

Mind the Gap: Promoting Social Inclusion in Higher Education at the International Level

Radu Lacatus

Key words: higher education, systemic approach, international and Roma students, promoting active and social inclusion, positive.

1. Context

This summer I have taken part in the University of Sussex HEIM Summer School, organised with the Roma Education Fund, as part of the Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility (HEIM) project. While I have been here I have learned a lot of things. In particular, I have noticed an extraordinary *international* academic environment that encompasses many specialties and a huge number of students and nationalities from all over the world. During this time, I have also had access to public and intellectual debates about the social inclusion process. Alongside this, the positive energy and enthusiasm I felt here at the University of Sussex, led me to consider the relationship between this *international* academic environment and the process of social inclusion. In particular, I am interested in the link between subjects of study and social inclusion, particularly for Roma. In this sense, I tried to identify a series of questions, establish a theoretical approach, develop a methodology based on my personal interpretation (approach) and, finally, try to identify a series of conclusions. While this data is based on my personal assumptions, it does indicate the importance of thinking about inclusion for Roma as an international level and highlights the need for further study.

2. Research Questions

The questions I became interested in were:

1. Do we have a chance to promote social inclusion in higher education careers at the international level?
2. In what academic fields can we promote more social inclusion in comparison with other fields?
3. It is necessary to invest in the academic space for Roma students in order to promote social inclusion?

3. Background

The World Bank (2017) define social inclusion as a “process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society - improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity”. Following the definition of this social inclusion concept, Rawls (1999) brings

arguments on the promotion of justice for all people and states “everyone has the right to protection and justice from society, so the system/society cannot overcome this value (p. 53).

For increased understanding of social inclusion, specifically for the Roma population, Hancock proposes the following positive action:

Sitting down and talking, getting to know each other are equals, is the first step to starting this process. And who knows – when you get to know us better, you might discover fascinating aspects of the Romani world that you’ve never existed. You can be a very real factor in the future peace and stability of your country. (2002, page 109).

However, Triandis (1971) underlines a number of difficulties of this approach based on the power differences when working with poorer populations, noting that:

Regarding the power relationship between two different ethnic groups, the emergence of discrimination can arise in the context in which an ethnic group holds power and obtains economic advantages that they do not want to share with the other ethnic group (page 117,).

In my opinion, the transfer of knowledge acquired through higher education can produce a significant change in terms of social inclusion, particularly for Roma populations, to enable them to get out of the “state of vulnerability” where they entered without their will.

4. Research methodology

I became curious about how the subjects studied by international students and also Roma students at the higher education level are related in this emerging process called social inclusion. In this regard, because this international academic environment/world was very new for me, I have tried to identify in different web pages what kinds of subjects of study/disciplines exist at international level, especially at Sussex University (<http://www.sussex.ac.uk>) for undergraduate, master and doctoral studies. So, I studied web pages and I collected a total of 34 subject disciplines that are offered to students.

These 34 fields are: Social work and social care; Sociology; Psychology; Religion; Political Science; Education; Public Policy; Management; Medicine; Philosophy; Anthropology; History; International development; International relations; Law; Media; Film; Literature; Journalism; Music; Culture; Art; Design; English and Language Studies; Economy; Business; Biochemistry; Chemistry; Neuroscience; Mathematics; Physics and Astronomy; Engineering; Informatics; Geography.

In order to analyse the relation of these domains/fields to the social inclusion process, I have allocated a series of criteria for these. In this sense I have identified 3 criteria based on my professional experience working for the inclusion of Roma in Romania and my readings about social inclusion encountered during my time at Sussex.

In this regard, these criteria are:

- Arts and Humanities with social justice focus to work directly in the social grassroots level or social services such as Social Work, Psychology, etc.
- Arts and Humanities such as Media, Film, Literature, etc.

- Hard Sciences such as Mathematics, Chemistry, etc.

After grouping the disciplines together using these three criteria, I tried to propose three categories in the sense of identification the level of relation of these fields with the social inclusion process. I proposed 3 levels of relationship: strongly related, somewhat related and not related to social inclusion. My assumption was that these disciplines studied will become jobs for these students and they will work in different countries and in different public entities according to their specialisations and tasks related to these jobs. Consequently, I have tried to identify this potential referring to the relationship between different fields and social inclusion for both International students and Roma students. I was curious if this **positive potential in social inclusion process** exists, both for students who are learning in this international environment, but also for Roma students who learn preponderantly in the national environment. This is outlined below:

Level 1 - Identifying the potential relationship between disciplines and social inclusion in general

International students at international higher education level – in general

Arts and Humanities with social justice focus	Arts and Humanities	Hard Sciences
Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
Fields	Fields	Fields
Fields	Fields	Fields
....

Roma students at national higher education level – in general

Arts and Humanities with social justice focus	Arts and Humanities	Hard Sciences
Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
Fields	Fields	Fields

Level 2 - Identifying the potential and the relationship between disciplines and social inclusion in different level of actions:

1. Grassroots level
2. Social services at local level
3. European projects
4. Public policies at the national level

International students at international higher education level and level of actions

Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
1 Social services at local level		
2 European projects		
3 Public policies at the national level		
Fields	Fields	Fields
Fields	Fields	Fields
....

Roma students at national higher education level and level of actions

Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
1 Social services at local level		
2 European projects		
3 Public policies at the national level		
Fields	Fields	Fields
Fields	Fields	Fields
....

5. Limits of my exploratory research

According to my model, however my research still has limits, because I decided not to analyse the different social protection models that exist in many countries, which is why the three criteria we tried to be as general as possible. For example, in a country where the neoliberal paradigm is predominant, their social protection system can be very different from a country where there is a social protection model based on social democracy. In the same context, I have not analysed the cultural and social barriers that can be built during the 3 or 5 years of study at an international level for students who are learning in this academic environment, where these students could build other values, other social identities, other expectations that may come in contradiction with the organisational culture of the future workplace. Moreover, due to the graduate labour market instability, it may not be that a subject of study has a direct link between a students' likelihood of a job in that area or a focus on inclusion.

6. Results based on my personal assumptions

Level 1 - Identifying the potential and the relationship between fields and social inclusion in generally

International students at international higher education level – in general

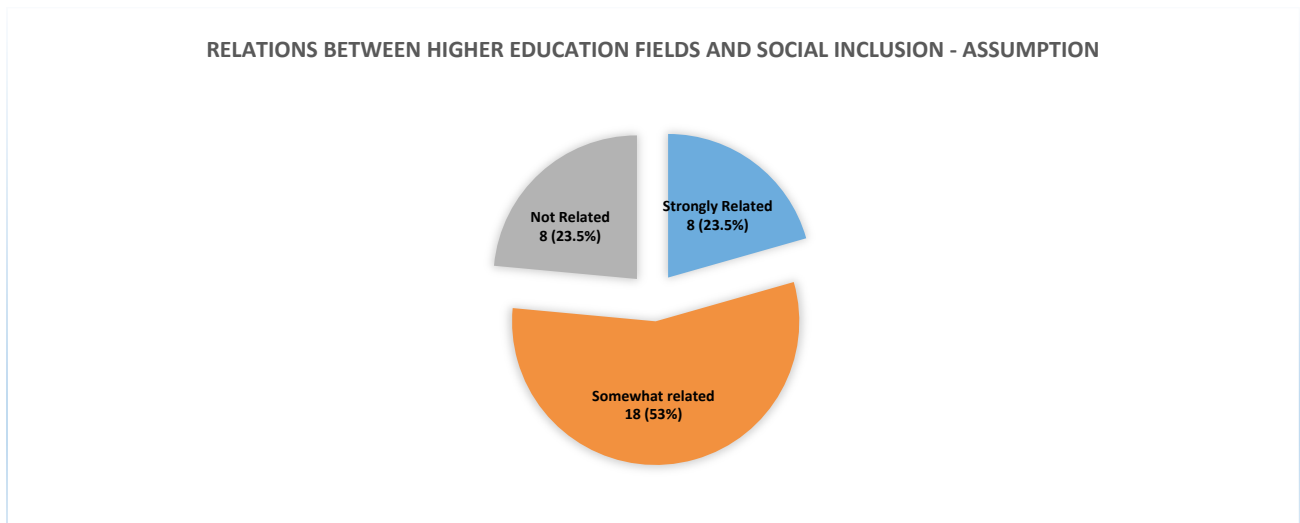
Arts and Humanities with social justice focus	Arts and Humanities	Hard Sciences
--	----------------------------	----------------------

CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND EQUITY RESEARCH (CHEER)

School of Education and Social Work | University of Sussex | Essex House | Brighton BN1 9RH | United Kingdom
www.sussex.ac.uk/cheer

Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
Social work and social care Sociology Psychology Religion Political Science Education Public Policy Medicine	Management Philosophy Anthropology History International development International relations Law Media Film Literature Journalism Music Culture Art Design English and Language Studies Economy Business	Biochemistry Chemistry Neuroscience Mathematics Physics and Astronomy Engineering Informatics Geography

Source: author



Source: author

Of the 34 fields, I considered that only 8 fields could be strongly related to social inclusion because I considered these fields to be closer to people or families involved in the process of social inclusion. In addition to these 8 areas that are strongly related, I considered that 18 fields are somewhat related to social inclusion because these fields are not close to the people or families involved in the social inclusion process, but can contribute to a certain extent in the process of social inclusion. While my assumption might be erroneous, yet there is a potential of over 60-65% of these fields that can be associated with the social inclusion process in sense of the potential. For example, I have not decided whether fields such as

anthropology, economics, business, and international relations are strongly related to social inclusion, but in the end I considered that these fields are somewhat related to social inclusion. However, if this analysis is carried out in depth, these fields allocated to somewhat related to social inclusion can be allocated to strongly related with social inclusion.

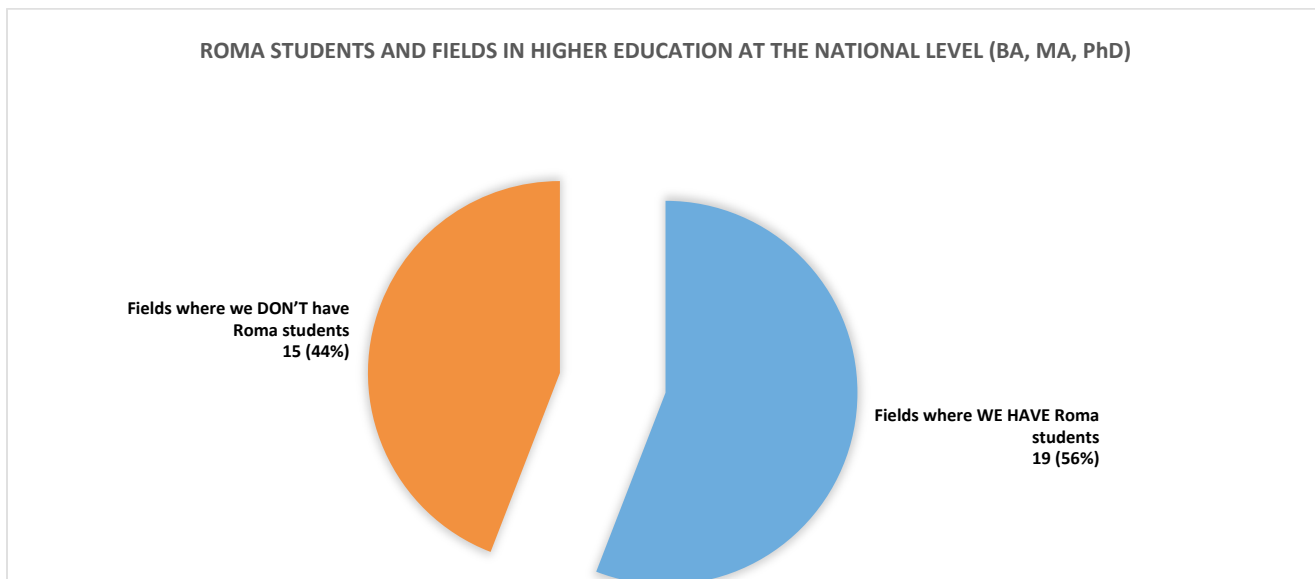
Naturally, this exploratory analysis led me to the question of identifying areas where Roma students can be included in this higher education level at national level.

Question: At the national level in which fields do we have Roma students?

Roma students at national higher education level and level of actions

Arts and Humanities with social justice focus	Arts and Humanities	Hard Sciences
Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social work and social care 2. Sociology 3. Psychology 4. Religion 5. Political Science 6. Education 7. Public Policy 8. Medicine 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management 2. Philosophy 3. Anthropology 4. History 5. International development 6. International relations 7. Law 8. Media 9. Film 10. Literature 11. Journalism 12. Music 13. Culture 14. Art 15. Design 16. English and Language Studies 17. Economy 18. Business 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biochemistry 2. Chemistry 3. Neuroscience 4. Mathematics 5. Physics and Astronomy 6. Engineering 7. Informatics 8. Geography

Source: author



Source: author

Out of these 34 fields, I have tried to identify in which of them exists Roma students at the national level in faculty, master, PhD. In this identification process, using data from the Roma Education Fund scholarships and my own knowledge. Again, there are possibilities for error, but I think is important to explore with further research. In any case, I identified a number of 19 fields where Roma students can be included, which I consider to be a major potential both for the level of higher education and also for the potential that these Roma students represent in the process of social inclusion. In this model of exploratory analysis, I identified another key question, but I cannot answer in this essay, because I do not have access to such databases. Anyway, the question is: How many Roma students are involved in higher education at the international level?

For Level 2 in my analysis, I will use these tables above, and for accuracy I will keep in color, fields allocated also for Roma students.

Level 2 - Identifying the potential and the relationship between fields and social inclusion in different level of actions:

1. Social services at local level
2. European projects
3. Public policies at the national level

Social services at local level

Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
1 Social services at a local level		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social work and social care 2. Sociology 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Political Science 2. Management 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biochemistry 2. Chemistry

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Psychology 4. Religion 5. Education 6. Public Policy 7. Medicine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Music 4. Culture 5. Economy 6. Business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Neuroscience 4. Mathematics 5. Physics and Astronomy 6. Engineering 7. Informatics 8. Geography 9. Philosophy 10. Anthropology 11. History 12. International development 13. International relations 14. Law 15. Media 16. Film 17. Literature 18. Journalism 19. Art 20. Design 21. English and Language Studies
---	---	--

Source: author

When this analysis is carried out within different levels of action in the field of social inclusion, the initial situation could be suffered some changes. For example, in the case of the social inclusion process that takes place through social services at the local level. I consider that, a number of 12 fields do not think they can associate with social inclusion and social services at local level within a municipality or county level. In this respect, the major change in this level of analysis is the fact that 12 fields I consider that in the case of social services, they should be allocated to “not related to social inclusion”. In the same context, the 7 fields assigned for strongly related have the same characteristics for both international students and Roma students at the national level.

European projects

Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
2. European projects		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social work and social care 2. Sociology 3. Psychology 4. Religion 5. Political Science 6. Education 7. Public Policy 8. Medicine 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biochemistry 2. Chemistry 3. Neuroscience 4. Mathematics 5. Physics and Astronomy 6. Engineering 7. Informatics 8. Geography

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Management 10. Philosophy 11. Anthropology 12. History 13. International development 14. International relations 15. Law 16. Media 17. Film 18. Literature 19. Journalism 20. Music 21. Culture 22. Art 23. Design 24. English and Language Studies 25. Economy 26. Business 		
--	--	--

In the case of the analysis of the relationship between the level of action European projects and the process of social inclusion, I have noticed that in this case there is greater freedom of action and then I consider that the fields assigned initially to “somewhat related with social inclusion”, should be interpreted as “strongly related with the social inclusion process”. In this context, I can state that compared to the social services within a municipality, where the organizational culture is difficult to change, within the European projects the dynamics is much higher in the case of the relation between the fields and the social inclusion process due to the diversity of European project delivery in the field of social inclusion.

Public policies at the local and national level

Strongly related with social inclusion	Somewhat related with social inclusion	Not related with social inclusion
3 Public policies at the national level		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social work and social care 2. Sociology 3. Psychology 4. Religion 5. Political Science 6. Education 7. Public Policy 8. Medicine 9. Management 10. Philosophy 11. Anthropology 12. International development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Film 2. Literature 3. Journalism 4. English and Language Studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biochemistry 2. Chemistry 3. Neuroscience 4. Mathematics 5. Physics and Astronomy 6. Engineering 7. Informatics 8. Geography

<p>13. International relations</p> <p>14. Law</p> <p>15. Media</p> <p>16. Economy</p> <p>17. Business</p> <p>18. History</p> <p>19. Music</p> <p>20. Culture</p> <p>21. Art</p> <p>22. Design</p>		
---	--	--

Source: author

In the case of the analysis of the relationship between the level of action public policies at the local and national level and the process of social inclusion, I have noticed that in this case almost the same as in the case of the analysis of European projects. In this case, I am not sure whether the 4 fields that have remained in category “somewhat related to social inclusion” can make a decisive contribution to the process of social inclusion, but if these studies are carried out in depth, these my personal interpretations/assumption may be well founded more concrete and clear.

7. Conclusions

There is the definite chance to promote social inclusion in higher education at the international level. In particular, I think it is necessary to invest in higher academic study for Roma students in order to promote social inclusion. We have approximately 10,000 Roma students in higher education in Europe, representing a tremendous human potential of Roma students as agents of social inclusion. On a personal level, the investment at PhD level from University of Sussex and REF from Roma Students during the summer school has been a fantastic way in order to produce knowledge and facilitate positive change for Roma communities working in the social inclusion process.

8. Bibliography

1. Rawls, J. (1999) *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press.
2. Hancock, I. (2002). *We are the Romani people*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.
3. Triandis, H. C. (1971). *Attitude and Attitude Change*. University of Illinois: John Wiley&Sons.
4. Parsons, T. (1954). *Essays in Sociological Theory*. New York: The Free Press.
5. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1059&langId=en>
6. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialdevelopment/brief/social-inclusion>
7. <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/>
8. <http://www.romaeducationfund.org/>