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School choice in Subcarpathia – the case of Beregszász [Berehovo]¹

On the basis of a qualitative research in this study I try to identify school selection strategies and motivations of Subcarpathian Hungarian parents. Former research on this topic approached school choice mainly from linguistic and ethnic perspective (in other words they dealt with the decision between schools taught in the minority or in the majority language). The aim of my research was to find additional pragmatic and practical factors, which play a role in parental decisions. The research was carried out in a settlement (Berehovo/Beregszász) where Hungarians live in a cluster. All together 16 interviews were made and analysed. My findings show that besides the language of instruction of the school, the ratio of Roma pupils in the class, the distance of the school from the children's home, teachers' personality and family traditions all had effects on school choice.

School choice is a moment of special importance for parents and their children, because schools serve not only knowledge transmission, but also general socialization. Growing up in appropriate circumstances, surrounded by good friends, being educated by well-qualified teachers are defining factors of the child's intellectual development. Educational establishments where the medium is a minority language get extra tasks to fulfill in comparison to general schooling. Through the hidden curricula minority schools became one of the scenes, where pupils' ethnic identity is developed. The school choice of parents belonging to minorities' ethno-linguistic considerations

¹ Beregszász is the Hungarian name of the settlement, while Berehovo is the Ukrainian name. Today Berehovo is the official name of the town – because now it is part of Ukraine – however in the paper I prefer use the Hungarian version (Beregszász) because here we investigate school choice motivations from the perspective of Hungarian parents.

appeared as an additional factor, which complete the general ones and at the same time it is closely connected to them.

In this paper I identify the strategies and the background motivations of Subcarpathian Hungarian parents' school choice on the basis of available statistics, demographic data and qualitative interviews. My research aimed at identifying pragmatic/practical factors which play a role in parental decisions.

School choice motivations were examined in Beregszász, where Hungarians live in a coherent cluster. On the one hand my research hypotheses was that school choice motivations are not exclusively determined by linguistic aspects while on the other hand the presence of the institutional framework and the ratio of Hungarians in the given settlement does influence motivations of schools choice.

Research location

Beregszász is the centre of the coherent territory inhabited by Hungarians in Subcarpathia. It has an extensive Hungarian language education system: several Hungarian-language kindergartens, Hungarian or Hungarian paired bilingual schools, a Hungarian high school and the only private Hungarian higher education establishment, the II. Rákóczi Ferenc Subcarpathian Hungarian College. According to the latest census (2001) the population of the town was 26.554, of which 12.785 people (48.1%) confessed to be ethnically Hungarian. 38.9 % of Beregszász is ethnically Ukrainian, 5.4% is Russian.² People, who represents the Roma ethnic group is significant as well, their number is 1695 (6.5 %). 99.2% of them speak Hungarian as their native language.

Within the Ukrainian education system there are Ukrainian-language schools, bilingual schools (with a parallel structure of classes in Ukrainian and classes in a minority language) and minority schools. The fact that in Beregszász several Hungarian, Ukrainian and bilingual schools take part in the competition for the Hungarian school-aged population, provides the opportunity to find motivations

² Molnár, József. – István Molnár D. (2010) A kárpátaljai magyarság népességföldrajzi viszonyai. In: Csernicskó, István ed. *Megtart a szó. Hasznosítható ismeretek a kárpátaljai magyar nyelvhasználatról*, 15–32. Budapest–Beregszász: MTA Magyar Tudományosság Külföldön Elnöki Bizottság – Hodinka Antal Intézet.

behind school choice in Hungarian-Hungarian relations, and in the thoroughly investigated minority-majority relations too.³ In addition more and more pupils from the nearby villages appear in the town's education market due to manageable distances and normally functioning public transportation.

Table 1.

Hungarian-language and bilingual schools in Beregszász⁴

Name of the school	Grades	Number of pupils 2011/12	Language of instruction
Secondary school №4	1-11	450	Hungarian
Secondary school №3	1-11	398 (from that Hungarian: 230)	Hungarian-Ukrainian Bilingual
Secondary school №10	1-11	192 (from that Hungarian: 105)	Hungarian-Russian Bilingual
Primary school №7	1-9	345	Hungarian-language “Gypsy-school”
Primary school №6	1-9	194	Hungarian
Primary school №9	1-9	95	Hungarian
Hungarian High School in Beregszász	5-12	78	Hungarian

³ See for example: Balogh, Lívía – Eleonóra, Molnár (2008) Az államnyelv elsajátításának ára a nemzeti identitás feladása? Вісник Прикарпатського університету. Педагогіка. Випуск XVII–XVIII. 10–19; Cserniczkó, István (2009a) Az ukrajnai oktatáspolitikai a nyelvi asszimiláció szolgálatában. Korunk 2009/február, 33–40; Ferenc, Viktória (2009) Kárpátaljai magyar diákok az ukrajnai emelt szintű érettségi útvesztőiben. In: Kötél, Emőke ed. PhD-konferencia. A Tudomány Napja tiszteletére rendezett konferencia tanulmányaiból. Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégium, Budapest, 199–214; Gazdag, Vilmos (2010) Az anyanyelv használati körének módosulásai az ukrán tannyelvű iskolába járó magyar anyanyelvű gyermekek körében. In: Kötél, Emőke – Zsuzsanna, Mészárosné Lampl eds. Határhelyzetek IV. Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégium. Budapest; Molnár, Anita (2009) Tannyelv és nemzeti identitás kapcsolta egy 2006-os felmérés tükrében. In: Karmacs, Zoltán – Anita Márkú eds., Nyelv, identitás és nevelés a XXI. században. Ungvár, Poli Print. 117–122; Séra, Magdolna (2009) Az iskolai tannyelv-választás szerepe a kárpátaljai magyar kisebbség jövője és megmaradása szempontjából. In: Kötél, Emőke – László Szarka eds. Határhelyzetek II. Kultúra – Oktatás – Nyelv – Politika. Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégium. Budapest, 241–267.

⁴ Source: Educational Authority of the town of Beregszász (personal communication)

In Beregszász all together six Hungarian-language schools and a Hungarian High School are competing to enroll Hungarian children (see *Table 1.*) The mentioned high school is specialised in talent guidance, it has an entrance examination, and its scope extends to the whole administrative region of Beregszász.

During our fieldwork four of the above-mentioned Hungarian schools were observed, namely the secondary schools №4 and №3, and primary schools №6 and №7. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with headmasters, teachers of both lower and upper school sections, parents, and focus group discussions with pupils of the 7th grade. All together 13 individual interviews and 3 focus group discussions took place in this research locality. Interviews were in the Hungarian language.⁵

Interviews were recorded, and the records generated in this way were taped. Finally the texts were coded in Atlas.ti interview analysing software. By coding we order labels/codes to certain citations according to the content of the citation. Citations with similar or the same meaning have received the same label. In this paper I focus on those codes and code families which contain the most citations, in other words we based our analysis on the dominant themes which appeared most frequently and could be supported by the most citations.

Analysing the individual interviews all together 163 thematic codes were set up. Focus group discussions with pupils of the 7th grade were coded separately, creating 130 different labels.

From the closely connected codes code families (network of codes) were organised. Here we make an attempt to analyse in depth the family *school choice motivations*, because the original aim of our research was to map out those motivation groups which play a significant role in children's school enrolment. On the one hand the issue of school choice can be differentiated according to different educational levels (kindergarten choice, school choice, university choice), while on the other hand the moment of school choice can be captured several times during the individuals' lifetime: besides their own school choice, the school choice of their husband/wife, or their chil-

⁵ Citations from the original interviews published in this paper are based on my own translation.

dren (if any) appeared in the interviews. It is an interesting aspect of the research that some of the teachers were parents at the same time, and in some cases parents were teachers, kindergarten-nurses, which add professional considerations to school choice as well.

Some important trends in Hungarian-language education in Subcarpathia

Before analysing the interviews carried out in Beregszász, it is important to introduce briefly the most important trends which influence the educational situation, since the results of the research cannot be interpreted without them.

The ratio of people of Hungarian ethnicity in Subcarpathia has shown a downward trend in recent years, the main reasons of which are assimilation, low birth rate, and migration.⁶

Low birth rate is a significant problem throughout Ukraine, therefore the country has launched a vigorous campaign in support of child birth. The support system which (compared to the economic situation of Ukraine⁷) had been operating with considerable amounts since its very beginning. On 1st July 2012 it was raised further for the amount of financial assistance paid on the birth of children. The current assistance levels are summarised in *Table 2* (the amounts are also expressed in Hungarian Forints).

Table 2.

Assistance paid on the birth of children in Ukraine⁸

	Ukrainian Hryvna	Hungarian Forint
On the birth of a first child	27 510	811 540
On the birth of a second child	55 020	1 623 090
On the birth of a third and each successive child	110 040	3 246 180

⁶ Molnár D., István – József Molnár (2005) Kárpátalja népeisége és magyarsága a népszámlálási és népmozgalmi adatok tükrében. Beregszász: Kárpátaljai Magyar Pedagógusszövetség Tankönyv- és Taneszköztanácsa, 27–31.

⁷ For comparison: the minimum wage is 1102 Ukrainian Hryvna (32509 Hungarian Forint), the amount of the minimum pension is 844 Ukrainian Hryvna (24898 Hungarian Forint).

⁸ Source: <http://karpinfo.net/cikk/ukrajna/konnyebb-lett-az-elet-7-hrivnyaval>

Towns and villages are over the demographic low point. In recent years the number of children has increased in every settlement, especially among the Hungarian-speaking Roma, which has led to an increased number of Roma pupils in Subcarpathian Hungarian-language schools.

Parallel to this a trend has developed of choosing a school in the majority language among pupils of Hungarian ethnicity. As a result, minority Hungarian-language education has started to weaken; its prestige has been decreasing. In fact, small schools in villages could survive, in many cases only because of the enrolment of Hungarian-speaking Roma pupils.

The Hungarian-language education system of the region, besides demographic characteristics, has also been influenced by the educational regulations of Ukraine. In 2008 the advanced level school-leaving examination in the Ukrainian language also became compulsory for school leavers of Hungarian-language school. As a result, the quality of the instruction of the Ukrainian language in Hungarian-language schools has become a crucial public question, since at the end of secondary school each student (regardless of the language of instruction of the school) has to take an exam in the Ukrainian language and literature under the same conditions as native Ukrainian speakers. This exam is the entry into higher educational institutions. *Table 3* illustrates that in the first two years the exam meant great difficulty for the students of Hungarian-language schools in Subcarpathia.

Table 3.

The school leaving and entrance exam in Ukrainian language and literature on a country-wide level and among Subcarpathian Hungarians⁹

Academic year	2007/2008	2008/2009
Failure rate	8.38 %	9 %
Failure rate of students of Subcarpathian Hungarian-language schools	29.58 %	44 %

⁹ The table was constructed on the basis of the following sources: Ferenc, Viktória (2010) A kisebbségi magyar felsőoktatás és nyelvi kihívásai a Kárpát-medencében: problémák és feladatok. REGIO, 2010/3, 59–89; Beregszászi, Anikó – István Csernicskó (2010) Направление языковой политики украины как фактор этнических и языковых конфликтов. In: Виноградов, В. – В. Михальченко eds.: Language and Society in present-day Russia and other countries, 245–249. Москва: Институт языкознания РАН – Научно-исследовательский центр по национально-языковым отношениям.

In 2008, for instance, the 8.38% of students failed to pass the exam on a country-wide level, while among students of Hungarian-language schools this rate was 29.58% (three and a half times more!), whilst in other subjects (which students could take in their mother tongue) there was no significant difference between students of Hungarian-language schools and those of other schools. In 2009 the rate of students who failed to pass the exam was 9% on a country-wide level. Out of Subcarpathian Hungarian students only 28% (535 students) participated in the exam, but almost every second person failed (44%).

The decreasing number of students in Hungarian schools can be partly explained by the phenomenon of structural dropout, the extent of which is rather high at the transitions from 4th to 5th grade and from 9th to 10th grade. The dropout rate rises with educational levels, since almost half of the pupils of Hungarian-language classes do not reach the secondary school level.¹⁰

The results of the school-leaving exams as well as other sociolinguistic and sociological studies prove that Subcarpathian Hungarians have a very low competence in the state language.¹¹ As a result of the inadequate teaching of the Ukrainian language in Hungarian-language schools, more and more parents choose a Ukrainian-language school for their children in order to help their language learning. *Table 4* illustrates that the number of pupils in Hungarian schools has shown a downward trend in the recent period which, on

¹⁰ The reasons for the dropout, in the lack of referential studies, can only be presumed. According to Papp (2010: 490) “Hungarian-language instruction, presumably because of the lack of pedagogical preparedness, is not able to keep children in the system. In lower classes the unsuccessful educational integration of Subcarpathian Romas of Hungarian mother tongue and of disadvantaged children may also contribute to this phenomenon. Parallel to this, a further explanation can be the attitude of the Ukrainian educational policy which has an obvious anti-minority character, trying to decrease the prestige of minority-education by creating a legal environment which forces both parents and children – especially in recent years – to choose the Ukrainian-language school.” Papp, Z. Attila (2010) A kárpátaljai magyar nyelvű oktatás rendszere és néhány aktuális kihívása 2009-ben. In: Fedinec, Csilla – Vehes Mikola eds. Kárpátalja 1919–2009: történelem, politika, kultúra, 480–498. Budapest: Argumentum–MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézete.

¹¹ See: Csernicskó 2009a, Ferenc 2010, Papp Z., Attila – Valér Veres eds. (2007) Kárpát Panel 2007. A Kárpát-medencei magyarok társadalmi helyzete és perspektívái. Budapest: MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet.

the one hand, is the consequence of the language policy of Ukraine, and on the other hand, is the result of the demographic downturn.

Table 4.

School enrolment in Hungarian-language schools in Subcarpathia¹²

Academic year	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011
Pupils enrolled in first class	2160	2311	1647	1499	1495	1321	1385	1429
The total number of pupils	22200	19600	18948	18136	17366	16407	15596	15126

The motivational factors of school choice in Beregszász

On the basis of the interviews carried out in Beregszász the following motivational subgroups can be distinguished. These groups were established by the categorisation of factors influencing school choice as identified by the interviews.

1. Decision based on nationality and language.
2. Decision based on the social composition of the class.
3. Decision based on the person of the teacher.
4. Decision based on traditions of family members and friends.
5. Decision based on the geographical location of the school and on other practical factors.
6. Decision based on the quality of education and on the success rate of students who continue their studies.

With the exception of the first group, decision based on nationality and language (which illustrates the choice between Hungarian- and Ukrainian-language schools), the other subgroups can also be used for the analysis of school choice in relation to Hungarian schools.

1. Decision based on nationality and language

Literature on school choice considering both Subcarpathia and other regions in the neighbouring countries pays remarkable attention to the choice between minority- and majority-language schools. The function of minority-language schools to strengthen national iden-

¹² The table was constructed partly on the basis of Papp 2010.

tity is indisputably important, and is not doubted by Hungarian parents. Our interviewees, recalling the moment of their own enrolment in school or that of their children, emphasised that to choose a Hungarian-language school is still the most obvious and most natural solution among Hungarians:

“Other options are out of question, so, it’s obvious that a child must learn in his/her mother tongue.” (Teacher, secondary school №6)

“I don’t know, it was so natural for us since we are Hungarians (...) so it was so natural that the child should attend a Hungarian school, we did not even think about other solutions.” (Father of a child studying in school №4)

Studying in one’s mother tongue, the atmosphere created by a Hungarian school, programs at a Hungarian school, the celebration of Hungarian national holidays all contribute to the formation and enhancement of the national identity of children. Hungarian-language schools in the educational market of Beregszász have this “minority plus” advantage in the competition for the school enrolment of children.

However, as a result of the poor opportunities of Hungarian higher education, the adoption of the compulsory Ukrainian school-leaving and entrance exam, the inefficient instruction of the state language in minority-language schools¹³, the tendency to choose a majority-language school has become rather strong for some years, the purpose of which is to foster the acquisition of Ukrainian.¹⁴ A further factor is that the environment in the Hungarian town does not help the acquisition of the state language.

¹³ Beregszászi–Csernicskó 2010, Csernicskó, István 2001 Az ukrán nyelv oktatásának problémái Kárpátalja magyar iskoláiban. *Nyelvünk és Kultúránk* 2001/2: 15–23; Csernicskó, István (2004) Egy megoldatlan probléma: az államnyelv oktatása a kárpátaljai magyar tannyelvű iskolákban. In: Huszti Ilona ed. *Idegennyelv-oktatás kisebbségi környezetben*, 113–123. Ungvár: PoliPrint – Kárpátaljai Magyar Tanárképző Főiskola; Csernicskó István 2010a: *Nyelv és nyelvpolitika a hosszú 20. században*. In: Fedinec, Csilla – Mikola, Vehes eds. *Kárpátalja 1919–2009*. MTA Etnikai- Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézete. Argumentum, Budapest, 553–611.

¹⁴ Csernicskó 2009a, Csernicskó István (2009b) Tények, adatok a kárpátaljai magyarok nyelvtudásáról. *Együtt* 2009/3, 70–77; Csernicskó 2010a; Ferenc 2009; Gazdag 2010, Molnár 2009; Séra 2009

“This is our disadvantage, a disadvantage in quotation marks, that we live in a Hungarian town, Hungarians are in majority here, so it is difficult for them to learn it [the Ukrainian language].” (Teacher, secondary school №3)

“Because Beregszász is still Hungarian, more Hungarian. Everybody speaks Hungarian, the child is not forced to speak Ukrainian, for the Hungarian pupils there is no background, there is no linguistic environment to learn Ukrainian.” (Mother of a child studying in school №4)

Therefore, neither the linguistic environment of the town, nor the family background helps language acquisition. The majority of parents learned Russian at school, only few of them speak Ukrainian, thus, they cannot help their children.

Regarding the inefficient, low level instruction of the state language, there is no significant difference between the Hungarian-language schools in Beregszász. There is no competition in this regard: there is no better or worse school, at least in a Hungarian-Hungarian relationship. As the teaching of the state language in Hungarian schools is still inadequate,¹⁵ the choice of a Ukrainian-language school has become an alternative, where (according to lay assumptions) children can easily learn the language while studying, and, as a result, can be “more successful in life”. Although in our research we did not ask those parents who chose a majority-language school for their children, this subject is so much a part of the discourse about school choice that the interviews provided us with partial data about this question as well. Almost every interviewee had some direct or indirect experience concerning the question what happened

¹⁵ In Subcarpathia numerous institutions and organisations have launched different programs the purpose of which was to improve the level of the instruction of the Ukrainian language in Hungarian-language schools. Beregszász has been especially active in this respect, since in January 2009, due to the initiative of the municipality of Beregszász, a workgroup was set up with an aim to develop programs, curricula, manuals, methodological booklets, teachers’ books and visual aids. The purpose of these materials was to enhance the efficiency of the level of instruction of the Ukrainian language (as a state language) in Hungarian-language schools in Subcarpathia. The work was finished in August 2011. Its products: 25 different publications. However, the official permission by educational authorities to use the materials and to spread them beyond the borders of Beregszász has not been realised yet. See: Csernicskó István (2012) Az államnyelvoktatás javítására tett kísérletek Kárpátalján. *Alkalmazott Nyelvtudomány* 2012, 17-32.

to Hungarian children who started learning in a majority-language school. A frequently mentioned claim was that children could not move forward in learning and had problems with some serious subjects, since they did not possess that kind of knowledge (cognitive learning skills)¹⁶ which made learning possible in a certain language.

“Parents today think that – I also talked to parents who are teachers – »I don’t know the Ukrainians language but my child will learn it. « It is true, the child will be able to speak at a basic conversational level but it is not certain that s/he will be able to participate in higher education. If there is no sufficient financial background, s/he is not likely to take part in higher education by his/her own knowledge. Because a Hungarian child, at primary school, maybe, can cope with this difficulty, but in upper classes, when they start to learn geometry and history and other subjects, which are difficult even in Hungarian, then how to learn them in Ukrainian?”(Mother of a child studying in school №3)

Among our interviewees who were either parents whose children study at Hungarian-language schools or were pedagogues who teach at Hungarian-language schools, there were some persons who survived the dilemma of the Ukrainian-Hungarian school choice.

“By the time the school would have started; I took his documents and enrolled him in a Hungarian school. Because we were thinking about it at home very long, and at last I realised that though he would learn the Ukrainian language for sure, I was not sure that he would be able to learn the subjects well. I was certain that he would acquire the Ukrainian language, but I was sceptical regarding the other subjects. So, after that I thought that if he would go to a Hungarian school and he would understand what they teach him in his mother tongue, later, if he would want, he would be able to learn Ukrainian as well. So, according to the current curriculum, in the

¹⁶ Jim Cummins (2008) proved the thesis according to which there are two grades in the acquisition levels of a language: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic learning proficiency (CALP). According to this theory learning in a certain language is possible only if the student has already reached the level of the cognitive academic learning proficiency. Cummins, J (2008) BICS and CALP: Empirical and theoretical status of the distinction. In: Street, B & Hornberger, N. H. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2nd edition, Volume 2: Literacy. New York: Springer Science – Business Media LLC. 71–83.

way they teach Ukrainian now, he is sure to learn it, if he will want to. Or, if I will have to give money for private lessons, I will have to pay for only one subject. Because my friends, who enrolled their child in a Ukrainian school, now pay for private lessons in Mathematics, and in Ukrainian. Here there is Hungarian language as well, in Ukrainian schools there isn't, so the child takes private lessons in Hungarian, too, because he didn't learn how to read. So, this was my decision, and I don't regret it because he is now among the best pupils in the class." (Mother of a child studying in school №6)

Parents who pay attention to their children easily admit that the purpose of acquiring a language must not precede the main purpose of school, that of acquiring general knowledge. One of the interviewed parents, who is a teacher, told us how their child changed school and also the language of learning in the 3rd grade:

"The first two years did not mean a problem, until serious subjects came. So, when the Mathematics started to be explained in greater detail, using terminology, I noticed that the child was in complete darkness, he did not understand anything, so at the beginning of the third class I enrolled him in a Hungarian school." (Elementary school teacher, school №6)

Children whose mother tongue is Hungarian, in Ukrainian-language schools lag behind not just in school subjects, but their language development may fall behind as well. Therefore, they will not be able to use neither the Ukrainian, nor the Hungarian language properly. Children of Hungarian mother tongue in majority-language schools, besides their bad results in studies, are judged not by their capabilities but by their language skills. Majority-language children and the teacher form a negative image of the children who cannot keep up with the tempo of learning; therefore, the self-esteem of Hungarian children may take a negative turn:

"First, when they started learning in the Russian school, they didn't understand anything. For several months they didn't understand anything, they just wrote what they had to write. The teacher knew that the pupil was a silly child, how to say, (...) it was accepted, that the Hungarian children are silly." (Upper class teacher, school №3)

Children in majority-language schools may suffer such psychological harm, that even the psychologist of the majority-language school advises the parents to take the child to a Hungarian school:

“I talked to the parents. Now there are three children in school №6 who came back from Ukrainian-language schools. One of them was brought back to the second grade, the other child to the first grade, and the third child to the fourth grade. The psychologist advised them to bring back the children to Hungarian school, because they were so hurt emotionally, that they were unable to learn. They could learn to speak, but in school subjects they were lagging far behind.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

The subject of Ukrainian or Hungarian-language school choice is closely connected with the question of educational aid. Those families, who live in neighbouring countries and whose children attend a Hungarian-language school, are entitled to this annual aid. The purpose of Hungary by this aid, which is one of the most significant assistance provided for the Hungarian population of neighbouring countries, is to motivate people to choose a Hungarian school. In our research we also included questions concerning the impact of the educational aid on the choice of school and the usage of the sum of money.

“The aid, well, parents are grateful for it, because it is really a great help. And it is seen, because children have new schoolbags and school supplies, but I don’t think the aid is really an influential factor while choosing between a Hungarian and a Ukrainian school. It has been about four years, probably, that parents have started to insist on Ukrainian schools so much, earlier it was not so. And then I asked them, why? And they told me that this way the child, at least, learns speaking Ukrainian. This is the main reason why they choose a Ukrainian school for their children and not the Hungarian one and the twenty thousand Forints.”(Upper class teacher, school №6)

2. Decision based on the social composition of the class

While analysing the interviews carried out in Beregszász, besides the strategy to choose a school on the basis of nationality and language, several other motivational factors were identified as well. Out of them the social factors of the learning community seemed to be the most significant one. While choosing a school, parents take into consideration who will be the classmates of their child, with whom will s/

he learn together?¹⁷ There were parents who considered it extremely important to have so-called *pulling pupils* in the class, claiming that if there are many strong students in the class, it is a motivating factor for the child to learn more, and it may have a great impact on his/her further studies as well:

*“And another important aspect was what would be the classmates be like, so, whether there would be pulling children in the class”.
(Father of a child studying in school №4)*

*“In a class there will be several talented children, children whose results are good. The child, perhaps, will learn more in such a class than in a class where someone has good marks only because there are no rivals in the class. So, this is an important aspect.”
(Mother of a child studying in school №3)*

While analysing the social composition of the class, regarding the schools of Beregszász, it is also important to pay attention to the educational situation of Romas of Hungarian mother tongue. School №7 which is situated not far from the gypsy camp, is officially called Hungarian-language Elementary School №7, but its common name is the *gypsy school*.¹⁸ Among the institutions primary school №7 represents a special case, being a dual minority school: in statistics it is indicated as a Hungarian-language school, however in the school only Roma pupils are enrolled, whose native language is Hungarian. The education of Roma children is concentrated mainly in this school, although well-off Roma parents often enroll their children in other Hungarian schools. Sixty-two Roma children study in other Hungarian-language classes in Beregszász.¹⁹ The regulation of the enrolment of Roma pupils in other schools is quite chaotic, but it has neither theoretical, nor practical barriers, as it seems from the extract below:

¹⁷ According to the international PISA estimations the discussion of the question of horizontal and vertical inclusion: see Papp's study, published in the present volume.

¹⁸ The teachers and pupils of the “gypsy school” call the other Hungarian-language schools of the town Hungarian schools, though in official statistics such a distinction does not exist.

¹⁹ Based on the data of the Educational Authority of the town of Beregszász (personal communication)

“There was a problematic question: to not enroll Roma children in Hungarian-language schools of the town. There is a gypsy school down in the camp, it is school №7. That school was established specially for those children. But we also have Roma children in our school. When the elder child of the Roma parents studied in the school, the parents were told that the younger child should be enrolled, too, so they are enrolled only in the case of these families. But we cannot enroll other children because it causes problems, so, there are very few of them.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

“There are children from those gypsy families who live not in the camp but in the neighbouring streets because these streets are inhabited mainly by them. They are the wealthy, rich gypsies, they have a car, and they enroll their children in schools №4, №6, and №9.” (Upper class teacher, school №7)

Schools which have a low number of students show a tendency to be more receptive towards Roma students by whom they can increase their total number:

“School №9 is out in Ardó, and they have a very low number of pupils (...). The number of births is too low to have enough children. In the 9th grade there were only 5 pupils. They said they would close the school because there were not enough children. The building was not used to capacity, so recently they have enrolled some Roma children, and the parents now are complaining about it. I’ve heard it from the parents.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

“There is a problem with the number of children. In order to open a class, they try to bring children from school №7, and, well, it is common knowledge that that is the school of minority children. So it is a problem again, because for parents it is a worry in what kind of environment their child will study. These are the main problems, I think.” (Father of a child studying in school №4)

As a result of the growing number of gypsies, Hungarian-language schools are frequently labelled and categorised as *a gypsy school*.²⁰ Due to the high rate of Roma pupils, Hungarian children leave and

²⁰ Choosing a Hungarian school leads to a division in gypsy communities as well. Those gypsies who choose the gypsy school, remain loyal to their own school and their community, while those who enroll their children in a Hungarian school, want to be different from their community, therefore, they start to follow the line of the process of becoming Hungarians („elmagyarosodás”).

change for *a more Hungarian school* (a school where there are more children of Hungarian ethnicity).²¹

3. Decision based on the person of the teacher

Particularly in the case of first class enrolment the person of the teacher seems to be a factor of special importance, who the parents entrust their child to.

“They are asking me too, who will be the first class schoolmarm? And then no matter if it is a weaker school, but a good schoolmarm, the child may go there. Thus on the one side the person of the teacher rather, than the school itself, but the person of the teacher and the environment will influence the parents’ school choice.” (Father of a child studying in school №4)

“I knew the schoolmarm through parents whose children were just with her, I knew the schoolmarm through them. So I was really happy that this schoolmarm will be ours. She is teaching children so playfully, and the class, so it is a very strong class, the whole one, only one or two, maximum three of the pupils are a bit weaker, but in other ways the whole class is strong and it is rare. The previous four years the class was the same as well.” (Mother of a child studying in school №6)

School-choice based on the person of the teacher is another aspect, concretely that the decision made by a teacher as a parent is taken as a sample to follow by the community:

„So anyway, I thought about the school №6. On the one hand because there I know the teachers, I am there. And I think it would be a negative promotion of the school, if one of its own teachers would not choose it for her own child.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

“When I became a teacher, both I and my husband were teachers, many of the teachers, Hungarian teachers enrolled their child to Russian schools, then later to Ukrainian ones. And this had a very negative effect on the people living in the villages, because we were employed in village schools and in the villages people looked up

²¹ Earlier school №7, the “gypsy school” was an average Hungarian school, but later, as a result of the dynamic settlement of the Roma and their intensive childbearing, it gradually became a gypsy school.

to teachers, still look up to them nowadays. However if the teacher choose Ukrainian or Russian schools for their child, then its goes naturally, that we do the same, why a teacher is better than I am?!” (Upper class teacher, school №3)

4. Decision based on traditions of family members and friends

Parents, who were satisfied with their old school, teachers, willingly bring their child to the same school. This positive feedback is important for the school as well.

“There are a lot of parents whom I was the schoolmaster. And those are enrolling their child here.” (Headmaster, school №3)

“It happens plenty of times that a mother says that I was attended school №6, so I enroll my child there as well. Thus this positive experience, which she has got in the school remains and she enrolls her child in the same place, which she attended.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

It happens too that if the older sister/brother or cousin is going to a current school then the younger child will be taken there as well.

“If the older child has already enrolled to the school №6, then the parents enroll the others to the same school as well, and it is like, like a family school. Thus it happens in every other class that children belong to the same family.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

5. Decision based on the geographical location of the school and on other practical factors

Practical factors could play a crucial role in school choice. The closeness of the school to the living place, broad-day service, lunch for free or school bus service could influence parental decisions. Among the listed factors the geographical position of the school appeared the most decisive (see the location of the schools in Map 1).²²

²² At the time of school enrolment a child’s parents should apply officially for enrolment. The most plausible solution is the choice of the closest school. However, if

Choosing the schools situated in the centre of the town (school №4 and №6) is only slightly affected by the distance, however in schools with peripheral location (school №10, №9 and №3) the number of enrolled town children is lower, and there is an attempt to substitute them with pupils from the neighbouring villages.

„School №3 is a bit far from here, and the parents go in fear of their child, because it is outside in Búcsú, which is a separate part of the town, so it is like the child travels from a village. The only difference is that there is a school bus, so the problem is solved, therefore children can manage to study there.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

“Q: Nowadays does school №10 count as an alternative?”

A: Not so, because it is a distant place too. No bus running in that direction, and you have to reach it on foot. Well, and it is about a 40 minute walk from school №6. Thus, it is far from here.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

The case of school №7 is special in that sense, because it is located very close to the centre of the town, however due to social reasons it does not participate in the competition of the local education market.

„For local gypsies it is absolutely natural to enroll their children here, because they even called it gypsy school. They do not mention it as School №7. And then it is very near, it is only a couple of meters from the separate grange, which they called camp.” (Upper class teacher, school №7)

The Roma camp in Beregszász is so extensive, that school №9 is also affected when it comes to the decision of the closest school. Those who live closer to that school, usually choose that one.

“There was a railway line here some time ago, and this railway line got connected with the camp with school №9, so the railway is almost leading there, and those who live on that side of the camp, for those school №9 is closer to attend.” (Organising teacher, school №7)

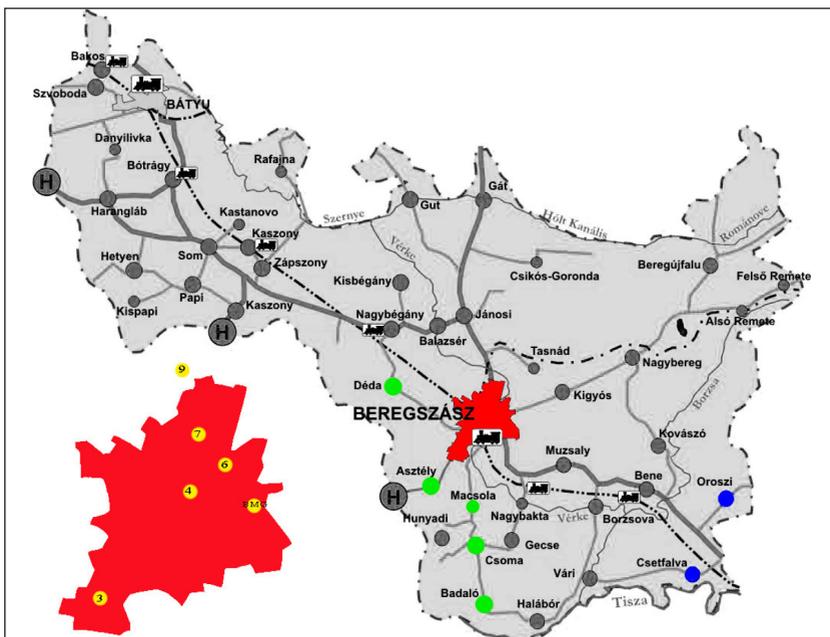
The number of pupils shuttling from villages to the Hungarian-language classes of Beregszász is 226. This is 16% of the total number

parents decide another way in theory there is no obstacle to enroll the child in another school. A practical hitch can be encountered if classes are filled up with children living in the neighbourhood of the school. In such cases school headmasters can refuse enrolling the child from a distant location. Beyond that, admission depends on the strength of parental arguments.

of pupils (1419) studying in the Hungarian language.²³ Those who are shuttling from villages have to wake up earlier, if a school-bus is not provided, then parents have extra expenses in transporting their children, in addition a negative attitude towards village children is tangible in some of the town schools.

Map 1.

The location of schools inside Beregszász and the neighbouring villages



Among schools under investigation school №3 appeared as the most significant from the point of enrolling pupils from the neighbouring villages. Due to the peripheral location of the school only 10% of the total number of pupils arrives from the centre or other parts of Beregszász. The place, where the school is situated was a separate village (called Búcsú) previously, and its attraction is strong for the neighbouring villages. The school launched a school bus service, which strongly supports the attraction of village pupils.

²³ Based on the data of Educational Authority of the town of Beregszász (personal communication)

In a 20 km zone of the neighbouring villages of Beregszász there are six Hungarian-language secondary schools and five primary schools, so in theory local Hungarian-language education would be possible (see *Table 5*). In spite of this a lot parents enroll their children in one of the schools in town.

In school №3 interviewees revealed that the actual circumstances in village schools is one of the important factors in school choice of parents living in villages. The high rate of gypsy children (see *Table 5*) could be determining in that respect, so the decision of that type belongs to the previously explained social category as well. The citation below refers to a village where the ratio of pupils belonging to Roma ethnicity is 47% in the local school.

“There are pupils from Badaló. It happens that there are twenty pupils with Roma origin and four Hungarians in a class. And then the parents say that I would prefer another school. There is a bus, school bus service, no worry, no problem. And this is the reason why they choose our school, or school №4, or school №10.”
(Upper class teacher, school №3)

Table 5.

Some characteristics of the neighbouring villages of Beregszász

Name of the village	Distance from Beregszász (km)	Level of local school	The ratio of Roma pupils in the local school (%)**
Makkosjányosi	7	Secondary school	22
Tizsacsoma*	9,9	Secondary school	0
Nagymuzsaly*	9,1	Secondary school	0
Gát	14,7	Secondary school	25
Nagybereg	10,1	Secondary school	9
Vári	16,2	Secondary school	38
Csetfalva*	20,9	Primary school	0
Sárosoroszi*	20	Primary school	0
Beregdeda*	5,3	Primary school	13
Nagyborzsova	12,5	Primary school	0
Badaló*	12,7	Primary school	47
Asztély*	5,2	Elementary school	0
Macsola*	7,1	-	

* villages mentioned in the interviews

** Data of the academic year 2008/09 Source: Braun László – Csernicskó István – Molnár József (2010:76) Magyar anyanyelvű cigányok (romák) Kárpátalján. Ungvár. PoliPrint.

6. Decision based on the quality of education and on the success rate of students who continue their studies

A kind of hierarchy can be discovered between schools in Beregszász. Interviewees' opinions concerning the place of different schools in this hierarchy are more or less coincidental. In that sense, the two best schools in the town are school №4 and №3.

“In my mind among Hungarian-language schools in Beregszász the two best schools are school №4 and ours [school №3]. It is believed to be so. I mean it regarding the continuation of studies. Maybe school №4 is a bit better, because there are more pupils from the town centre whose parents take care more, however the difference is not big. For example in completions of subjects, our pupils win first, second and third places as well. So these two schools are the best among Hungarian-language schools. At least I think that these are the two best schools.” (Upper class teacher, school №3)

For the title of the best school the Hungarian High school in Beregszász²⁴ is competing as well. In this respect secondary schools are at a disadvantage because the high school has a special focus on talent guidance, and the ratio of those who continue their studies is naturally higher in this institute. It goes together with the tendency that the most talented pupils of the Hungarian-language schools after graduation from the elementary school, move on to the high school.

“After the fourth grade the Hungarian High School in Beregszász attracts our children. One of our eyes sheds tears, the other one laughs, because we are happy of them, we are proud of them being able to enter the high school. But on the other hand the number here decreases. But if it is in the interest of the child, it is understandable.” (Father of a child studying in school №4)

“Thirty two pupils are in the fourth grade from which nine are planning to enter the High School. But those nine pupils are really prominent ones, so they are children of teachers, or pastors, or they are going to continue studies abroad.” (Upper class teacher, school №6)

In case of the gypsy school №7 it is hard to speak about indicators of the continuance of studies, because the majority of the pupils

²⁴ Beregszászi Magyar Gimnázium (BMG)

can hardly finish the 9th grade. In many cases the mere question of school attendance causes problems in this school. In addition social patterns of the Roma community, early family settling and child bearing makes finishing the primary school impossible.

Conclusions

In this paper we tried to catch the moment of school choice and identify parental arguments for choosing one or another school. At the same time the educational supply provided by the institutes in the local education market also influence parental decisions.

Regarding the analysed interviews the language based decisions (the decision between Ukrainian and Hungarian-language schools) seems to be one of the most important considerations for minority existence, however other practical factors also influence school choice of Hungarian parents. Besides the medium of the schools, the ratio of Hungarian-speaking Roma children, the distance between children's home and the school, the quality of education, and family traditions seem to be determining factors.

Table 6.
Competition of schools in some respect

Aspects of competition	Primary school №7	Primary school №9	Primary school №6	Secondary school №10	Secondary school №4	Secondary school №3	Hungarian High School
Primary school interval	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Matriculation	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
Continuance of studies, talent guidance	-	-	-	-	+	-	+
Village pupils	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
Roma pupils	+	+	+	-	(+)	-	-

+ Competition exists

(+) Competition exists, however school doesn't take part deliberately

- Competition does not exist

Since almost half of the population of our research location in Beregszász belongs to the Hungarian minority, a fairly dense educa-

tional network is available in the Hungarian language. In Beregszász several secondary and primary schools appear already at the elementary level, so parents have real alternatives when it comes to choosing schools.

Real and comprehensive competition cannot be experienced between the schools. They are rivals only in some aspects. Enrolling children during the primary school interval is in the interest of all of the primary and secondary schools. In regards to the number of pupils some of the schools are forced to compete with school №7 for enrolling well-off Roma pupils. Due to its peripheral location school №3 has a strong aspiration for enrolling pupils from the neighbouring villages. Another kind of competition can be identified between school №4 and the Hungarian High School, because both of them are interested in talent guidance and are attracting talented pupils.

The issue of languages has a dominant presence in school choice in Beregszász. Due to the inadequate effectiveness of state language teaching in Hungarian schools all over Subcarpathia, and because of the obligatory school-leaving exam of the Ukrainian language and literature a tendency of choosing Ukrainian-language schools has increased among Hungarian parents with the aim of improving children's state language competences.

Our interviewees however revealed that this choice could have considerable consequences on the child's development. The majority of the people we asked had the opinion that while learning the state language is an aim of special importance and it faces obstacles in almost all of the Hungarian-language schools, nevertheless it is of vital importance that the appropriate solution for effective state-language teaching should be found within the Hungarian-language schools.

Education of Hungarian-speaking Roma children appeared as a key issue. There is a separate Hungarian-language school especially for Roma pupils, where the biggest problem is school attendance. During education in such schools teachers do not pay regard to Roma children's peculiar socialization patterns. In the school educational process gypsy culture appears neither in a symbolic way in forms of inscriptions, nor in the curricula or textbooks. Curriculum, textbooks used in their schools were made especially for the Ukrainian/ Subcarpathian Hungarian-language minority education.

Concerning the education of the Roma this is not the only difficulty. The other crucial problem is that these segregated schools are not able to fulfil the aim of educating the rapidly growing Roma population even at a lower level. At the same time among the Roma with a bit better material background the tendency of assimilating into the Hungarian ethnicity has appeared, which has a school choice aspect as well. Our data proved that the Hungarian community does not receive Roma overtures in a definitely positive way and consequently Hungarian children move away to a more Hungarian elite school, or even to Ukrainian-language schools.