

## **And the Poor Gypsies Get Children- The use of Anthropology in Demography**

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### **Introduction**

While most of Europe faces the Dilemma of an Aging Society, in some post-socialist Eastern European countries there seems to be an emergent “underclass”, whose demographic behaviour differs sharply from that of the rest of society.

In Hungary, whilst the majority of the population start bearing children at a much older age (27-28 years old on the average) and have fewer kids than previously recorded, according to some ethnographic studies (some by this author, as well as others), there is a marginalised group of Gypsy ethnicity in the Hungarian society (recently referred to as “the new poor”, or “underclass”), who have started to give birth in their teens and produce a much higher fertility rate than the previous generation during the state socialist period.

Representatives of the “Underclass thesis” (Ladanyi- Szelenyi, 2004), who have adopted J. Wilson’s theory (Wilson, 1998) for the American urban ghetto-poor to Hungarian rural ghetto-poor Gypsies, argue, that social exclusion, in itself, can explain the demographic behaviour of this marginalised group. But so far there is no statistical evidence to verify this distinct hypothesis.

The question remains unanswered: whether is it the social status (being excluded) that is responsible for the increasing fertility rate of the marginalised poor Gypsies or it is their ethnicity (minority status hypothesis, Uhlenberg, 1976). The author of this paper, analysing the data of a national survey called the Poverty and Ethnicity project, 2000, argues that ethnicity in itself has a significant effect only at the lowest level of schooling:

those Gypsies who have not even finished primary school (8 years of schooling), have significantly more children than their non-Gypsy counterparts with the same amount of schooling.

But what is the social meaning of ethnicity? Or put it in other way, what aspects of ethnicity can explain this demographic outcome? Is it the “culture” of the studied Gypsy groups that has an effect on their demographic behaviour? And which concept of the “culture” could help us to better understand the demographic behaviour of the Gypsy Poor that seems to be so different from the majority Hungarian society?

In order to answer these questions for the purposes of this paper, we used our mix-method research in two small North-Hungarian villages where the vast majority of the residents (80%) are of Gypsy origin. We compared our ethnographic findings from the fieldwork with the survey data collected in these studied villages. We argue, that the use of anthropology in demography (see the representatives of “anthropological demography”: e.g. Aaby, P., Basu, A.M. (1998), Ketzer, D. (1995), Greenhalg, S. (1995), the Schneiders (1995) can be very useful when we studying the demography of a minority group like the Hungarian Gypsies.

We are aware of the fact that only a more complex, multidimensional explanatory model can help us to understand the fertility patterns of the studied Gypsy communities. A model, somewhat similar to what is referred to as the “political-economic and cultural theory of demography” by some anthropologists studying demographic issues. (Greenhalg, S., Ketzer, D., 1995). In this model the macrolevel variables- changes in political, economic conditions or schooling-, alongside with the history of the studied groups, as well as the microlevel: family structure, marriage patterns, contraceptive strategies; and the culture of the given community have their own and complex effects on fertility behaviour.

Nevertheless this paper, in its attempt to answer the aforementioned questions, concentrate only one factor of the reproductive behaviour of the two studied Gypsy communities, namely the family formation (marriage pattern and adolescent

motherhood). We address the puzzle: whilst the two studied villages's Gypsy population are in the same social position (both live residentially segregated, the majority of both of them are unemployed and high school drop-outs), there is a significant difference in their family formation's pattern (eg.in the proportion of the teenage mothers ).

On the basis of our intensive fieldwork, and of our ethnographic findings, we argue, that although social status has a huge effect on reproductive behaviour, we can not understand the differences without analysing the characteristics of the studied groups's social networks and their impact on fertility decisions.

### **Research methodology**

This paper is based on a mix-method research. The author has benefited from years of extensive fieldwork and survey data collection in two "ghettoised" („Gypsified") villages. We have used historical, both written and narrative sources and documents. We have worked with archival documents, that is birth, marriage, and death records; analysed school records, and carried out in-depth interviews with all the village residents aged 14 and above. These ethnographic and empirical data will be serving as the ground that we will base our arguments on in this paper.

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