HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WHEN YOU COME FROM AN ETHNIC MINORITY?

THE CASE OF CZECH ROMA

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Population estimated **150,000 – 300,000** (from total Czech population of 10.5 mil.)

90 % low socioeconomical status and extremely high unemployment rate

Segregation and discrimination (workplace & education)

Prejudice on the side of majority:
- **the least likable ethnic minority** in the 2011 national survey
- **high social distance from Roma** found in the research of the Czech Interior Ministry in 2010
SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Watts et al. (1999), Watts et al. (2003), Watts & Flanagan (2007)

How do (young) people become politically engaged

Key part: development of **critical consciousness**
  • understanding of historical, cultural and political forces that produce asymmetry and oppression
  • knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties

Other key components:
  • SPD proceeds in **several stages**
  • SPD is facilitated by „**ecological“** social processes

Theory based mainly on research among Afro-Americans in the U. S.
1. SPD theory describes 5 stages. Do they apply to Czech Roma?

2. What „ecological“ factors facilitate SPD of Czech Roma?

3. What other topics do Czech Roma mention regarding their SPD?

Our approach: Focus on participants’ experience
5 focus groups with 28 Roma males and females

Age 16-26

PIDOP project

Varying level of engagement – from uninterested to full-time community activists

Transcripts coded and analyzed with ATLAS.ti software
1. SPD theory describes 5 stages. Do they apply to Czech Roma?

2. What „ecological“ factors facilitate SPD of Czech Roma?

3. What other topics do Czech Roma mention regarding their SPD?
Person is unaware of social asymmetry: a world is just

„There is some talk about racism here. That's not the point. It's rather an excuse [...] You didn't go to school, you don't have education – I'm sorry, you can't do what you want.“
2. ADAPTIVE STAGE

Asymmetry is acknowledged but it is seen as unchangeable

„There is actually no way how to solve racism. It’s inside everybody. Everybody who is sitting here has it inside.“
Talking about a recent racially motivated attack on Roma girl:

„For example, one black man was shot down in USA and they started to burn the cars. And here? Nothing. Everybody [Roma] was silent and talking about it when watching TV only.“
4. CRITICAL STAGE

Asymmetry is seen as unjust and social change efforts are admitted

“When we were going home [from the workshop in Germany] we decided to establish our own group and to solve the things [...] Mainly, we wanted to give lectures [to other Roma] that life can be different and we can live it in other way than we actually do.”
Real and frequent community involvement

„If somebody called me at midnight and told me: 'come to help me with some demonstration,' and I was interested, I would go. It's not a job – it's an engagement.“
Highly engaged Roma seemed to embrace all perspectives, not only the last one.

One person was able to take different perspectives when talking about different aspects of social asymmetry and discrimination.

„I can see big future [in my project]. If Roma attend non-Roma schools, it will be living proof that things can be different – that not every Roma is a thief and so on. I believe that I can open the mind of white people by this [...] However, it's not always about racism. It can be about one's incompetencies. If somebody can't speak properly, he can't apply for certain job positions. It's a question of finding a balance. Everybody is prejudiced but sometimes it's easier to use it as an excuse than to see my own fault.“
LINEAR DEVELOPMENT, OR GROWING COMPLEXITY?


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ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Very strong emphasis on social support and positive role models from ...

... family

„I'm happy that there was somebody who helped me to learn what I really like. I've known those people since my childhood, therefore they've known my strengths and weaknesses. If they hadn't existed, I would have sat in the pub now.“

... schools, leisure-time groups, & civic organizations

„I think that these things are really good – we have a student council at my school [...] we are solving school problems there, how to help and so on.“
1. SPD theory describes 5 stages. Do they apply to Czech Roma?

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3. What other topics do Czech Roma mention regarding their SPD?
Activists felt trapped between the expectations of their minority and the majority:
• collaborating with hostile majority ("coconuts")
• coming from unpopular minority
• treated as representing whole Roma community
• expected to be an example of "a good Roma"

"Engaged Roma, who go into it really fully, burn out two times faster that you [Czechs]. It's because they are still fighting with two sides. It's difficult and if I should talk about myself, I'm really pissed off when I have to defend whites against Roma, and Roma against whites every day. To be in the middle and fight for something."

"You have not only to do something for the Roma people, but also to be an example of a good Roma for the majority."
CONCLUSIONS

All 5 stages of SPD were found.

However, highly engaged activists were taking multiple perspectives on the situation of Roma (not only socially-critical perspective).

„Ecological“ factors were perceived as strongly facilitating SPD
• family
• schools
• leisure-time groups
• civic organizations

Risk for SPD: activists felt
• trapped in others' expectations
• fighting with both sides
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