The Impact of Self-Image on School Performance and Educational Careers among Ethnic Minority Youth

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Abstract

The paper draws on the extensive findings of the EDUMIGROM research project, and it focuses on the ways and sense in which school performance (and more generally attitudes to school and to the idea and imperative of education) intervenes in the identity formation process among ethnic minority youth. The presentation consists of three parts. First, relevant general findings of the project on this issue will be presented in a sketchy comparative perspective. Second, the case of the Czech Roma and the image of Roma-Romanticism will be given as a concrete example of the issue. And the presentation will be concluded by a reflection on ethical dilemmas brought up by particular kinds of general sociological explanations of similar issues.

Conceptually, the paper is based on two distinctions: between ethnic identity and minority identity, and between ethnicity and ethnic culture. This also means that ethnicized self-image and minority self-perception are taken into account in particular, although among the youth that we have researched there certainly is much more at work than just these two cultural representations when it comes to personal and collective self-identification. As the title of the paper suggests, the analytical focus will be on the impact of cultural representations to action/performance. Yet it will also be demonstrated that according one of the two poles – ethnic/minority self-image on the one hand or school performance/education experience on the other – the ontological status of a primary cause or an independent variable in this relationship would easily lead to empirical inconsistencies and ethical troubles.