

## **Communicative Strategy for the Implementation of a Dynamic Model for Partial Desegregation of Roma Education in Bulgaria**

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**Abstract:** Between the end of the summer and the late autumn of 2018, a field survey was conducted in the municipality of Sliven in order to collect data for establishing the current state of integration and inclusion of Roma children and students in the municipality. Based on the fieldwork, three models were developed for mutual inclusion and integration of children and students in the municipality. The first one, which is the subject of this paper, offers the possibility of partial desegregation in the education of the Roma in Nadezhda district.

**Keywords:** inclusion, integration, dynamic model, Roma, desegregation.

## **Комуникативна стратегия при реализиране на динамичен модел за частична десегрегация на ромското образование в България**

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**Абстракт:** От края на лятото до късната есен на 2018 г. беше проведено мониторингово теренно изследване в община Сливен с цел събирането на достоверна информация за установяване актуалното състояние на процесите на интеграция и приобщаване на ромските деца и ученици в общината. На базата на изготвения мониторинг, бяха разработени три модела за взаимно приобщаване и интеграция на децата и учениците в общината. Първият от тях, който е обект на настоящата разработка, предлага възможност за частична десегрегация в образованието на ромите в кв. „Надежда”.

**Ключови думи:** приобщаване, интеграция, динамичен модел, роми, десегрегация.

### **Introduction**

The Roma population in the District of Nadezhda in Sliven is more than 20,000 people. At this stage of the development of Sliven municipality, the complete closure of schools serving the Roma population in the district and the removal of all children and students enrolled in them may lead to the deprivation of educational services. Therefore, the model we are proposing to implement is intended to partially overcome segregated education in both schools – Bratya Miladinovi Primary School and Yuri Gagarin Primary School, which serve Roma children and students from the District of Nadezhda by organising their joint training with children and students from all other primary and secondary schools with upper secondary education in the city after completion of the primary stage (I-IV grade).

## 1. Methodology, hypothesis and brief theoretical overview

The methodology of the proposed study is developed in two stages. The first one is related to the monitoring of the processes of inclusion and educational integration in Sliven municipality between August and November 2018. The monitoring was carried out on the basis of the following:

- a survey of the demographic characteristics of the Roma population;
- identification of problems related to Roma education;
- a survey with questionnaire of kindergartens and schools;
- pedagogical specialists and parents;
- interviews with mayors of settlements and interviews with the head of the RUO, headmasters and NGO representatives;
- analysis of the educational documentation (at kindergartens and schools in the municipality) related to the planning of the processes of inclusion and educational integration and their continuous monitoring the studied municipality.

The second stage of the research is based on the development of three models for mutual inclusion and integration of children and students in the municipality. The first of one, which is the subject of this paper, offers the possibility of partial desegregation in the education of the Roma in Nadezhda.

Prior to its current appearance, it was offered to 38 experts, pre-selected by certain criteria, for **verification** via e-mail. 30 experts have prepared and provided their expert evaluation. Most numerous among them is the group of educators - 14 people. The philologists are 4, the historians are 3, sociologists and ethnologists are 2, one philosopher and one political scientist. The other three experts are nuclear physicist, mathematician and national security specialist.

The ones with master's degree are 16 and 14 hold PhDs. 5 are associate professors and the professors are 2. The ethnic representation is also interesting. Most experts have self-identified as Bulgarians - 23 people, 6 are Roma, and one has self-identified as Turkish.

**The hypothesis** of the study is based on the assumption that the problems of mutual inclusion and educational integration between Roma and non-Roma in Sliven will be significantly improved by creating conditions for widening the communication circle between Roma and non-Roma, starting with mixing students with different ethnic backgrounds in all municipal schools in the city which provide secondary stage of education.

Nowadays, the number of Roma children and students studying and socialising in the two main segregated schools in Nadezhda and also moving up to high school is symbolic. The reasons for this are rooted in the fear of meeting with the representatives of the macro-culture and partly in the awareness of the deficits of the education received in the segregated school - all as a result of the narrow communication circles. The lack of communication between the adolescent Roma in Nadezhda and the majority of the city nurtures fear and negative stereotypes, and later appears to be a major prerequisite for hate and aggression against each other. According to Aleksandar Krastev (2019: 55), communication is a basic human function "People as emotional beings communicate to express their thoughts, feelings. Through communication, we show what we want or do not want. This is a basic skill by which we reveal our needs to others. It is important to develop and improve our communication skills in understanding and partnering with others. Only in this way we will be able to show what we feel and be understood. If we learn to communicate non-violently, we have a real chance of turning others into like-minded people, instead of considering them to be an obstacle in the way of reaching our desires and goals." [1]

As early as 2002, Krasimir Kanev stated that “the processes of the progressive isolation of the Roma in the recent years to the point where the two communities, the Bulgarian and the Roma, especially in the big cities, live in conditions of actual apartheid. Their shared communication space is progressively narrowing and differences in their communicative competence are steadily widening. And those communicative spaces that remain are rather maintaining and reinforcing prejudices than reducing them.” [2]

For the early counteraction to this negative phenomenon, Yanka Totseva proposes her own scenarios for diversity management in a school called “promoting mutual adaptation. In it, everyone involved accepts and understands differences and diversity, accepting and recognising that adaptation to one another is necessary.” [3] For Diana Dimitrova “There is no better place than a school for a great opportunity to initiate a peaceful and benevolent coexistence between ethnicities and cultures” [4]. Plamen Makariev connects the solution of these problems in education through training in a multicultural environment, where the processes of tolerance and recognition are leading. “It is in the spirit of multiculturalism to seek solutions to problems in this area by harmonising relationships, not by, say, giving privilege to one identity over others or by undermining all identity problems” [5]. Krasimir Kanev is even more direct in his statement: “Getting out of the ghetto by enrolling in a “normal” school is a fall into another social orbit, social and cultural innovation with lasting effects on the life prospects of the Roma” [6].

## **2. Reason for organising the model**

It is well-known that in the initial stage of education, all children, including Roma, go to school on their own will. Although the educational services in the two primary schools offered to the preschool children and students of Nadezhda is homogeneous, the Roma children are of such an age that it is easy to attach themselves to a good teacher, to become more accustomed to school life (stress conditions in a homogeneous environment are significantly less than in a heterogeneous one), and to acquire general knowledge and culture. The available school facilities in the neighborhood can be fully utilised for full-day children's centers with preparatory groups (due to insufficient capacity of the kindergarten /Kindergarten Zvezditsa in Dame Gruev District/ and the newly opened kindergarten Nadezhda in the neighborhood of the same name) with an initial training stage with a full-time training option and a variety of elective training groups. In other words, both schools, whose facilities are at an acceptable level, can become, with little means, a natural springboard for education, upbringing and socialization in the upper school age, but already in a heterogeneous environment, outside the segregated Roma educational environment.

Studies with students at this age lead to the belief that education just after grade IV should no longer be in a separate neighborhood. It is upon reaching puberty that the Roma need to break the enchanted circle of ‘the family, the street and the local school’. This frame in which their lives have existed so far is already narrow for them. Self-expression in a new environment (among their peers from other ethnic groups) would prove to be a huge stimulator for the positive development of the children from the isolated neighborhood. In this environment they will learn to speak Bulgarian language; to compete with the best performing students; to form a sense of the good, the beautiful, the modern, the universal; good manners and behavior that are valuable to both ethno-cultural backgrounds, etc. During this period the young person at this age receives a new and more appropriate social situation in which to build upon and distinguish himself as a unique individual entity. Thus, the chances of Roma children to socialise with their other peers from the city and to receive better knowledge are significantly increased. Those who

manage to outgrow their original environment are likely to return to it one day to work for its spiritual growth. In other words, there are educated and intelligent people already from the Nadezhda District community that pull it forward.

While implementing this model we should take into account the fact that in the formation of the administrative districts for the admission of students in first grade, the Municipality of Sliven included the Nadezhda District in the Central district, at the request of the parents, the children from the district can also be enrolled in educational institutions downtown. However, this right at this stage in practice remains only a theory. There are many reasons for that. From the ignorance about such a right by the vast majority of Roma parents, their neglect for the value of having good education as a value, to the fear of facing the outside the ethnic minority. The implementation of the model aims to change the attitude towards education in significant part of the Roma community.

### **3. Description of the model**

The two primary schools serving Roma children and students from Nadezhda are being transformed into separate primary schools. The next step is to direct the 4th grade graduates to the host schools. The aim is to keep the two problematic schools with offering only primary education. The children in the preparatory groups and in the elementary classes are trained in homogeneous formations. Upon completion of primary education, Roma children are organised and mixed with other peers in all secondary schools within the city.

In order to prevent leakage of non-Roma children from the foster school to other schools in the city, it is necessary to ensure equal admission of Roma children from Nadezhda in all schools with secondary education. The desired mix ratio between the students coming from Nadezhda and those attending the host school should be up to 30/70 % in favor of the students in the host school so not to allow a situation of secondary segregation and dissatisfaction with foster parents.

### **4. Conditions for implementation**

The host schools are outside the large Roma neighborhood. However, in order to be successful in this way of work, the following important conditions must be met:

1) In order to successfully implement the idea with the day-care centers, it is necessary to create an educational technology for working in a preparatory group, which includes the development of the necessary knowledge, skills and competences in the children and help them first of all master the Bulgarian language. The overall work with the children in the pre-school groups and the students in the initial stage of Nadezhda in both schools should have a strong emphasis on the formation of good manners and hygiene skills, because for the unbiased Bulgarian citizen this is in fact the most obvious which sets them apart from their other peers.

2) Teachers should be specially prepared to work with students with Roma and / or Turkish mother tongue, motivated to work professionally and should be involved in the cause of education and the parents of their graduates. The special training of teachers is expressed in the knowledge of the phonetic and syntactic features of the Romani and Turkish languages, of the Roma history, cultural traditions and festive rituals, the mastering of the mechanisms of secondary socialisation and acculturation, working in a team with an educational mediator and / or social worker. The motivation for professional work is related first and foremost to the financial incentive, and this is already a fact in our educational system by linking the

qualification with “Ordinance No. 15 of July 22, 2019 on the status and professional development of teachers, principals and other pedagogical specialists” [7].

3) Organisation of Sunday schools for parents from the municipality and with its financial support, as well as with the methodological assistance of REM (Regional Education Management) - Sliven, in which better educated parents can educate the more uneducated. Meetings with celebrities, including those of Roma origin, should be part of their work. At the same time, the ethnic Bulgarian parent should not be overestimated (as is practiced so far) and he should also be involved in the Sunday schools. Many of the reasons for the difficult situation with welded segregation from the recent past and especially secondary education segregation at the moment is due to the negative prejudices and discriminatory attitudes of Bulgarian parents towards Roma parents and their children. There is a great deal of mistrust, but it is about time to start working on this problem instead of comforting it.

Organised work with both Roma parents and non-Roma parents should be the focus of the main activities of the municipality, the schools and kindergartens in the city. For the successful implementation of this model, the role of non-Roma parents, to the classes whose children will be included in the fifth grade with Roma, is crucial. The experience from the recent past shows that their resistance is quite high and if a good information campaign about the municipal educational policy for inclusion is not implemented, many negative reactions will follow and public tension will be created. Overcoming mutual prejudice is one of the most important conditions for the success of the endeavor. At the same time, Roma parents who wish their children to study in mixed educational institutions from a pre-school age should be encouraged, not deterred or restricted.

4) Active participation in the overall educational work of educational mediators, teacher's aides (for working with children with SEN (special educational needs)) and social workers as needed. They will serve as intermediaries in the partnership between teachers, parents and children in order to overcome cultural barriers easier, and in particular to attract and retain children and students at risk of dropping out, searching for and enrolling unregistered children in educational institutions and etc.

5) Organising attractive extracurricular activities in the fields of speaking, dancing, music, sports, IT technologies, etc.

6) Permanent exchange visits and joint participation with students from both transformed elementary schools serving Roma children and students in Nadezhda Quarter and from all other host schools in the city for the purpose of getting to know each other.

7) Well-planned, focused and organised preparation by the municipality and the Roma for the process of mixing in the host schools after grade IV for both Roma and non-Roma children. In other words - the children from Nadezhda District, throughout their period of education, upbringing and socialisation in the initial stage, live with the expectation that they will go to another school outside their neighborhood in a new educational environment with new friends belonging to different ethnicities with whom the Roma coexist in the city and have already met many non-Roma peers in different inter-school activities. Non-Roma children from foster schools are also trained with the view that their peers, who come from the Nadezhda District of Sliven, will flow into their classes. Some of them are distinguished by their anthropological traits, by their knowledge in more than one language, which is why not all are fluent in Bulgarian, some of the Roma families face serious financial difficulties, etc., but their peers must be welcomed, because it will also be their school.

8) Significant improvement of the material and technical base of the transformed primary schools, emphasising the creation of conditions for mastering modern IT technologies.

9) It is very important that Roma parents are also ensured in terms of their future cooperation in the distribution of their children after completing an initial stage in schools in the city. The challenge for municipal government here is how to ensure that Roma parents' consent is distributed to all schools with a high school diploma in the city in order to avoid segregation in some of the closest neighborhoods. It is recommended that the enrollment is done on a family basis - then the Roma parents show the highest degree of consent and assistance.

10) To seek the assistance of the mayor of the Nadezhda District for the implementation of the model. An obligation to implement the model needs to become an integral part of his professional duties.

11) A very important element of the steps for the successful implementation of the model is the attraction of Roma teachers (both mother tongue Romanes and Turkish) in all schools, especially in segregated and transformed elementary schools. Children in segregated schools need role models from their own environment. Roma teachers can be ideal models for young students. What is currently observed with the recruitment of these schools, however, is in the opposite direction - it turns out that for young teachers of Roma origin to get into "Roma" schools is nearly impossible because teachers there have the highest salaries and they "defend" their positions until retirement..

## **5. Functions of the key actors in the educational process**

For each major group with a key involvement in the educational process, a wide range of activities is recommended to improve the overall educational process.

### **5.1. Children in preparatory groups and students in school**

The existence of only one kindergarten in the Nadezhda Quarter is already a fact and it has been operating since the end of 2018 with 2 nurseries and 4 full day groups in the kindergarten. The limited intake of children is determined by the available capacity. For all compulsory pre-school children in Nadezhda District, conditions have been created to study in pre-school preparatory groups in both primary schools. Nevertheless, part of the neighborhood children, it is unclear what proportion, never crosses the threshold of the educational institution, denies illiteracy, and this results in a difficult socialisation in society and lack of prospects for realisation on the labor market.

The fact is that Roma children from Nadezhda District, unlike other children in the city, still spend most of their time up to the age of 6-7 on the street. Keeping them in large school rooms for long periods of time does not help them integrate into the system. The solution is to have more kindergartens, with fewer children in groups, and to have a program to oversee their education along with support to parents in order to avoid dropouts.

The efforts of teachers, as well as educational mediators and social workers who work with them (the forthcoming implementation of the Support for Success project will also allow the recruitment of such support staff) should not only be directed towards the traditional absorption of literary Bulgarian language and mental work habits of their graduates, but also to fill their lack of knowledge of the outside world and social adaptation to the requirements for living in the conditions of the Bulgarian cultural model. At the same time, in order to avoid the assimilation prerequisites in their education, learning about the building blocks of Roma culture should be an integral part of the education and upbringing of Roma children at this age. It should be clear that some of the students in these schools are Turkish-speaking Muslims whose parents prefer to identify themselves as Turks. The right to self-determination is a legitimate. It is necessary to respect the ethno-cultural identity of all groups (local communities) involved in the

implementation of the model, whether they identify themselves as Bulgarians, Roma, Turks, Armenians, Jews, Karakachans or Millets [8]. Respect for different mother tongues, folklore, holidays, rituals and customs is an indispensable element in the process of mutual recognition and respect for different cultures and one of the most significant aspects of the contemporary school's intercultural nature.

The completion of the preparation of children for the first grade should be done with a test study that determines the level of school readiness of each child. Its results should be passed on to the elementary teacher, who will be able to individualize and differentiate his / her work from the first days of the first grade so as to create the best conditions for every first-grader to have a good start in school. The form of education in both schools should be full-time. Full-day training provides children with maximum stay in the Bulgarian-language environment created by the teacher, educational mediator, social worker, teacher's aide (for work with children with SEN) and support staff (who usually do not respect school rules and speak to children in their mother tongue) . In this way, the young students will be immersed in study duties and children's games all day long, which is preferably the alternative to preparing alone at home.

In order to be interesting and attractive, it's necessary that the training in the two Roma neighborhood schools, preferred by the parents, has to offer more interactive models of education (situational, discussion and experienced / empirical); regular school attendance should be a condition for participation in different cultural and educational groups, participation in concerts, competitions, excursions; attracting well-known musicians and artists in the public space with elementary school student programs. At the same time, more work is needed with small groups within the classes to identify their skills (scientific, artistic, professional) and to work in this direction. Students are individuals with different capacities, family upbringing and knowledge, so individual work should be emphasised more than work in a class where a common approach is applied. More mediators need to be attracted for this purpose, for example, each mediator should be responsible for 25-30 children, not 1-2 mediators for the whole school.

Unregistered and unaccompanied children and students should be submitted to the established interinstitutional group working on the mechanism for the return of children to educational institutions.

## **5.2. Pedagogical specialists in educational institutions and educational mediators**

Primary school teachers from both district schools retain their jobs, provided that the number of students enrolled remains unchanged. Secondary school teachers (V-VII class) move their jobs to host schools in the city, along with the relocation of their students to them.

By blending Roma with non-Roma students in foster schools and the presence of graduates who need general and additional support, teachers in these schools will experience a lack of familiarity with the mechanisms for teaching in a multicultural environment and the specifics of working in the field of inclusive education. Compensation for this deficit is partly possible through the inclusion in training courses offered by training companies approved by the MES, both for training teachers for work in a multicultural educational environment and for education through inclusive education.

Another challenge for the successful work with children and students from ethnic minorities in the implementation of this model is that often the pedagogical professionals will be lacking knowledge of the ethno-cultural characteristics of the Roma, Armenians, Karakachans and Jews who inhabit the city, and the Roma and Karakachans in the surrounding villages. Officially approved training organisations offer intercultural trainings, but most often with the participation of trainers who are not authentically carrying these cultures. It is understood that, through their work, such trainers more often affirm their own biases towards minorities (especially Roma) while carrying their work.

The additional qualification of teachers is, in principle, linked to “Ordinance No. 15 of July 22, 2019 on the status and professional development of teachers, principals and other pedagogical specialists” [9], and has already been supported by a financial incentive. At the same time, the opportunities for advanced training of pedagogical specialists tested through the years consist of open lessons and discussions after them, exchange of experience with successful, related educational institutions. These have been carried out in Sliven and its neighboring villages.

It is suggested that future teachers who are now studying in the pedagogical faculties of their universities will be better trained in these areas of knowledge. Already in their undergraduate curriculum, prospective teachers can choose subjects such as inclusive, intercultural and civic education, interaction in a multicultural environment, hygiene and health education, among others. This choice is the result of the need for higher education for teachers to have the appropriate level of competence to work in multicultural groups and classes. As Boryana Zdravkova (1918: 36-44) points out, “the need for children and students from minority groups to be captured and detained in educational institutions predetermines the need for future preschool and primary teachers (and in general all teachers - B.) to be well prepared for effective pedagogical interactions in mixed groups and classes. “ Evidence of the importance of teachers being able to work successfully with students from different cultures is the inclusion in recent years of more and more disciplines in this field in some pedagogical majors [10].

Teachers from the surveyed municipality will have the opportunity to be supported by newly appointed educational mediators and / or social workers in the 2019/2020 academic year under the Support for Success project. For the last 15 years or more, a lot of experience has been gained from the work of the so-called “Teacher's assistant” (<sup>1</sup> A rather controversial assistant position in Bulgarian education. Some pedagogical specialists claim that the assistant has a place in the Bulgarian education. Another part finds that it hinders more rather than creating the preconditions for successful work. Another part dismissed it as unnecessary, despite its intermediary functions between the educational institution and the family.). In any case, the educational mediator (as already regulated in the new PII) will be much more successful in practice if the requirements for his appointment meet the following conditions:

- to come from a community whose children will be served;
- to know and coexist with the language and culture of this community;
- be a recognised informal leader, sought after and respected by his community;
- the requirement for secondary education to be ignored in cases where applicants with such education are missing.

Specialised basic training is a necessary and mandatory condition, but no training company approved for this activity by the MON offers such training. Educational mediators can also take care of their own qualifications by: creating their own civic formations through which to gather, discuss and offer lessons learned; creation of own platform for sharing experience and materials for work; Facebook communication groups and more in order to avoid misunderstandings in the appointment of such support staff, Maya Grekova suggests in his selection that “it is decisive for the teacher to work with him”. [11]

### **5.3. The parents of Roma and non-Roma children**

The municipal administration of Sliven, with funding from the municipal budget and in cooperation with the non-governmental sector and with the methodological assistance of RUO, seeks to open the so-called “schools for parents” or “Sunday schools” for both Roma and non-Roma parents in which the parents can be subject to certain education services.

For illiterate Roma parents captured by the so called “illiteracy culture” [12], special measures are needed to restore the basis of their own cultural foundations. The following activities can assist them:

- conducting individual, family and group consultations to identify the accumulated socio-cultural deficits;
- drawing up an individual, family and group plan with appropriate activities to get out of the identified situation;
- organising pre-planned motivational meetings with successful Roma (through their eyes) from their backgrounds (both with Roma and Turkish ethno-cultural identification);
- enrollment in literacy courses;
- qualification in a particular occupation or skills for that occupation;
- retraining in another field, which is said to be with high demand in the city and region;
- training in responsible parenting, etc.

In the work of the Sunday schools, the challenge of all other parents of different ethnic backgrounds, religious backgrounds and mother tongue is related to the hard work of reducing intercultural distances and overcoming the accumulated mutual discriminatory attitudes and prejudices (and especially of Roma). The practice of NGOs and other forms of training shows that the most progressive results are achieved in working with ethnically mixed parent groups. Sharing together, in addition to the direct communication leads to an indirect benefit for the participants when they create an appropriate atmosphere for sharing life experiences, getting to know their own and other cultures, overcoming their own prejudices. The benefit of such activity is for the whole Bulgarian society. For better results, a multi-ethnic training team can be a good example of equal work and collaboration. It is necessary to find the necessary material and moral forms for tolerating the efforts of those Roma parents who, of their own free will, seek the services of schools outside the segregated neighborhoods.

Particular attention should be paid to two important and highly underestimated factors so far to improve the situation of inclusion and educational integration in the city and the municipality - the ethnic Bulgarian parent in general.

The ethnic Bulgarian parent has been put in a privileged position throughout the practice so far and it seems by presumption:

- He/she is knowledgeable and capable and does not need training, ie. it is overvalued;
- He/she has gained public recognition that he is interested and endlessly committed to the educational future of his child and that gives him the right to enroll the child where they think is best and at any time of the year;
- He/she immediately seek the services of another educational institution when a Roma is enrolled in the kindergarten or school of his or her child and this has to be interpreted as a parental commitment rather than a discriminatory act, etc.

In contrast, the ethnic Roma parent is put in the position of utterly stigmatising - he is generally ignorant by presumption, uninterested, unmotivated about his child's educational future, precisely. The project activities were aimed specifically at him, and the treatment he went through was intended to make him more motivated, more engaged and more responsible.

The father, both Roma (more often) and non-Roma (not so often), has been ignored or self-excluded from his parental duties. He is almost absent from parent-teacher meetings, even less frequently seeks out teachers for individual counseling, does not assist his children in their self-preparation (especially for the

less educated citizens of the municipality), does not read books with them, does not play with them, neglects their educational achievements or failures, etc.

Free literacy courses, the acquisition of vocational skills and retraining into a new profession is the motivating factor that will bring and hold the attention of different parents for Sunday School.

The future school for parents has many challenges ahead and the sooner it works the better for the educational, social and cultural development of the municipality.

#### **5.4. The municipal administration, non-profit organisations and the involvement of local businesses**

The main obligation of the municipalities in our country is to care locally for the well-being and prosperity of their citizens, regardless of their social status, ethnic origin, religion, mother tongue, educational level, age and gender. Preserving social and ethnic peace in ethnically mixed regions is at the heart of this concern.

Why is it so important for the municipality of Sliven to care much more for the creation of a multicultural educational environment for all children and students to be educated from the age of 5 to the completion of the 12th grade of secondary education? In the idealised multicultural environment, every participant in it must feel welcome, ie. to be well received, to be at the right place, to be valued with his distinction, not to be discriminated against for being different, and to have the freedom to harness his creative powers for his own development and improvement, which will one day prove to be beneficial for the development and prosperity of all residents of the municipality and the country. In response to the above question, it can be summarised that Sliven is a multicultural and multiethnic city in which a significant part of children are born, grow up, learn and socialise in educational institutions lacking an ethno-culturally diverse number of pupils. This fact inevitably strengthens the dividing spaces between the Roma and non-Roma populations. Ignorance and fear of ethno-cultural differences are part of the local moods that create a culture of insecurity, rejection, and distance. These processes have been going unnoticed for three decades, gaining momentum and at any moment can become the basis of excesses with unpredictable social and interethnic consequences. Instead of talking about this issue, the preferences in the municipality of Sliven are still to convenient to keep quiet and to wait for the problem resolve itself.

The Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Roma Youth Organization (RYO) in Sliven between 2001 and 2009 developed and implemented its own model for desegregation of Roma education in the city. Although the CTOs for objective reasons did not complete their work, the results of it have clearly shown that the fears of the Roma are insolvent and that even the poorest and most marginalised Roma of the “naked” group can be integrated. Implemented by Roma, this project had a huge social effect in overcoming the dividing lines between the various Roma groups in the city, but the lack of sensitivity to it by the ruling ones deprived him of this privilege. However, the positives and negatives of this project can be the basis for the development of a municipal model that can be discussed, adopted and implemented by consensus from all local communities.

In order for all this to happen, the following steps are necessary:

- organised, purposeful, evenly distributed over time, with clear financial parameters and commitments, and with the efforts of various municipal institutions and organisations to develop and adopt a single municipal plan for the inclusion and integration of the Roma population from segregated neighborhoods. The current plan adopted at this stage was literally designed in such a way that nothing follows it and, as such cases define Maya Grekova, “... the aim is to change nothing” [13];

- the education of Roma children in separate neighborhood schools should be an integral part of this plan;

- to discuss and promote a model for the mutual inclusion and educational integration of all children and students in the city. It should be made clear that Roma students from the Nadezhda Quarter, after completing the primary education, are dispersed in all secondary schools in the city, so that there will be no leakage of non-Roma students to other schools;

- the municipality to partially or fully cover the traveling expenses of traveling students and to reorganise transport traffic so as not to create any obstacles to the free and seamless movement of children and their parents/carers;

- traveling students should be accompanied by newly appointed educational mediators or social workers (in accordance with the new Law on Pre-school and School Education / PSET);

- develop concrete and clear measures for host schools in the direction of: overcoming mutual discriminatory attitudes and resolving potential conflicts before they develop; the mutual adaptation of Roma and non-Roma students to each other, both inside and outside the classroom; the assumption of social privileges should be in accordance with the material situation of the families of the children and not their ethnic origin;

- the model would increase its pragmatic value if a strategy and program were developed for a municipal information campaign with two focuses - towards Roma parents and non-Roma parents. In each of them, depending on the environment - urban or rural, there will be differences and specifics.

NGOs in Sliven and the municipality, as well as local community activists, should be an integral part of decision-making regarding inclusive and educational integration policies. In the process of realisation of these processes, the most socially convincing individuals from Sliven and the region should be involved in the need for mutual inclusion and intercultural education - politicians, administrators, people of art and culture, journalists, public figures and others. NGOs can focus their efforts on attracting funding to support the education of poor but talented children, for joint learning through extracurricular activities, for convening thematic conferences, seminars, round tables, and for exercising civic control over the activities of the institutions. NGOs must be both a partner and a corrective of municipal organisations and institutions.

At the same time, the municipality of Sliven and the local NGOs are good at devoting resources and conducting research on the change in attitudes towards education as a value, both among non-Roma people and among the identified three Roma social circles in the municipality - marginal, patriarchal and modern. In the last 10-15 years, some evangelical churches have been planting roots in Nadezhda. Instead of neglecting or completely ignoring their role, it would be much better to work in sync with their leaders and get them involved in the implementation of the model, to the best of their ability.

Consideration should be given to current students being future employees and workers of local business, local government, and more. through visits that would provoke an interest in the younger generation for a particular career orientation.

It should not be forgotten that the two schools under discussion are municipal and the main obligation of the municipality is to create synchronization between all parties involved in the implementation of the model, to finance the schools and to increase the motivation of all participants in its implementation.

## **6. Changing the school network**

A major change to the school network in the city is not expected. It is related to the change of the status of the two primary schools in Dame Gruev District (next to Nadezhda District offering Roma educational services in the neighborhood) to primary and to the dispersion of the other students in grades V through VII in all schools in Sliven, which offer high school education.

### **7. The role of the media**

Media - electronic and print - at the municipal, regional and national levels has an increasingly decisive role to play in the successful implementation of the process of mutual inclusion and educational integration between Roma and non-Roma children and students. The persuasion of journalists about the rightness of the chosen cause is crucial for the objective coverage of events related to this process. For this purpose, Sliven Municipality and NGOs can organise various training seminars for journalists, which reflect the problems of education. Periodic press conferences at different levels will be able to nourish the media interest with specific data, real steps, achievements, etc.

### **8. Possibilities for applying the model in other cities of the country**

This model is suitable and recommended in those settlements (mainly district and larger municipal centers) where Roma live in compact neighborhoods of about 10,000 and above, with education institutions no further than 3-4 kilometers away to offer services for everyone. At the same time urban transport does not create problems, but adapts to the need to move children and their companions to schools on time. By creating the necessary organization and good cooperation between the municipality, schools, transport companies, parental committees and non-governmental organizations, it is possible to implement the model in any settlement of the country with larger Roma neighborhood.

### **Conclusion**

The exemplary model is not to be necessarily implemented as described here. It would be very good if it was discussed by a work group at municipal level and after its refinement, it is recommended that the Municipal Council formally adopts it at its meeting. Silencing the problems of education in the city is not the most acceptable way to solve them. That is why it is necessary to conduct a public discussion, approach in a professional and visionary way. Otherwise, the Bulgarian population of Dame Gruev District (adjacent to the Roma Nadezhda District) will continue to sell their homes and move to the more central regions due to the lack of Roma children in the educational institutions there. In this way, people with marginal status will increase their territorial presence in the city, and the education system will be further stigmatised. All this implies action and the proposed model is only a modest opportunity in this direction. The integration of students of different ethnic backgrounds in the city schools will create a common multicultural space in which small representatives of different ethnicities will become acquainted in their years as students, will become accustomed to the presence of their ethno-cultural differences and together will seek the path of their mutual well-being. Thus, only with the expansion of the communication spaces among of the young citizens of Sliven we can expect to see ethnic peace and peaceful coexistence between Roma and non-Roma in Sliven.

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