



# NEWSLETTER

## *Promoting the Integration of Roma in and through Education*

### **My Beautiful School (MBS) - a place where it is possible to be happy**

**Headlines:**

- MBS - a lifelong Learning project
- The Montessori method - introduction
- Interview with Catalina Olteanu

**MBS** is a Lifelong Learning programme with the aim to overcome prejudices and cultural barriers which hinder integration of Roma children in formal education.

The project intends to promote the updating of the Montessori-Hallgarten didactical approach and its main objectives are:

- To carry out a **comparative experimentation** on the application of the Montessori - Hallgarten method;
- To create a **framework of practical indications**

for improving the relationship among between Roma communities and all the members of the educating communities;

- To set up a **framework of didactic tools** for teaching social skills to Roma children in order to improve their perception of the social context in which they live;
- To organise **seminars and learning experiences** for both Roma and Gadjo teachers;
- To experiment the approach in three Roma communities in Lithuania, Italy and Romania.



#### **First project meeting**

The first meeting of the project “My Beautiful School—a place where it is possible to be happy” was held the 19 and 20 June. ... *continues on page 2*

**In this number**

- My Beautiful School (MBS) — a place where it is possible to be happy **1**
- The Montessori method - introduction **2**
- First project meeting **2**
- Interview with Catalina Olteanu **3**

### **Interview with Catalina Olteanu**

**Catalina Olteanu – programme coordinator for Roma youth**

Catalina Olteanu graduated in Literature and Foreign Languages

(Romani and Spanish) and has a master degree in translating contemporary literary texts into Romani. Since 2009, she has been working for

“Impreuna” (one of the most active NGOs in Romania for the promotion of policies for Roma people) as coordinator for projects for Roma youth. ... *continues on page 3*



Villa Montesca, the place of origin of the Montessori method

*“Children should have the freedom to work on self-chosen tasks in attractive environment especially created and equipped to meet their needs.”*

## The Montessori method - introduction

Maria Montessori was the first Italian woman to study medicine at the University of Rome. She then practiced in the field of nervous disorders.

She stated that the key for solving mental deficiency problems lies in a pedagogical approach rather than in a medical one.

As a physician and educator she developed an educational method based on specific materials and exercises designed for the child to be used in set ways and each for a specific purpose.

Alice Hallgarten was an American married to Leopoldo Franchetti. In 1901 they founded

the Villa Montesca School for the children of the local farm workers and in 1909 Alice Hallgarten invited Maria Montessori to her school and supported her in publishing and experimenting her “Method” which was partly based on the experiences carried out at Villa Montesca.

In developing her method, Maria Montessori elaborated a set of principles:

- Children should be guided towards self-development and self-teaching .
- Children should be free to

work on self-chosen tasks in an attractive environment especially designed and equipped to meet their needs.

Although the teacher plays an important role, in the Montessori method children are at the centre of the learning process. Therefore, teachers should:

- create an attractive environment;
- protect the learning process;
- observe the child;
- indirectly assist the child’s perceptual-motor skills and his/her emotional, intellectual and social development;
- be a central figure, a model, a teacher and a record-keeper.

## First project meeting

During the first project meeting , the Italian partner highlighted the fact that it is the first time that the EC dedicates a specific Programme to the Roma people. The MBS project is one of the eight selected projects of this Programme,

therefore the Commission will be paying a lot of attention to it.

Furthermore, the EC has recommended the exchange of ideas among the eight winning projects, as it would be a good opportunity for contributing to its educative policies .

The Project partners agreed that, given its duration is only one year, all actions for achieving the planned outcomes must be as practical as possible.



## Interview with Catalina Olteanu

*Who or what motivated you to go to school?*

My parents divorced when I was seven and my brother and I moved to my grandparents. I come from a poor family of *Ursari*\*. My grandfather played the accordion while working also as a builder. He attended school only up to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and he was the one who motivated me to go to school and supported us with the meagre earnings of a poor man from a forgotten village. I was raised with my grandfather's idea that only going to school you can become someone, be respected by the community, by Gadjo people and by your own people. I realised that the only way to become someone was to learn; but I never forget my origins.

*How was your life as a Roma child?*

There were times in my life as a student when I didn't even have a school bag and I was ashamed to eat what my grandmother put in it (just a piece of bread). But she always had a meal ready waiting for us when we got back home. I have never felt marginalised at school. I had a group of friends both Roma and Gadjo. I guess I had a normal childhood and I tried to enjoy all the good things that happened to me, as well as the bad ones, and the lack of some things only made me feel I wanted to become an adult to obtain them.

*How do you think school affected your life and your career?*

I don't think I would have ever succeeded without going to school, without all that knowledge that helped me to understand people, their traditions and the world that surrounds me. School plays an important role in the life of a child: it guides and shapes you.

*What do you think would motivate Roma children of today to go to school?*

Just as I succeeded because I went to school and learnt, I strongly believe that there are also other children who wish the same. The simple fact that you can learn a lot of interesting things, meet new people, have a better profession than your parents can be a strong motivation to go to school.

*What can school do for Roma children?*

As I said before, school plays an important role in the educational of every child, but if school promotes discrimination caused by the lack of teachers' involvement and by the limited number of classes I think that it will fail in its role. Welcoming schools, teachers who promote multiculturalism not just as a theoretical concept, but also practical, are the way to go. I've noticed that in schools where teachers have a non-discriminatory attitude pupils have good results. So it is possible!



\**Ursari* (bears tamers) – a branch of the Roma people who used to earn their living as musicians or itinerant artists with tamed dancing bears used for entertaining

***“I realised that the only way to become someone was to learn; but I never forget my origins.”***



Image courtesy of [FreeDigitalPhotos.net](http://FreeDigitalPhotos.net)

***“I've noticed that in schools where teachers have a non-discriminatory attitude pupils have good results. So it is possible!”***

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### **Centro Studi e Formazione Villa Montesca**

CSFVM is a non-profit consortium founded in 2001 in Villa Montesca, Città di Castello, Italy, which develops innovative educational initiatives and offers a broad spectrum of multi-disciplinary research expertise and training activities.



### **Association for Education and Sustainable Development**

AESD is an educational centre based in Calarasi, Romania. Its main activities are the implementation of courses of formal or informal lifelong education, building an organized system of consulting, information and training with a lifelong duration.



### **The Public Institution Roma Community Centre**

The RCC is a non-governmental public benefit organisation based in Vilnius, Lithuania. Its mission is to contribute to better living standards for the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society and for a better future for their children.



[www.aesd.ro/mbs](http://www.aesd.ro/mbs)

*This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*