounding social fields and became internalized as capital, becoming intrinsic and developing their resilience.

"But the biggest boost has always come from within me. I wouldn't be on the road to success today if I hadn't desired to be, if I hadn't been diligent."

It is also evident from the data that ongoing community support has resulted in a mobility pathway where stability and sense of security for personal coping has been provided by the perceived safety net in the learning environment. The quote below illustrates this.

"Another motivating aspect for me was that my fellow students all had very good grades, and I didn't want to fall behind them, so we always pulled and helped each other, we were a close-knit community."

In contrast, the first Control Group (C1) (with students from families with lower socioeconomic status) has a very different experience. In contrast, half of the student society members also mention the inclusive school atmosphere and supportive classmates, which points to additional elements of their social capital. The further research question was, what "price" do different strategies for becoming resilient impose on mobility? How stable and vulnerable do the observed mobility paths seem and why? Presumably, the two coping strategies, although similar in terms of the outcome, they may be fundamentally different in the context of sacrifices made, the sense of feeling what price one pays for mobility in a vulnerable situation.

In the present, we asked the respondents about what they "sacrifice" to study in higher education? Based on this the price of mobility in the case of Roma student society members was inquired (Figure 5.) There were only statistically significant differences between the groups in the category

of 'postponing personal plans or to start a family'. Only two of the student society members reported this sacrifice, while more than half of those in the control group (C3) with the highest social status (C3) marked this as a sacrifice. The personal effort (e.g. more study and less me-time) and the overshadowed human relationships were similar across the groups. (Table 6.)

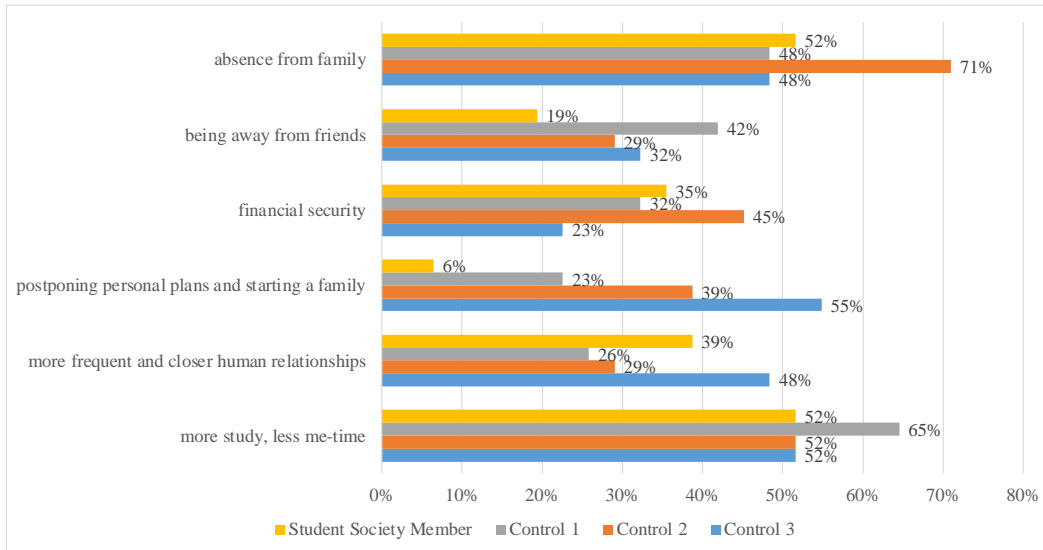**Figure 5**

Sacrifices made for degree and mobility, %.

Table 6

Sacrifices made for degree and mobility, %.

Groups	Postponing Personal Plans / Starting a Family
Student society members	6,5
C1	22,6
C2	38,7
C3	54,8
Chi-square	18,972
p	<,001
Cramér's V	,391

The study outlines that both groups of lower socioeconomic status perceive and emphasize the necessity of internal force on a multi-stage social mobility pathway. Compared to the overall positive experiences of Roma student society members along their learning paths boosted by social

137

capital, the 'individual breakthroughs' of those who lacked social capital were presumably on the expense of more sacrifices and higher "cost" for mobility. This is exemplified by those in control group C1 who have similar social backgrounds (or are even slightly better off) than members of our focus group. Nevertheless, most of their responses show that their social capital has been low throughout most of their school life. They also perceived even less support in the school environment than how much they received from their families, so they relied mostly on their own personal strength, or self-efficacy (psychological capital), mainly on their asset of being goal-oriented, and less on their intrinsic motivation to get to university. This "lonely road" as individual mobility makes resilience rather vulnerable and difficult to maintain and experience. It involves far more personal sacrifice, and the price of mobility is much higher, as individuals are unable to convert the community support and resources available to them into social capital. The members of C2 control group rely to a large extent on the capitals that they bring from their family, while students in group C3 (with the highest social status) clearly rely on these family capitals to succeed in education. They are more balanced in the motivational and goal-oriented parts of their psychological capital, and even if they perceive schools as inclusive, they are less likely to think that they have needed help from their teachers. They are not without problems, but they tend to find resources to compensate for the difficulties with the help of their networks of family and friends.

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

Motivating Family as a Supporting Factor

In the analysis, school, family, and individual factors influencing the learning path of university students from different ethnic and social backgrounds were examined. Examining the school path of groups from different backgrounds based on factors of resilience, our results are consistent with data of previous research on successful Roma youth. The first important finding is that the supportive and motivating role of the family is crucial in the learning paths of student society members, which clearly refutes the stereotype that families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds generally "do not care" about their children and do not motivate them in their studies. Survey results reveal that most Roma youth mention family support as a decisive factor, although most of their parents did not have access to higher education and therefore could not actively help with specific learning tasks, yet they were highly motivated to strengthen and instill the need for

learning in their children. This result is in harmony with previous research results (Gallego-Noche & Goenechea-Permisán, 2022).

Social disadvantage is a factor hindering resilience according to Masten's theory (2007), which manifested in the lives of students as a lack of financial and educational capital in the family. These disadvantages on the learning path of most Roma student society members are counterbalanced by the caring family as social capital, even if the content of their family cultural capital differs from the one that could be converted at school, as seen in the control groups with parents more experienced with schooling. This is also supported by the fact that half of the students born to mainly university graduates (C3) mention that they received specific learning support from their parents, while this figure is less than half for the other groups, and the number decreases the lower the parents' educational attainment is. It means that resilient, young Roma students, stating they increasingly rely on their teachers for support when school difficulties arise, while their peers with higher socioeconomic status receive such support mainly from their families.

Importance of the Teachers and Peer Groups

Therefore, it is also an important question how learning support in the home is complemented by the capitals available in their secondary place of socialization. In the case of the Roma student society members such support is offered by teachers and peers as tutors and mentors at school. As it was transparent, in the control groups, teacher support is mentioned by one half and one third of the respondents. It is only significantly higher for students born to families with greater socioeconomic status (C3), but even that figure is below the number reported from the student society student group. The essential role of teachers in aiding social mobility through schools is therefore unquestionable.

In the capital network of student society members, inclusive communities are frequently found, where peer support groups consist of all ages. Belonging to such a community is a decisive force in one's life and for many, this has already begun at secondary school level. In higher education institutions the Roma student society network fulfills the role of such a social and academic network.

"At the university, I was already in the good hands of the Evangelical Roma Student Society of Pécs. I was welcomed by an inclusive community where I could meet people from a similar

situation. I was motivated by being surrounded by smart people. I looked up to my senior student fellows and respected them a lot."

"Peers from the same study track, the student society's community and my friends helped me overcome the disadvantages of my mobility to a great extent. By forming a mutual bond with these communities, it has given me a stable ground to cope with all the problems I had when I got here..."

From disadvantage to advantage

An important segment of the diversification in higher education is the increasing number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds for whom a degree is the means of social mobility. For them, capital gains are a key issue since they need to make up for the family capital deficits to make this mobility path safer, less vulnerable for a "lower price" (Durst & Bereményi, 2021). Apparently, among these capitals, the most significant ones were available within the social network. The social capital within our focus group was based on mutual trust and its key objective was to provide support for a successful learning path as an asset that provides further opportunities for a wide range of meaningful activities. Social capital came from both informal (between individuals) and formal (organizational) resources (Putnam, 1995). The organizational capital is exemplified primarily by the university setting and the student society community that is subject to this researcher study, with its academic resources, shared set of values and norms that highlight the legitimacy and importance of inclusive communities in higher education.

The efficacy of minority groups supporting each other and being inclusive is confirmed by research (Boros et al., 2021). The inclusiveness captured in the quotes is a good characteristic of the Roma student society, which inspires its members to transition from the role of the supported to the role of supportive mentors, depending on the stage of the resilience-empowerment continuum they are at. Some acting as "translator" role-models to the community of similarly disadvantaged youth (see Adler's theory (1975) of bicultural socialization). So, the process of accumulating positive psychological capital runs parallel with the strengthening of resilience.

We found that, even though Roma student society members came from the most disadvantaged background and lack capitals to the greatest extent, they were also the students who had the highest level of external and intrinsic support during their life course. These supports could be captured as social capital stemming from the family and the school environment, with their family providing

the motivation for learning in a general sense, while teachers provided specific learning support, advice, and guidance for school progress. At the higher education level, the peer community will be the most important social network. In addition to the classmates attending the same courses, belonging to a Roma student society, along with students who have similar fate and mobility path, plays a key role for the focus group members. All this interacts with the positive psychological capital of the individual, which, as an intrinsic drive, maintains resilience, relying on external supportive forces, while constantly reinforcing the individual on an upward path of mobility. The broad community embeddedness as social capital converted into other (financial, cultural, and psychological) capital, helping them accumulate, which in turn guaranteed a successful learning path. It is striking that in all categories, external support was perceived to be higher by student society members, except for inner strength (psychological capital), which was more volatile for them. This suggests that the internal insecurities resulting from the lack of self-confidence can be overridden by the external supportive (inclusive) environment. We also looked at a few cases where social capital was not as strong – either due to lack of family – or school support. We found in those responses, and thus presumably in their life strategies, that these students were like the ones from the C1 group. They compensated for the lack of capital with a strong psychological capital, and they appeared to be more marginalized within the student society. They use another strategy, which presumed to impose higher individual price of mobility, making them more vulnerable.

The originality of our research lies in the fact that we asked students from different socioeconomic backgrounds to reflect on their educational experiences, focusing on their learning paths and their capitals. This has highlighted the differences in terms of social capital between the students coming from lower socioeconomic background who have been supported by the student society and the ones who did not belong to that community (Durst & Bereményi, 2021; Naudet, 2018). We could also examine the impact of this membership on their personal strategies and the cost of mobility. The disparity between lower and higher socioeconomic groups highlighted that the lack of initial capital can be compensated for by joining and combining social networks (Boros et al., 2021). Looking at the life course of the young people interviewed, we found that while teachers together with parents tend to play a more prominent role in the social capital building during the public-school period, university students rely largely on their peers in the higher education arena. Consequently, the formal, and informal communities that provide targeted support for students on

the path of social mobility to strengthen their psychological capital and maintain their resilience have an even more crucial role to play at universities (Gallego-Noche & Goenechea-Permisán, 2022). By increasing the number of small, supportive communities, the increasingly inclusive higher education environment can also reach out to those who have reached higher education alone, without social resources. These inclusive communities, as social (capital) networks, support successful degree attainment and labor market entry, while minimizing the costs of mobility and maximizing capital accumulation and conversion. In doing so, creating happier, more fulfilling adult lives for all (Vitéz, 2021).

Acknowledgement

References

Adler, P. S. (1975) Beyond cultural identity: Reflections on cultural and multicultural man. In Samovar, L.; Porter, R. (Eds.) *Intercultural Communication*. Belmont. CA: Wadsworth. 1975, pp. 327-378.

Bernáth, A. (2019) Integration of the Roma in Hungary in the 2010s. In Tóth, I. Gy. (Eds.) *Hungarian Social Report 2019*, Tárki Társadalomkutatási Intézet Zrt. Budapest, Hungary; pp. 195-214. ISSN 1419-9793

Boros, J., Bogdán, P. & Durst, J. (2021) Accumulating Roma cultural capital: First-in-family graduates and the role of educational talent support programs in Hungary in mitigating the price of social mobility. *Review of Sociology* 2021, 31(3), 74–102. DOI: 10.51624/SZOCSZEMLE.2021.3.4

Cooper, M. (Ed.) (2012) Student Diversity in Higher Education: Conflicting Realities - Tensions affecting policy and action to widen access and participation, European Access Network, London, UK.

Coutu, D. L. (2002) How resilience works. *Harvard Business Review* 2002, 80(5) 46-55. [Retrieved from: https://hbr.org/2002/05/how-resilience-works]

Dunajeva, J. (2023) University Mentoring Programs during the Pandemic: Case Study of Hungarian Roma University Students. *Social Sciences* 12: 111. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12030111

Durst, J. & Bereményi, Á. (2021) "I felt I arrived home": The minority trajectory of mobility for first-in-family Hungarian Roma graduates. In T. M. M. Mendes, T. M. M.; Magano, O.; Toma, S. (Eds.), *Social and economic vulnerability of Roma people*. New York: Springer. 229-249. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52588-0_14

Gallego-Noche, B., & Goenechea-Permisán, C. (2022). What makes them thrive? Protective factors for the academic success of Roma university students: A case study. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/17461979221123009

Lauritzen, S. M. & Nodeland, T. S. (2018). „What is the problem represented to be?" Two decades of research on Roma and education in Europe". *Educational Research Review*. Vol 24, No. 1., pp. 148-169. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.04.002

Luthans, F., Luthans, K. W. & Luthans, B. C. (2004) Positive psychological capital: beyond human and social capital. *Business Horizons*, 2004, 47(1), 45-50. DOI: 10.1016/j.bushor.2003.11.007

Masten, A. S. (2001) Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 2001, 56(3), 227-239. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227

Masten, A. S. (2007) Resilience in developing systems: Progress and promise as the fourth wave rises. *Development and Psychopathology*, 2007, 19(3), 923-930. DOI: 10.1017/S0954579407000442

Naudet, J. (2018) *Stepping into the elite. Trajectories of social achievement in India, France, and the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780199487240

Nolan, J. & Targett, N. (2018) Developing and Sustaining Inclusive Excellence and a Safe, Healthy, Equitable Campus Community at UNH. *Interim Report Presidential Task Force on Campus Climate*. New Hampshire. https://law.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/2018/09/jntaskforcereportandrecommendations_apr20187.pdf

Putnam, R. D. (1995) Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 1995, 6 (1), 65-78.

Rutigliano, A. (2020), "Inclusion of Roma students in Europe: A literature review and examples of policy initiatives", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 228, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/19939019

Simić, N., Vranješevic, J. & Stančić, M. (2019) Roma in Higher Education — Psychological and Social Capital as Factors of Academic Success. In *Andragoške studije*, 2019. 127–148. http://dx.doi.org/10.5937/AndStud1902127S

The Velux Foundation (2019). "Education", in 2019: Roma in Europe.

Vaccaro, A. (2022) Fostering Inclusion through Professional Development: The Case of Faculty Workshops at the University of Rhode Island A Chapter Submitted for: Challenging Higher Education in the 21st Century. *Autonomy and Responsibility Journal of Educational Sciences*. 2022, 7(1), 7-18; DOI: 10.15170/AR.2022.7.1.1.

Vitéz, K. (Ed.) (2021) Inclusive University – Here and Now. University of Pécs, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Education, Pécs. 2021. ISBN 978-963-429-812-0

Yosso, T. J. (2005) Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 2005, 8(1), 69–91. DOI: 10.1080/1361332052000341006