

THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF RECENT ROMA HUNGARIAN IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA

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***Abstract:** As a problem of international scale, since the late 1990s there is a constant migration of the East and Central European Roma to Canada and the United States, primarily from Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the majority of cases, these immigrants apply for refugee status, arguing that in their country of origins they suffer from discrimination and persecution and that mainstream Hungarian society presents a negative attitude towards them.*

Discrimination in education, healthcare, labor market and housing is widespread against the Roma. In such a situation, the media has a great responsibility as mass communication devices can foster the integration of minorities. This paper argues that based on the analysis of printed and online media texts Hungarian media texts deal with conflicts and problems with the Roma, without giving voice to the Roma individuals involved.

***Key words:** Roma, Central Europe, immigration, Canada, United States of America, media, media regulation*

The latest census in Hungary was in 2001. Based on its data there are 13 minorities (e.g. Greek, Polish, German, Slovak and Ukrainian). Some 190.000 persons identified themselves as Roma, representing the largest minority in Hungary. However, the actual number is considered by the researchers as approximately 600.000 (Kemény et al. 2004, p. 12., Bernát 2006, pp. 118-119). In October and November of 2011, another census was carried out, but the data related to the number of minorities is still not available.

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States, primarily from Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the majority of cases, these immigrants apply for refugee status arguing that in their country of origins they suffer from discrimination and persecution and that mainstream Hungarian society presents a negative attitude towards them.

Discrimination in education, healthcare, labor market and housing is indeed widespread against the Roma. In such a situation, the media has a great responsibility. Mass communication devices can foster the integration of this minority with the help of press and media regulations that apply for all participants.

The current regulations on presenting the minorities in the media

Based on the analysis of printed and online media texts, we believe that Hungarian media texts deal with conflicts and problems with the Roma, without giving voice to the Roma individuals involved. The Roma are taken as a homogeneous group, presented under ethnic labels (See Bernáth & Messing, 1998; Ligeti 2007; Zöld könyv, 2006; TÁRKI, 2005; Publicus Research, 2009).

Research goals and methods

One of the chief research goals was to explore the content of such media texts. We inquired about the presentation of the Roma minority in online sources in the course of a month (2 January – 15 March 2012), more precisely, about how and in what context the Roma are presented. We also explored the content of 4 online versions of daily papers, that of 5 printed weekly magazines along with 5 further online sources of news. Based on the surveyed qualitative and quantitative content elements (14 types of criteria), we can easily identify the attitude and practice of a particular online medium related to the Roma.

The analysis criteria and categories of media texts are:

I. Quantitative data:

How many pieces of news have discussed Roma-related issues?

What was their volume? (i.e., the number of sentences)

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II. Qualitative data:

In which column did a particular article appear?

Is there any photo included? If yes, is it advantageous or disadvantageous to the topic or person involved?

What topic is related to the Roma? (law, politics, crime, labor market, welfare aids, individual life story, population, education, etc.)

How objective is online press when presenting the situation of the Roma minority?

In the given period, we have found 30 media texts in the Canadian and Hungarian online sources that were related to the Roma.

A hypothesis we formulated was that there has not been any major change in the Hungarian media coverage of the Roma minority over the last few years. Problems are still tabooed and ethnicized, while news related to the Roma mostly focus on social conflicts, crime, unemployment and welfare dependency.

As for the Canadian media, our presupposition was that online media texts reflect the multicultural society; therefore, the articles discuss some possible solutions to the social and economic problems Roma Hungarian immigrants / refugees pose to the Canadian society, and also indicate their alleged contribution to the receptive country.

A survey of the journalism students of 18-23 age group related to their attitude to the Roma (October – 28 December 2011)

Another goal of the research was to obtain data on the views of college students, journalists of the future, on the Roma. They were asked to fill in a partly adapted and partly self-developed questionnaire on their attitudes. The questionnaire consisted of 20 close questions:

- 7 demographic (gender, age, education, qualification, place of living, etc.)

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- 13 questions related to attitudes to the Roma (e.g.: Bogardus-scale, living conditions, behavior, etc.)

Regarding the Hungarian students’ opinion on the Roma, our hypothesis was that it may reflect prejudices manifest in the overall society apart from the fact that due to integrated education, this age group is in daily contact with the Roma minority.

In the following we are to focus on some remarkable findings of the survey on media text contents.

Of the survey on media text contents

MTI is the central news agency in Hungary. Most media are contracted partners of the agency and provide information based on MTI news. Our content analysis of their articles shows the following outcomes:

- In the surveyed period, there were 108 MTI articles on some Roma-related topics with the mean sentence number of 13.
- Hungarian online media (15 news sites – 540 articles)

	National daily papers (N=4)	National weekly papers (N=5)	Only online new sources (N=5)
The number of thematic news on the Roma (N=540)	195	132	105

- One third (34%) contained photo illustrations, mostly events and everyday life images (work scenes, playing music at church rituals, funeral ceremonies). The photos did not indicate any disadvantaged living condition of the Roma.

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Photo: Bruzák Noémi. MTI

Kanalas József a Lélek programnak köszönhetően munkához és bérelt lakáshoz jutott Budapesten



Photo: Vajda János. MTI

Kállai Albertné kortárs képzőművész képe is kiállításra került a Bódválankén megrendezett Albert Hall tárlaton

- The Roma as a topic was central only in 33% of the articles. The rest of the articles devoted only one sentence or so to the Roma.
- Most focused on the prejudice among the mainstream society, negative discrimination (23%), Roma lifestyle (19%), music and minority culture (15%), and crime.
- If there was a specific individual or incident involving the Roma, there was insufficient data provided.
- 98% did not state the age, occupation, living conditions or income of the persons involved. If the article is about an immigrant, there is no telling of the reason for emigration (98%), and no opportunity was provided to utter the émigré's opinion either.
- 77% of the authors did not request expert opinion who could suggest some solution for a particular problem.

Canadian online media¹

¹ Some of the sources were: <http://www.torontosun.com/2011/10/26/video-refugee-influx-at-pearson>; <http://www.legalfrontiers.ca/2010/01/should-canada-gyp-the-roma/>; <http://www.thestar.com/news/investigations/immigration/article/957690--roma-refugee-complained-of>

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40% of Canadian online articles provided information on the given Roma person's age, gender and living conditions. These news items addressed the following problems:

- the increasing number of immigrants posing a major challenge to naturalization authorities
- this number should be decreased to its 1/5
- the refugee status claimants cast a too heavy workload on airport terminal personnel
- evaluation of the visa claim takes a very long time

37% of the articles offer some solution to these problems, for instance:

- the re-introduction of visa requirements should be seriously considered;
- Canada should follow her policy of providing shelter for oppressed minorities and refugees, without any consideration of their place of origins;
- Everyone can have access to opportunities and a valuable life through education;
- Canada should be a country that provides that opportunity.

Major findings of the content analysis of Canadian online articles (N=30)

Average sentence number	47
Topic of the photo: portrait, event	33 % (occurrence)

chest-pain-toronto-inquest-told; <http://towardfreedom.com/home/europe/1748-the-plight-of-the-roma-from-europe-to-canada>; http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2011/10/27/Hungarian-Gypsies-flocking-to-Canada/UPI-23241319741127/?spt=hs&or=tn; http://www.gipsytv.eu/en/news/canada-roma-families-from-hungary-abused-his-countrymen.html?page_id=1072

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Topics of the articles	Occurrence
Emigration, refugee status claim	73%
Extending welfare network, affirmative action	73%
Majority v. minority conflict, maladjustment	56%
Crime, threat, indignity, incarceration	43%

Survey on the attitudes of Hungarian students of age group 18-23 related to the Roma

The questionnaire required some 30-35 minutes to fill in. As for their age, gender and qualification, the students of 18-23 represent fairly well all the ones in Hungarian higher education today who will make the journalists of the future, although, because of the limited number of respondents, this cannot stand for a nation-scale representative survey.

47% of the respondents were male and 53% female, while only 4 were of the age of 18. Between 19-23, students had a balanced proportion. 54 had their final exam at secondary grammar schools, while 49 completed secondary vocational school. Further 21 came from a mixed-type secondary school. Apart from these, only 42% had some qualification. The extent of their motivation can be characterized by their attitude to and level of learning foreign languages. 46 students (37%) had some language exams.

Most Hungarian college students have some personal experiences with the Roma minority at their original place of living or where they study. This indicates some direct experiences behind their opinion. In the view of the results analyzed with the help of a Bogardus-scale, these students are more tolerant with the Roma as prospective neighbors or co-workers. 65% of the respondents would accept a Roma colleague and 30% would not mind having a Roma neighbor or close relative. However, 65% rejects the opportunity of having a Roma partner.

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People have different attitudes to others belonging to some national/ethnic minority groups.
(N=124)

Questions:	<i>Would accept Frequencies (%)</i>	<i>Cannot tell Frequencies (%)</i>	<i>Would reject Frequencies (%)</i>
1. Could you accept that a Roma family moves to your neighborhood?	30,6	38,7	29,8
2. Could you accept a Roma co-worker/colleague?	65,3	21	12,9
3. Could you accept a close relative of yours having a Roma partner / spouse?	31,5	33,1	34,7
4. Could you accept a Roma person as your partner / spouse?	16,1	17,7	64,5

Bogardus, Emory S., Social Distance in the City. *Proceedings and Publications of the American Sociological Society*. 20, 1926, 40-4.

As for their relationship with Roma classmates, 25% had positive and 15% negative impressions. The above answers reflect the high level of prejudice and discrimination against the Roma still tangible among the mainstream white youth. There are some fields, like folk arts, where the Roma are respected for their talent and values. College students believe that the segregation of the Roma, for instance, in education has no place in Hungary. Nevertheless, 47% disagree with the idea that Roma students should be given special grants and some affirmative action should help their higher educational opportunities. The respondents agreed on the following:

- "There would not be any problem with the Roma if they finally have learned how to work hard." (49%)

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- “The Roma are just like anyone else. There are nice and upsetting ones among them, too.” (46.8%)
- “The Roma threaten peaceful folks.” (41%)
- “Roma folk arts are as valuable as Hungarian arts.” (38.9%)

According to the respondents, the three major problems with the Roma Hungarians are the following:

1. They have a tendency to commit crime (34.7%)
2. They are unemployed (25.8%)
3. They have too many kids (25%)

120 students (96.8% of respondents) claim to have some Roma acquaintances. Of them, 106 (85.5%) got into contact with Roma persons during their studies, which formulates a basis for direct experiences shaping their opinion.

Views based on direct experiences (N=124)	<i>occurencies (%)</i>
They are loud	95
They are aggressive	87
They are undereducated	86
They tend to steal/commit crime	82
They are dirty	77
They have a natural talent for music	71
They are family-loving	69
They are poor	57
Different language use	52
Different skin color	51

Half of the respondents (48%) cannot imagine a prime minister of Roma origins in Hungary. Half of the respondents (51%) believe that the objectivity of the media cover of Roma-related stories depends on the very medium and

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topic. 25% of the respondents did not answer the question on the possibility of electing a Roma prime minister. Nevertheless, 16% believes that in 10 years it might become possible. Quarter of the respondents (25%) questions the objectivity of the press, while 11% thinks that it may further galvanize prejudice against the Roma.

Views without any direct experiences (N=124)	Frequency of replies (%)
There is no difference between the situation of the Roma in Hungary and in the neighboring countries	56
It is not possible to have a Roma prime minister in Hungary	48

Conclusion

There are some remarkable differences in Hungarian and Canadian online journalism regarding the media coverage of issues related to the Roma. Based on our research findings, the following differences are significant besides the obvious one, i. e., that the Roma in Hungary represent a significant group of people born in Hungary, while in Canada they are one of the many immigrant minorities:

- Hungarian online media have less coverage of Roma topics in their volume.
- Hungarian news sources focus on conflicts of the minority v. majority, while the Canadian sources give voice to the ones affected by the story (experts, authorities, Roma immigrants).
- Hungarian online media on the Roma does not give much opportunity for the Roma to express their opinion.
- Canadian press attempts to provide a more comprehensive picture: they discuss the difficulties of Roma immigrants and the mainstream society, while in 37% of the articles some solutions are suggested as well.

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- Based on the analysis of online media texts, we can observe that the Hungarian texts addressing the Roma focus on the conflicts and problem areas, while little opportunity is actually given to Roma individuals to speak out for themselves.

Challenges related to the minorities are burning issues all around Europe, including Hungary. Although the number of foreigners here is not significant (less than 0.5%), as compared to other countries, the general attitude towards non-Hungarians is negative. Hungarians tend to despise immigrants and the group they disdain even more is the Roma (Tóth, 2011, p. 48).

A fundamental role of the media is to strengthen social cohesion with the help of its various means that could significantly foster the integration of ethnic and national minorities, as well as that of certain social groups and minorities. Thus, priorities in the media should be:

- To promote a balanced presentation of minorities;
- To sustain a daily discussion of minority issues;
- To provide equal opportunity for all parties involved in any problem in giving voice to their opinions and in contextualizing the events in their own view;
- To give job opportunities for young Roma journalists in mainstream media, thus increasing the sensitivity of media towards minority issues.

Over the last few years, there have been some steps in Hungary to improve the ethical merits of journalism, but unfortunately there have not been any major visible changes achieved so far.² We believe that media education might

² See the regulations on the media on minority issues in Hungary: 2010. évi CLXXXV. tv. a médiaszolgáltatásokról és a tömegkommunikációról – ún. médiatörvény (on media services and mass communication) „Media Law”; 2010. évi CIV. tv. A sajtószabadságról és a médiatartalmak alapvető szabályairól – ún. médiaalkotmány (on freedom of speech, press and the basic rules of media contents) „Media Constitution”; Újságírói Etikai Kódex (*Közös*

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release the impact of negative stereotypes and prejudice against the Roma minority, while we have a lot to do to improve the methodology in media education as well.

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Etikai Kódex, 2004) (code of ethics for journalists); Magyar Tartalomszolgáltató Egyesületének Etikai Kódexe (MTE, 2001) (code of ethics for the Association of Hungarian Media Content Providers); A médiumok saját etikai kódexe is nyújt az újságíróknak iránymutatást (specific ethical codex for each provider). The first two regulations apply to all segments of the media, including printed, electronic and online media.

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