

UNDERSTANDING ROMA «PRACTICES».
PROMPTING EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH TO SURPASS
«WHAT IS THE CASE» TO «WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE»

*Sobre la comprensión de las «prácticas» gitanas.
Estimular la investigación educativa para pasar de
«lo que es el caso» a «lo que hay que hacer»*

*Sur la compréhension des «pratiques» roms.
La recherche éducationnelle incitée à passer
de «ce qui est le cas» à «ce qu'il faut faire»*

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SUMMARY

Generally, Roma people are viewed as being very different from those in main-stream society. The aim of this article is twofold. First, it explores these differences and attempts to make sense of the social practices of the Roma. To achieve this, the theoretical framework of meaning and social practices provided by Wittgenstein, Winch and others is applied to this subculture. Secondly, this «extreme case» stretches the theoretical framework to its limits, but it is argued that it is nevertheless possible to give expression to this far-reaching experience of difference. The Wittgensteinian notion of «knowing how to go on» prompts educational research to surpass «what is

the case» and get to «what needs to be done». By means of empirical examples taken from research into the education of Roma children, we argue for the need to take this further step. Answers are provided as to «how to go on» with regard to the case investigated, and the feasibilities and constraints of both the theoretical framework and educational research are explored.

Key words: Roma; Wittgenstein; social practices; educational research.

RESUMEN

Generalmente, los gitanos son vistos como muy diferentes de la sociedad mayoritaria. Este artículo tiene un doble objetivo. En primer lugar, se exploran estas diferencias y se intenta dar sentido a las prácticas sociales de los gitanos. Para lograr esto, el marco teórico de Wittgenstein, Winch y otros sobre el significado y las prácticas sociales se aplica a esta subcultura. En segundo lugar, este «caso extremo» extiende el marco teórico hasta sus límites. Sin embargo, se argumenta que es posible dar expresión a esta experiencia de gran diferencia. La noción de Wittgenstein de «saber cómo continuar» urge la investigación educativa para superar «lo que es el caso» y llegar a «lo que hay que hacer». Por medio de ejemplos empíricos tomados de la investigación en la educación de los niños gitanos, se argumenta de esta manera la necesidad de adoptar este nuevo paso. Se ofrecen respuestas en cuanto a «cómo continuar» en relación con el caso investigado y se exploran las posibilidades como restricciones tanto del marco teórico como de la investigación educativa.

Palabras clave: gitanos; Wittgenstein; prácticas sociales; investigación educativa.

SOMMAIRE

Généralement, le peuple Rom est considéré comme un peuple très différent de ceux au grand courant de la société. L'objectif de cet article est double. Tout d'abord, il explore ces différences et tente de donner un sens aux pratiques sociales des Roms. Afin d'y parvenir, il applique à cette sous-culture le cadre théorique de la signification et des pratiques sociales prévues par Wittgenstein, Winch et autres. Deuxièmement, bien que ce «cas extrême» pousse à ses dernières limites ce cadre théorique, on prétend qu'il est néanmoins possible d'exprimer cette vaste expérience de la différence. La notion de Wittgenstein de «savoir comment continuer» invite la recherche éducationnelle à dépasser «ce qui est le cas» et à arriver à «ce qu'il faut faire». Par l'intermédiaire d'exemples empiriques tirés de recherches sur l'éducation des enfants Roms, nous plaidons pour la nécessité de franchir cette nouvelle étape. Des réponses sont fournies quant à «comment continuer» en ce qui concerne le cas étudié, et les possibilités et les contraintes du cadre théorique et de la recherche éducationnelle sont explorées.

Mots clés: Rom; Wittgenstein; pratiques sociales; recherche éducationnelle.

It is the logic of our times,
No subject for immortal verse-
That we who lived by honest dreams
Defend the bad against the worse.

(C. D. Lewis, 1943)

1. ROMA IMMIGRANTS AND EDUCATION: CAN WE MAKE SENSE OF THEIR CULTURE AND DO THEY WANT TO BE PART OF OURS?

The enlargement of the European Union with twelve new, mainly Central and Eastern European countries in 2004 and 2007 led to a significant increase of Roma immigrants to Western Europe. Many of the new EU countries, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania include large Roma populations. Membership of the European Union enabled the free movement of inhabitants to other member states. Many Roma benefited from these new opportunities to seek a better life outside their home countries, and migrated to Western Europe, where they tend to settle in cities. Although their number and proportion should not be overestimated (OSCE, 2010), these migrations do not go unnoticed, and bring about heated public debates (one may for example recall the Roma evictions by French president Sarkozy in 2010 or the 2011 Dale Farm eviction in Essex, UK). News reports generally focus on the Roma's supposed inherent criminality or their poor living conditions, as these are disturbances or possible threats to the social order of the societies they joined. Roma are perceived as bringing along a number of societal problems and their integration into mainstream society does not go smoothly. Schools are also confronted with additional challenges: attendance by children who live in extreme poverty and who inhabit houses in a bad state and with a lack of hygiene (Ringold *et al.*, 2004). Figures indicate that retention and drop-out rates are high amongst Roma children, their educational achievement is generally low, and they do not easily join in with the school mentality. They often have limited or even no previous experience of schooling, and there are additional language problems. Last but not least, Roma are often said to be reluctant to participate in school and other social institutions, partly because they fear discrimination or being subject to violence, and so Roma schoolchildren often lack parental support in their schooling (e. g. Cahn *et al.*, 1999; Myers *et al.*, 2010; O'Nions, 2010; Open Society Foundations, 2012; Rostas, 2012; Şandru, 2009; Székely *et al.*, 2003; The World Bank, 2012; Unicef, 2011).

The difficulties that must be addressed go beyond practical issues. An underlying concern is how these challenges can be approached without being insensitive to people's culture or way of life. Neither unilateral assimilation nor segregation are regarded as valid perspectives from which to develop an educational approach. Within an assimilationist view, present differences are cancelled out and the pre-existing order is taken as fixed and something to which newcomers should adapt. Segregation precludes the possibility of different groups living together, as

differences, so it is claimed, are too large to overcome. Rather than living with each other, groups live next to each other. An educational stance rejects each of these essentializing views of 'difference', whether such differences are looked upon as undesirable (in the case of an assimilationist view) or as unalterable characteristics leading to insuperable incongruences (in the case of a segregationist view). An alternative proposal involves building on existing social practices, where the practices through which people shape their lives are taken as a starting place for seeking points of similarity in order to reach mutual understanding. Although there may be large differences between social practices, a large number of commonalities which can be built upon can generally be seen. A more nuanced and hopeful approach to addressing differences can therefore be developed.

Roma practices are not always easy to understand. At first sight at least, much of their behaviour may be interpreted as characterized by an unwillingness or reluctance to participate in mainstream society. Irregular school attendance is only one of the numerous examples where granted rights and opportunities are not fully taken up. It is dangerous, however, to jump to such conclusions. *From within our current interpretative framework*, this kind of behaviour may not seem transparent or intelligible, but perhaps our horizon falls short of offering an adequate interpretation. This experience of alterity should not be prematurely considered as absolute; the social practices of the Roma are not by definition completely impenetrable or unintelligible. Without denying the existence of commonalities nor wanting to overstress differences, it may be suggested that the Roma represent a *limit case*. This involves a group of people whose social practices often deviate considerably from those we are used to, including the explicit and implicit social norms and beliefs with which we are familiar. While the notions 'what we are used to' and 'the familiar' are in itself subject to a certain extent of inconclusiveness and can hardly be demarcated unambiguously, some reference can still be made to what is 'mainstream', i.e., what is conventional and established or related to the dominant discourse in a particular society. It concerns prevailing attitudes, values and practices that are somehow recognizable for a vast majority of a group or society. Roma force us to reflect more deeply upon the nature of beliefs, habits, customs and convictions which motivate both their and our way of being. The following two situations, which are taken from fieldwork conducted with recently immigrated Roma in a Western European city, exemplify this experience of being confronted with social practices which are hard to understand when they are somehow cut off from the day to day Western European interpretive frameworks:

Tonight the local Roma organization 'Opre Roma' is organizing a benefit, the purpose of which is to collect money to support Roma families in precarious living circumstances in the city who are unable to pay their energy costs. Some of the volunteers working in this organization are preparing the room for a meal (spaghetti) that will be served to the guests later. One of them, Ingrid, a non-Roma woman, is drawing up a pricelist for drinks. A discussion arises when Martin, the Romani chairman of the organization, complains that Roma do not feel good about

that. Ingrid says: «What is wrong about making a pricelist? People will be given the opportunity to give a free donation for the spaghetti meal that will be served, so let us sell the drinks at democratic prices». Martin argues: «The Roma are not like that, we do not fix prices like that, one cannot say how much people have to pay beforehand». And he goes on: «We will see when people get here, and then see who it is». His words remind me of a similar discussion about a band, which during the past few years has become quite well-known and is often asked to perform on stage in various settings. When I asked one day for the fee for a live performance, the band members refused to answer. They explained that «the price depends on the person, of course» and «these decisions must be made at the moment». One of the band members added: «If we see that people have a lot of money, and we do not know them, we ask a lot of money but if it is for people we know then we can even do it for free. Or we ask them how much they want to offer and then we see».

We are driving to Răcășdia, a small village in the South-West of Rumania. 'We' includes two journalists, a Romani woman (Deliya) and myself. The two newspaper journalists took the initiative in organizing this trip. They are making an in-depth report on a group of Rumanian Roma immigrants who arrived recently in Ghent, Belgium and want to visit these people's region of origin. They are accompanied by a local who can guide them around, as well as by myself to provide background information, and with whom the Roma in Ghent are to some extent familiar. It is silent in the back seat of the car, although I have made a lot of attempts to start a conversation with Deliya she does not seem to be very talkative. Her answers each time are brief, restricted to the absolutely necessary. But in the late afternoon, after a long drive, all of a sudden she asks me: «Why are all of you so interested in us, and why do you think our houses [i.e., self-built slums] are so special?». The question strikes me. Although I work often with Roma people, it is the first time in my life that a Roma person has posed me a question which is not about asking 'for something'. I am surprised and do not know how to interpret this. Is what she said casual or is she really interested? She makes me reflect upon our position. We are the ones who want to go to Rumania. We are curious about her living circumstances and personal history. We want to know more about the Roma. For her, I guess this trip is merely a job: she was paid by the journalists to join us. Perhaps she is taking advantage of the opportunity to see her children who stayed in Rumania and whom she has not seen for about three months now. Why am I paying so much attention to an apparently 'normal' question which cannot reasonably be regarded as shocking? Still, that probably describes my emotion: I am surprised, maybe indeed shocked, and certainly touched, the kind of feeling you have when things happen when you least expect them. I start to explain to her that I am doing research, and what this implies: that the situation of people should be investigated in order for policymakers to be well-informed and to be able to develop strategies to fight poverty, discrimination and social inequality. «One must know what situations are like in order to be able to do something» I add. But judging from her «oh» reaction, that all sounds too abstract. When I ask her whether my clarification explains some of the expressed interest, she shakes her head. I try to make the story more personal and tell her I had been doing voluntary work with Roma people before I started doing research, and that I was concerned about the living conditions of many of them, about the fact that they were excluded or that

their rights were violated, in particular in case of the children who do not always get the same chances at school. But I am not sure whether my attempts were of any help because she continued to ask me: «But why do you want to know this if you have a good life?».

Obviously, no generalizable conclusions can be drawn from these particular situations but they may not be insignificant, either. It goes without saying that similar reactions are to be found in other subcultures and may even be observed in people from the dominant culture. Yet the manifestation of such very different behaviour suggests to us the need for a theoretical position that can do justice to it. It is our belief that preceding experiences of alterity reveal something about the social practices of many Roma. There are of course other interpretations, referring for example to the often poor living conditions of Roma (cf. the 'culture of poverty'; see Lewis, 1959). In the first example, it could be argued that the event should remain accessible to all, and from that viewpoint, fixed prices put up a barrier which may exclude some. Concerning the second example, much of the 'usual' behaviour may be also be perceived as a consequence of poverty. The reduction of most communication undertaken by Roma to questions for material help will sound familiar to many field workers. Moreover, this woman's acceptance of her invitation to join the journalists seems to have been prompted by the financial reward. Although these arguments seem very convincing on the surface, they are in our view unsatisfactory. They offer only a partial interpretation of what is going on. In the first example, a negative interpretation, that of taking away barriers in order to meet the needs of less fortunate people, could be replaced by a more positive reading of the offered arguments. It could be that a different concept of justice sustains and motivates the way Roma see things. 'Fairness' is not a matter of equal treatment ('everyone should pay the same for obtaining the same goods'), but should take into account particular conditions ('one should contribute in accordance with what one has'). The second case urges us to reflect on our own values. The 'attention given to Roma' is not something these people ask for; rather, it happens to them. They 'simply' move to live somewhere and all of a sudden everybody seems interested in them: welfare professionals, voluntary workers, and all the media come to visit them in the squats they inhabit. To 'us' (researchers, paradigmatic for the Western mind-set), this fascination-with-what-is-happening-around-us, our curiosity, is something that comes naturally to us. It expresses a willingness to know and understand things, combined with a desire to control the world around us. But things *can* be otherwise. The apparent 'disinterest' of Roma, which is often referred to as problematic behaviour, may in its turn be interpreted more positively: a kind of surrendering to fate, to trusting each other ('us', as in opposition to 'them', i.e., mainstream society) and the course of events. This is radically different from a worldview grounded in risk management (see Beck, 1992).

Rather than taking our tentative interpretations further and turning them into wild hypotheses, an appreciation of what is involved first requires the understanding of a number of fundamental issues. In the following section, a Wittgensteinian

conceptual and epistemological framework is outlined in order to grasp the issues at stake. Key concepts such as ‘meaning’, ‘(social) practices’ and the ‘form of life’ are clarified. Subsequently, a stance is developed about where the educational researcher finds herself including what ‘interpretation’ amounts to. A further section focuses on the need to make a distinction between ‘knowing the case’ and ‘knowing how to go on’. Finally, the paper returns to the social practices of Roma, and more particularly to the issue of schooling Roma immigrant children.

2. MEANING, PRACTICES, AND THE OVERALL FRAMEWORK¹

2.1. ‘Form of life’ and ‘language-games’

Ludwig Wittgenstein discussed acting, speaking and doing in his *Philosophical Investigations* as well as in *On Certainty*. The concept of the ‘form of life’ indicates what he considers to be the bedrock of our ‘language-games’. These unjustified and unjustifiable patterns of human activities can be seen as the complicated network of rules which constitute language and social life. The ‘form of life’ is ‘given’: it is ‘language-and-the-world’ and thus we cannot place ourselves outside it. Examples of this ‘bedrock’ include Moore’s well known statements «I am a human being», or «There are physical objects», to which Wittgenstein refers in sections 4 and 35 of *On Certainty* (1969, henceforth *C*). Sentences saying that one has two hands, and that all human beings have parents (*C*, §§ 157 & 240) are similar. The ‘certainty’ of the ‘form of life’ is not a matter of knowledge itself but is *a priori*. These ‘propositions’ are unmoving foundations (*C*, § 403); exempt from doubt (*C*, § 341); they stand fast (*C*, §§ 151 & 235); and are absolutely solid (*C*, § 151). They ‘ground’ all activities and thus are wrongly expressed by the words ‘I know’ (see *C*, § 414). Our acting is embedded in a matrix of certainty that precedes our knowledge (the matrix of knowing-and-doubting and knowing-and-‘making a mistake’). These ordinary certainties are the roads on which we walk without hesitation. They are not the only possible roads, and not necessarily the right ones (for example those which have worked in experience). But they are the roads on which we travel, and we have no reasons for leaving them: «I have no grounds for not trusting them. And I trust them» (*C*, § 600). For this reason the ‘form of life’ cannot be taken as the ultimate foundation for absolute objectivity or truth. What we call objective and true is determined by this ‘boundary’: «If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false» (*C*, § 205).

In discussing the paradigmatic notion of the language-game Wittgenstein writes: «If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements»

1. Section 2 and Section 3 rely extensively on previous publications of one of the co-authors. More in particular use is made of ideas developed in previous studies such as SMEYERS, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012; SMEYERS & BURBULES, 2006; and SMEYERS & MARSHALL, 1995.

(*Philosophical Investigations*, 1953 – henceforth *PI* – *PI*, I, § 242). Only within a ‘language-game’ will we be able to justify a certain inference, a certain behaviour; within a ‘language-game’ we can speak of justification and lack of justification, of evidence and proof, of mistakes and groundless opinions, of good and bad reasoning, of correct and incorrect measurements: «What counts as an adequate test of a statement belongs to logic. It belongs to the description of the language-game» (*C*, § 82). And moreover, if we try to doubt everything, Wittgenstein argues, we would not get as far as doubting anything: «The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty» (*C*, § 115). Thus, within a system of thinking and acting there occur, up to a point, investigations and criticisms of the reasons and justifications that are employed in that system. We bring this inquiry to an end when we come upon something that we regard as a satisfactory reason, and that we do so can be seen by our actions. The end, Wittgenstein says, «is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language game» (*C*, § 204). It is by our actions that we fix a boundary of the ‘language-game’. This is the ‘certainty’ we are initiated into, and he insists upon the importance of the way the initiation proceeds, and on its relevance to establishing meaning: «... always ask yourself: How did we *learn* the meaning of this word (‘good’ for instance)? From what sort of examples? in what language-games? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings» (*PI*, I, § 77).

2.2. Agreement in ‘judgements’

Peter Winch draws our attention to the fact that Wittgenstein’s notion of agreement as a condition of being able to communicate does not presuppose that an agreement should be reached about *everything* if communication is to be possible at all. What seems to be important is to try to understand the position of the other party, including the difficulties that go with it. Winch writes: «There is no ground whatsoever *a priori* for expecting the emergence of some position free of difficulties which everyone would be able to accept. But that does not mean at all that there is no difference between someone who accepts and lives by a position with clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, of where it may lead him, of what the alternatives are, and someone who does not understand these things» (Winch, 1987, 189). This is closely linked to the meaning of ‘following a rule’. One cannot indicate all the cases which possibly belong to the area of application of a certain rule by (the phrasing of) the rule itself. ‘To follow a rule’ means to be able to go on in a certain way. As Norman Malcolm puts it: «We go on all agreeing, following rules and applying words in new cases – without guidance. Other than past training, there is no explanation. It is an aspect of the form of life of human beings. It is our nature. To try to explain it is like trying to explain why dogs bark» (Malcolm, 1986, 181). It is important to recall that this ‘going on’ is quite obviously socially sanctioned.

Let us focus on the fact that Wittgenstein's 'theory' of meaning advocates neither a position of pure subjectivity nor one of pure objectivity. From the beginning, what could be called an element of risk is present in the way communication is conceived. Though every situation is in some sense new, the different meanings of a concept are linked through family resemblances. In order to be understood, any particular use may not be radically different from previous ones. However, the consistency of meaning Wittgenstein argues for is free of essentialism. It is within the *normal* context that the meaning of a concept is determined. Other people *and* I proceed in this way. There is no absolute point of reference, neither internal nor external, neither for them nor for me. The community of language speakers forms the warrant for the consistency of meaning. Analogously the meaning of an action can be decided from the 'third person perspective'. And in turn 'intention' finds its proper place in the context of action. What is crucial, as indicated already, is the social determination of meaning and understanding. The meaning of a concept is not the result of what I intend, but is determined and carried by the community to which I belong. To understand a concept means to be able to paraphrase it and to act accordingly. In both meaning and understanding, the 'third person perspective' is predominant. Language is first of all the language of others. It determines the way that I can speak, the alternative is to be unintelligible.

2.3. *Understanding social practices*

According to Winch (1958) social science has to engage itself in understanding human practices. In suggesting this he draws from the later Wittgenstein such ideas as 'following a rule', 'human shared practices' and 'what it makes sense to say'. Invoking Wittgenstein, Winch draws attention to the fact that one cannot make a sharp distinction between 'the world' and 'the language in which we try to describe the world', and argues that it is therefore wrong to say that the problems of philosophy arise out of language rather than out of the world: «Because in discussing language philosophically we are in fact discussing what counts as belonging to the world. Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use. The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world» (Winch, 1958, 15). The relevance of conceptual enquiries into what it makes sense to say should therefore not be underestimated. In this vein he argues that «... the question of what constitutes social behaviour is a demand for an elucidation of the concept of social behaviour... it is a matter of tracing the implications of the concepts we use» (*ibid.*, 18). Words are to be understood in terms of their use in the lives of those who deploy them. Having a language, and the notions that go along with that, such as meaning and intelligibility, are logically dependent for their sense on social interaction between people.

That «practice has to speak for itself» (C, § 139), points for Wittgenstein not only to the ways in which the unity of our concepts is formed; it also comprises the skills involved in *handling* the conceptualized phenomena, our pre-reflective *familiarity*

with them, expressed in the sureness of our behaviour, and the *judgmental power* exercised in applying or withholding a given concept on a particular occasion. These factors are all relevant to the establishment of knowledge, but they cannot themselves be fully and straightforwardly articulated by verbal means. In returning to the ordinary, Wittgenstein stresses the essential groundlessness of the social contexts in which assessments can be made and standards evoked.

Here *training* plays a crucial role in education, but this is importantly different from *conditioning*, in that the association is structured by a practice which for Wittgenstein is rule-governed, that is, normative: not the mere reinforced association of word and object, or behaviour, but an association that is effective in enabling the novice to realize her more basic desires by shaping her behaviour to conform to –or perhaps better, mimic– the activities licensed by practice or custom. Training is successful if it results in the initiated learner eventually becoming a skilled and thereby an autonomous practitioner, and thus performing within, and so adding to, the practice –perhaps even contributing to a further change in it. The structuring provided by a community or practice is a necessary support, both logically and physically, for the novice's actions. It is logically necessary because it provides a system of background beliefs, actions, and competencies; this complex pattern is necessary for the token utterance or action to have significance. It is physically necessary because the very possibility of learning at all exists in the presence of exemplars and models –*even if* the outcome of the process is to question or modify them. Thus training provides the grounds for the development of the cognitive competencies constitutive of the mastery of language, for Wittgenstein, or for the mastery of any genuinely normative practice within a 'form of life'.

2.4. *Judging and Acting*

It should be noted here that we not only take over certain ways of judging the world, as we experience it, from earlier generations, but that, in this context, judging is also a way of acting. The child's coming to act according to these beliefs cannot be learned simply by rote (see *C*, §144). This is why the practical aspect of rule-following cannot be taught on the basis of rules alone; it has to be picked up by examples and by training. As Wittgenstein says, we look at a model or template and learn 'to go on' in a similar way. But, as we have stressed, this is not to say that practices are forever fixed: they are always open to new developments. That these standards are embedded within socially constituted bedrock practices is the only view of norms that ends neither in mystery-mongering nor in a regression. According to Wittgenstein these practices are not deliberately chosen conventions, but are constituted by the harmonious 'blind' agreement, in words and activities, of a group of people over a period of time, which stands in the background. It is 'blind' only in the sense that it does not itself result from the self-conscious or explicit application of rules (see *PI*, I, § 219). Hence, he says, to the extent that we are following a rule we are doing so 'unquestioningly', but this does not mean that

the act of following a rule brooks no originality or spontaneity: judgment always plays a role, even where there are limits on judgment. In Wittgenstein's account, people are neither unconscious automata 'blindly obeying' rules, nor utterly free agents, *sui generis*; the indispensability of an unquestioned background links the process of learning to the content of what is learned. In this process, regularities that create a space for going on in the same way are both reinforced *and* opened to potential question as they are acted out in actions and reactions shaped by our initial training. Practices are learned foremost by doing rather than by teaching. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein argues that these grounding meanings must always come down, at some point, to a recognition that people simply *do* accept this or that, just *do* agree about what actions count or do not count in following a certain procedure; they may not even be able to articulate how and why this is so. Here the limits of critical reflection are set by the fact that a good deal of practical know-how is *tacit*, learned not through explicit representation and explanation, but through unspoken processes of observation and emulation.

One may distinguish activities, games, practices and rituals. There are 'family resemblances', to use a Wittgensteinian term, between these; there are cases in which it is not completely clear to which category a particular kind of human doing belongs (as there are possibly more intermediate cases one could distinguish). But they are all one or another kind of 'practice'. A way to think about 'practice' might involve emphasizing (1) how they are learned –for instance through imitation, initiation, instruction and so forth– and (2) how they are enacted. In both cases a person's *relation* to the practices in which they are engaged becomes crucial; how they are brought into them, and how they contribute to them. Practice, viewed in relation to human actors, cannot simply be seen in intrinsic terms. It is about the interrelationship between the nature of an activity and how people think about and act within its practice. For example, practices may be learned, or enacted, in an unreflective, ritualistic way; or as a strategy of conforming; or they may be occupied or enacted ironically; they may be learned, or enacted, as a way of transforming them, or as a way of portraying them as objects of reflection and questioning; or they may be learned, or enacted, as part of a process of perfecting them, excelling at them. To be sure, the particular type of practice has features that tend to promote one or another way of learning or enacting them; there is, as we have said, a *relationship* here –but it is a reciprocal one. There are practices that are in essence conservative (such as folklore activities), and others that are directed at change (such as the conventions of debate over the introduction of a new law); there are more rigid (the performance of a classic piece of medieval music) and more flexible practices (the work of an artist such as Andy Warhol); some practices are more critical, while others do not tolerate any kind of questioning. A further dimension of the relationships that a practice encourages or discourages through different ways of learning or enacting it, is how it is intertwined with our *self* and sense of *identity*, on the one hand, and our *relations* and ways of *interacting* with other people, on the other hand. Here the way we identify with particular practices, and to what extent, is at stake.

2.5. *Understanding practices and social theory*

For Charles Taylor, social theory rarely consists simply of making some continuing practice explicit. The stronger motive is the sense that our implicit understanding of a practice is in some crucial way inadequate or even wrong. Theories can extend, challenge, or even criticise our constitutive understandings. Theory makes a claim to tell us what is really going on, to show us the real, hitherto unidentified course of events. Of practices he says,

[those] which make up a society require certain self-descriptions on the part of the participants. These self-descriptions can be called constitutive. And the understanding formulated in these can be called pre-theoretical, not in the sense that it is necessarily uninfluenced by theory, but in that it does not rely on theory. There may be no systematic formulation of the norms, and the conception of man and society which underlies them. The understanding is implicit in our ability to apply the appropriate descriptions to particular situations and actions (Taylor, 1985, vol. 2, 93).

The validation of a social theory is therefore, for Taylor, not how well the theory describes practices as a range of independent entities, but rather a judgment of how practices fare when informed by the theory. The self-descriptions that he considers constitutive presuppose that a human being understands herself against a background of what she calls 'strong evaluations'. Here the desirable is not only defined by what is desired (plus a calculation of consequences) but by a qualitative characterization of desires as higher and lower, noble and base (see Taylor, 1985, vol. 1, 23).

Clearly, interpretation is central to all kinds of educational research and enters into every stage of the process in different ways. The selection of the focus of enquiry depends on a certain reading, an interpretation, of an arena of policy and practice, and of the existing research and other literature, as well as the interests of the researcher. The selection of a mode or method of enquiry, of the location of the research, of participants and of the forms of data or other resources to be assembled depends on an understanding, an interpretation, of the nature of the matter to be investigated and of the evidence and illumination that different forms of enquiry will yield. Some of the data assembled will itself be constituted by participant interpretations of events and experience. Then, and perhaps more obviously, there is all the business of organizing data, selecting what will be reported and trying to make sense of it in some form of analysis or argument. Interpretative frameworks are thus (1) brought to a piece of research; (2) embodied in the data we collect through research (3) and generated out of interaction between the theoretical frameworks that the researcher brings to the research and all that they encounter through the research process. Finally, the kinds of conclusions that are drawn from the analysis and argument are themselves the product of interpretations not only of the research but of the place of research within educational theories, policies and practices.

3. 'KNOWING WHAT IS THE CASE' AND 'KNOWING HOW TO GO ON'

In educational research what is at stake is the understanding of a particular reality brought to the fore by language: this presupposes that this reality can be understood and moreover that its intelligibility can at least partially be made explicit. The core of the conception of language, which marks Wittgenstein's later work, is that in the context of social practices any attempt to say something is always partial, is always one-sided. No way of speaking, no doctrine whatsoever can control cultural practices and thus liberate us from the restlessness and uncertainty of human existence, of the search for meaning in our lives. He points to the fact that what we do can never be completely transparent, and that it is always characterized to some extent by arbitrariness. Thus it becomes clear that in what we say we bear witness to what we long for, but also to what we are not certain of, such as how we try to express ourselves or be coherent. In an analogous way, Stanley Cavell argues that we should not try to escape from the existential conditions in which we find ourselves, in order to look for false certainties, but urges us to be reborn continuously and thus to be mortal. In his book *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (1988), he maintains that, among other things, words in philosophy may create a distance. They allow us to start over and over again and thus generate an alliance with others who are also focused on this process. Words may help us escape, but at the same time they create a home. Thus philosophy is engaged in a certain revision of the way one sees particular things and the philosopher may identify herself as someone who '*reviews her vision*', or else '*revises her reviews*', thereby reflecting on what she is conscious of.

The conceptualisation of social (and political) problems therefore demands an ever-renewed rethinking of reality using similar instruments. To think again can only mean to think from a different point of view about what one is trying to understand (and perhaps change). From Cavell's philosophical framework it will be clear that an investigation of what exists is only a starting-point. What is at stake shifts to what is at stake for someone (again, for the other and for myself), where the other is recognized in their personal struggle as an emotional being, thus partaking in unstructured justice. Rigid approaches to social (and political) problems will have to be complemented by a more flexible ethical sensibility. Here it is no longer possible to ignore the recognition of emotions as an essential component of a comprehensive social rationality (see Nussbaum, 1997). To see the other is to look for the way in which she expresses herself, gives shape to herself in the struggle with herself. But to touch the other is also to confront the other with one's own struggle by means of the evocative instruments that are at our disposal. That we inevitably 'violate' the other is clear enough. After all, the understanding of the other is at the same time a negation and a constitutive affirmation. We approach the other as an intentional 'object', which we crave to understand. We want to read the story of the other, too often without recognising the illegibility of her story. This does not necessarily imply that we would not be able to understand her or do not want to do justice to her. The reading of the story of the other is however at the same time a reading which is bound up with our

own stories. We are called upon to surrender to the intersection of this reading with its reader, and to what this does to us.

One can distinguish between understanding in terms of knowledge, and understanding that directs us towards –to remain in the Wittgensteinian frame of reference– ‘knowing how to go on’. The person who is part of a practice is by definition someone who knows how to go on (and obviously, she does go on in a particular way); denying this makes the concept of ‘knowing how to go on’ empty, evaporating into thin air. Now, if that is the case, relying on the concept of practice in order to claim the superiority of understanding (understood as ‘knowledge of’) misses the point completely of course –we should keep in mind Wittgenstein’s insight that ‘Interpretations themselves do not determine meaning’ (PI, I, § 198) and that «... “obeying a rule” is a practice» (*ibid.*, I, § 202). This confusion is the result of there being two concepts of understanding (i.e. knowledge of vs. knowing how to go on). For all kinds of reasons, the ethnographer may not be willing to go on in a particular way (dictated by a practice). In a sense one could say she does not understand it, but it would be clearer to argue that though she may well understand it, she chooses not to take this particular route since route does not make sense for her. This brings us to the issue of entitlement, more generally, to what it means ‘to know how to go on’. In the absence of fixed rules which determine what and what does not count as belonging to a practice, it is only they who are on the inside who are entitled to legislate about the application of a rule, in other words, on the basis of belonging to a particular group. This points towards ‘being acknowledged’ as being entitled and thus to other notions such as conversion and initiation which make sense along these lines. Though knowledge may necessarily be the beginning, it cannot leave us to indulge ourselves in the feeling of complacency that this is all we, as researchers and philosophers of education, need to acquire or achieve. Indeed, it pushes us in the direction of making it our business to know how to go on.

4. ADDRESSING THE EDUCATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ROMA IMMIGRANTS

As indicated at the beginning of this paper, the education of Roma immigrant children presents us with a number of problems. Rather than taking a stance of practical problem-solving (which would merely be an unreflective way of ‘going on’) or focusing on the reconstruction of knowledge of ‘what is the case’ (‘knowing that’), the interpretive framework outlined above points at a perspective that aims to develop ‘knowing how to go on’. This first of all requires that some form of ‘understanding’ of Roma social practices is sought, and secondly, that these should be related to the social practices children are initiated into within the educational system, as well as to the way educational policy is conceived. The central research question that must be addressed in this context thus focuses on the mutual relationship between the social practices of Roma immigrant children and the social practices these children are initiated into in the educational system. This requires that further

attention is paid to the way these children are looked upon in policy. To answer these questions, ethnographic research and extensive interviews with various stakeholders (policymakers, teachers, principals and other school workers, social workers as well as Roma parents and children) were conducted (see Hemelsoet, 2013b). A clarification of the particular hindrances to participation in schooling was part of that investigation, but at its very heart was an interest in exploring 'difference'. This has important consequences for the way problems are even defined. Different actors have different perspectives, produce distinct discourses, and acknowledge distinct problems, in other words experience different meanings when confronted by the same event, and are differently motivated to act. While for policymakers irregular school participation, truancy, school drop-outs, segregation and the over-representation of Roma children in special education are of the highest importance, schools see themselves confronted with welfare problems when these children enter schooling children lacking school skills and attitudes as well as language and communication problems. Beyond the obvious practical barriers resulting from difficult living circumstances (related to both poverty and residence status), Roma people themselves mention a lack of adequate knowledge and information (they are not familiar with the school or the educational system in general), they further say they fear and distrust social institutions (which is a reason to keep children at home: they want to decide and control how their children are being educated themselves), and they also talk about a gap between the family and school culture. The curriculum is not adapted to their way of life: what they learn is not always considered to be practical, there are different habits (with regard to hygiene, mixing boys and girls for activities, etc.) and sometimes they say they hope and aspire for different ideals. Clearly, to some extent, the perspectives of different stakeholders refer to the same underlying problems. Yet the significance they each attach to these problems seems to vary greatly. Truancy for example, is self-evidently interpreted by policymakers in terms of reluctance and disinterest in the school. For parents or children however, this may be motivated by being unfamiliar with the school, shame, distrust, fear of being discriminated against, a generalization of anger towards other social institutions, or disagreement with the educational project of the school.

4.1. *How different are Roma really?*

To consider the question 'How different are the Roma, really?' we will first offer some more general conclusions from our own inquiry and relate these to the findings of other research reports. Gómez Alonso and Vargas (2003) found that Romani children and their parents and families are motivated to learn and to go to school, which is affirmed by our study. A general willingness to have their children go to school was found among parents; youngsters in their turn had a surprisingly clear vision of their dreams in life, as well as how school could contribute to the realization of these. This does not mean that no difference is experienced between the home and the school culture, on the contrary; this is consistent with the ethnographic study by Levinson

and Sparkes (2005) which describes the dissonance between a Roma culture characterized by relative freedom and fluidity, and a non-Roma school culture which is more restrictive. In our own research, both parents and school workers refer to a similar gap. To a large extent, this is due to poor living conditions; as previously mentioned, poor people, in general, often refer to a gap between their home culture and social institutions such as a school. Teachers additionally describe disciplinary and attitudinal problems as 'typical' for children of the Roma. Moreover, Roma parents refer to their lack of knowledge and information about the way schools function, and to a fear and distrust of social institutions. They talk about the 'gadje' (the non-Roma) as opposed to themselves the 'Roma'. Though they speak of 'us' and 'them' which signifies their identity, it is not clear to what this comes down to, i.e., what exactly is different in their point of view. We think that some of it could be characterized as a kind of resignation or *Gelassenheit*. With regard to school participation, for example, although most parents affirm the importance of going to school, they are not very active in sending their children, encouraging them or punishing them if they refuse to go. Though lip-service is paid in terms of the expression of the desirability of attending school, their efforts do not seem to match. Such apparent 'disinterest' or 'passivity' should not too easily be interpreted as reluctance. It is, instead, the expression of a feeling that a person can't control her usefulness whatever she does, that she must always hope for the best, or trust that in the end it will be alright. Is this the result of a long history of exclusion, powerlessness and therefore of an intuition that despite their efforts, much will be in vain as they are in the hands of those who are in power, adding to a feeling of inferiority? Roma live foremost in the here and now and generally need to see the urgency and actual relevance of things in order to take action. Schooling, is a long-term project which lacks this feeling of urgency. From that perspective, children waking up late may be as much a legitimate reason for missing school as being ill. The passivity we see is not necessarily motivated by laziness, although it may seem so. Things that are considered immediately relevant may prompt immediate action. An example of something that resonates with what we observed in a school context is the manner in which the last part of pregnancy is sometimes dealt. It is not exceptional that parents take few preparatory measures for the birth of their child; so that, at the moment of birth, there is no bed for the baby, nor clothes or diapers, etc. What they expect is that, as soon as the baby is born, everybody will swing into action, and all family members will hasten to assist with what must be done. They are not just *awaiting* what could happen (which would result in complete passivity), but they are rather *accepting* or *trusting* (confident in what tomorrow will bring; that the issues they will be confronted with, will be resolved).

4.2. Policy initiatives involving the Roma

We will return to this but will consider first another set of preconceptions about policies concerning Roma. Most (European) policy initiatives involving the Roma are directed at their inclusion by means of strategies which combine

mainstreaming and *targeting* (see European Commission, 2009, 2011). Although the aim is inclusion, policies also seem to affirm a kind of particularization, considering Roma as a distinct group. These policies acknowledge to some extent that Roma are different and take this as a starting point for further action, for example, that they are excluded or discriminated in their home country. Insofar as both local authorities and Roma themselves apply for European funds, they are pushed towards initiatives focusing on Roma as a target group, as this is an explicit criterion for funding. Such policies aim to break the opposition between non-Roma and Roma, between us and them –they are directed towards social inclusion. But paradoxically, at least initially, they seem to add to this division. As such, they run the risk of further enlarging social discrepancies and oppositions rather than supporting social inclusion. Finally, focussing on good practice, the importance of taking a comprehensive life-world oriented approach and personal commitment is stressed (Hemelhoet, 2015). Such a view takes the life world of families as a starting point for further action in which the development of a trusting relationship often makes a difference. Although concepts such as trust, commitment and involvement may sound vague and hard to grasp, professionals who cross the boundaries of what is professionally expected from them and who develop an engaged relationship with families, make headway in getting these families involved in the schooling of their children. For example, some teachers make home visits after working time and help families with other issues such as administration. These extra efforts express an engagement which is helpful in gaining trust, and consequently strengthens a mutual interest and involvement.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to offer a conclusive answer to the question of what exactly makes the Roma so different and what distinctive features can be identified. It seems that much, however, can be explained in terms of trust on their behalf, which is lacking in a more radical sense than in other subgroups. While the Roma seem to rely on fortune, and their social practices are structured by ‘the here and now’ and reliance on other Roma, non-Roma (here referred to as the prototypical Western European citizen) express a need for control of the reality that surrounds them; to some extent the Roma have not given up on the idea that things can change, they live the American dream, i.e., they see Western Europe as ‘the promised land’; their approach is positive (and thus there is room for change). It is not just about running away from exclusion and because of discrimination, yet, perhaps their experience is less characterized by a feeling they can have a lot of influence. The discourse of Western Europe is characterized by a desire for knowledge, by science, structure and the deployment of all kinds of means to avoid risks and consequently people will *plan* what to do and weigh all available options beforehand. In Wittgensteinian terms, the Roma and people from Western Europe play a different language-game; what is real for them is based on a different way of making sense of the inherited human condition. It would be too easy to say that they cannot understand us or the other way around. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, such a stance is problematic, and it is problematic in three ways.

First, it is *incorrect*. Although they may have a different language-game, Roma do not have a different form of life. The reality they speak of and the language they use isn't radically different. Second, it is *dangerous*. A stance excluding the possibility of mutual understanding opens opportunities for justifying (more precisely rationalising) racism, as it antagonises the other. Finally, it is *not fruitful*. It leaves little room to answer the question of 'How to go on?', presupposing more than a peaceful coexistence. For both the Roma and for all other people, what will be required is a preparedness to appreciate each other's differences but at the same time to move on in an atmosphere of mutual respect towards living together and taking up joint responsibilities. Obviously, 'appreciating each other's differences' implies that we get to know each other, at least to some extent.

4.3. *Social practices of Roma and their history*

In order to comprehend the social practices of Roma, it is crucial to understand their history. As is extensively documented, the history of the Roma people is mainly characterized by continuous social marginalisation (including legally embedded slavery until the late 19th century), exclusion and discrimination (see Fraser, 1992; Liégois, 2007; Lucassen *et al.*, 1998). This is not only something from the past but exists in the present as well; it is the everyday experience of many Roma living in Central and Eastern European countries (see Bancroft, 2005; Guy, 2001; Ladányi & Szelényi, 2003). It is this story these people bring when they move to the West: it has been the story of their lives as well as the history of the group to which they belong. What is carried from the past is a narrative of unhappiness, hence it is no surprise that these people do not tend to expect a lot from the future. From that perspective, it is not at all unreasonable for them to bracket the future and live in the 'here and now'. They were *not* part of a society, they are *not* really Europeans (yet); it follows that it is almost impossible for them to appreciate an apparently sudden well-intended inclusion. There are good arguments to suggest that the state of being excluded has come to structure their lives, given their history in Europe, and that it is the binding principle underlying many of their social practices. The experience of 'not belonging to mainstream society' has repeatedly been passed on to new generations, and it has led to a lack of trust in non-Roma, in the surrounding world, and in what the future may bring. It has fixed them to see themselves as outsiders (they cannot belong to the society they have arrived in, nor do they have anywhere else to go, i.e., a homeland); and sometimes, this socially ascribed inferiority seems to have been internalised and turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Clearly, this has important consequences for 'how to go on'. How can we move to an atmosphere of mutual respect, to living together and taking up responsibilities against the background of these painful insights? It seems to us that the first step in initiating change has to be taken by the non-Roma. Regaining trust that has been lost for such a long time is a difficult challenge both for Roma and

non-Roma. In spite of much counterevidence from the past as well as from the present, Roma should recuperate their trust in mainstream society. Similarly, and notwithstanding repetitive unfavourable experiences of non-conformism and social maladjustment, non-Roma should open up and give the Roma a chance. As the observed success factors of good practices have shown, regaining trust and confidence is of the utmost importance in achieving progress. This has partially been achieved among the younger generation, as demonstrated in several inquiries (see Hemelsoet & Van Pelt, 2015; Van der Straeten, 2013). Some Roma youngsters who have grown up in Ghent, have learned to believe again, and are able to hope for a better future in a society they start to call theirs and in which they can experience people's appreciation of the way they participate: not *because*, but *notwithstanding* or *while* they are somewhat different. This implies vast challenges for policy. There is a tension present in current policies, between targeting on the one hand, to take into account particularities of Roma, and on the other hand to include them. It requires a difficult balance in order to cope with the danger of identifying Roma with the problems they experience (whether it be poverty, housing, criminality, unemployment, etc.); issues which must be addressed independently of particular ethnical groups (see Hemelsoet, 2013a). Yet at the same time, given the present conditions, a targeted approach may be regarded as the only alternative for change.

4.4. *How to go on: Prompting educational research to surpass 'what is the case'*

It goes without saying that given their long history of exclusion and discrimination, it will take a long time before Roma self-esteem and consequently acceptance of responsibility may change. It is to this that the educational researcher can contribute to some extent when addressing 'how to go on'. However, we believe that this is not enough and that the theoretical insights we have developed above can complement these insights in order to make sense of the situation that confronts us. Knowing the case is the first step. Empirical research which compares the social practices of Roma with the social practices children are initiated into within schools, and what is targeted and implied in certain policies, has certainly yielded relevant knowledge. From this, suggestions can be made about 'how to go on'. Theoretical insights need to be integrated with empirical knowledge, in view of a better understanding. The case of the Roma stretches the Wittgensteinian framework to its limits, but it seems that it can give expression to a far-reaching experience of difference. It provides a language that allows us to see how understanding is possible and thus creates opportunities to consider 'how to go on'. Conversely, the social practices studied deepen the theoretical stance by making it clear what is involved at different levels. The theoretical stance is humanising: it makes points of contact and helps to make explicit what we share as Roma and non-Roma. The inquiry does not limit itself to seeing opportunities 'to go on', but also points to some of the necessary 'tools' and ingredients to do so (see Hemelsoet, 2015). The specific findings of this research are not merely theoretical: they concern a particular comprehension

of the situations at stake and express an informed responsiveness towards these. This implies a redefinition of the problems. Problem definitions reflect a particular view and have come into existence in a specific way. This process does not take place outside power constraints, outside of what is politically desirable. But as clarified above, and in order to 'go on', attention must be drawn to various problem definitions made by stakeholders. In other words: everybody should be heard and needs to have a say in how the problems are defined. Eliciting these differences does not only contribute to the production of more knowledge; it also engenders a democratic move. All must be involved as partners in that dialogue. Further, these problem definitions shed a light on the challenges to be tackled and offer arguments to deal with 'what needs to be done' in the eyes of policymakers, practice workers, Roma, and in fact of all citizens. 'Altering the situation' is something to be distinguished from 'solving present problems', as it takes a step beyond, by focusing upon the interpretive framework which signifies the meaning of the ongoing course of events. In order to solve present problems in an immediate way, knowledge about the case could possibly suffice. Within an interpretative stance, what is real (relevant, important) surpasses the means to tackle problems.

Turning back to the example of truancy, Roma parents will also, in the first instance, refer to practical issues related to poor living conditions such as food, hygiene or having the means to pay for travel to school as 'causes' of truancy. But underlying these 'self-evident' answers (which may for parents be an easy way out of having to explain what is really at stake), there may be other reasons for keeping their children at home. *Knowing* these, will not be enough: in order to 'go on', more is needed to make a difference: it requires involvement with these families, a life-world oriented approach and a true engagement and expression of willingness to 'go on' together. This allows people to take part not only in the definition of problems, but also in dealing with them. 'Solutions' are then valued not for their immediate effects, but for how they connect meanings and social practices. What needs to be done is to make sense of education for Roma, which implies that the meaning attributed to school by society is clarified for them; the educational system needs to take the attributed meanings and social practices of these people into account. That this requires, to some extent, that Roma adapt and reshape some of their own conceptions goes without saying. At the same time, it requires that teachers, schools and the educational system as a whole are ready to reconsider the education that is supplied, in order for the right to education to become meaningful for everyone. An interesting example is the situation where a parent refused to let his daughter participate in a swimming class. In the discussion that followed, between the school principal, a mediator and the parent, the principal on the one hand clarified that swimming class is not just 'having a bit of fun' or some time off school: it is a class, just like the teaching of other subjects, for which learning plans are developed and aims should be attained. On the other hand, the father explained his worries about the 'sexual character' of these activities (because of the scanty clothing of a bathing suit), and also pointed to hygiene (as

children were all in the same water in which some may urinate) and explained he was convinced that not participating would not do any harm; for him, this was not a learning situation as it took place outside the class. Moreover, he believed that the school should not be involved with this sort of activity where time for study is wasted; instead children 'should be educated'. At such a moment, different meanings are communicated, and a space is created to conceive of different ways to shape the meaning of a situation that 'does justice' to both perspectives. Rather than 'solving the problem', the 'situation was altered' here and a forum was created 'to go on'. Although disagreement may persist, a situation was shaped in which both parties may come to mutual understanding. Shared communication was established and expectations became explicit and meaningful to each other. Similar examples could be provided at the policy level. Policymakers are generally concerned with social problems such as social exclusion, poverty, and the like, but what is often not taken into account when developing well-intended 'Roma inclusion' initiatives, is the interpretive background of the Roma's history. A focus which is too limited to particular problems takes attention away from what is going on: that (supportive) target-group oriented initiatives add to separation and thus to opposing 'us' and 'them'. These negative consequences of a target-group oriented approach may in the long run override the expected immediate positive results (incidentally, often quite limited, see for example McDonald & Negrin, 2010; Rorke, 2013).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Raised awareness of the 'state of exclusion' of Roma is of central importance to *non-discrimination policies* as well as for *socio-cultural initiatives* which aim to offer opportunities for people to highlight their identity and culture in self-defined ways. In the foregoing, arguments were developed in order to take a particular direction; a stance was taken with regard to what is desirable at the level of practice, policy and theory, thus indicating possible ways 'to go on'.

This brings us to some final conclusions of this article. Through a philosophical reflection on the 'differentness' of Roma, it was explored how the Wittgensteinian conceptual framework related to social practices, meaning, forms of life and language games may contribute to a better understanding of differences. Aiming to obtain a better insight in (attributed) meanings is not just an optional thought experiment, but involves a far-reaching engagement with the encountered differences. Indeed, the theoretical position presented here is not focusing on a better understanding of differences *in se* (i.e., an insight in 'what is the case') but shifts the attention to how to go on with these (i.e., indicative answer to the question 'what needs to be done'). It does so with regard to various domains. First, it appeals for a different kind of research and presents a framework for this. It evokes us, philosophers and scientists, to take the step beyond investigating 'what is the case' to 'what needs to be done'. Consequently, scientific research and philosophical reflection become fields of political action (in an broad sense) to a larger extent

than we are generally used to, as they engage more explicitly with normative questions. Second, it proposes some directions of how to go on for both policymakers and practitioners dealing with Roma (see 4.4 and developed more extensively in Hemelsoet, 2013a). It offers levers to connect people through these different interpretive frameworks or language games, starting from the insight that what we, as humans, all share with each other is a common form of life. As such, steps towards a better mutual understanding can be taken, and inclusion may come to reach its aim to break through the 'state of exclusion'.

This may be a rather modest view of what research can offer. Yet it should suggest—at least to policymakers—to refrain from all too many ambitions, from expecting too much; it asks for time and harms against disappointment and disillusion. It also shows the limits of research, as it points at the same time to the need to invoke a kind of theory that makes sense not just of problems, means and ends, but of the human condition itself. In a climate where performativity rules, it thus defends, as in the evocative language of the poet C. D. Lewis, 'the bad against the worse'.

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