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**Challenges facing Researchers on Roma
Minorities in contemporary Europe:
Notes towards a Research
Program**

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Challenges Facing Researchers on Roma Minorities in Contemporary Europe: Notes towards a Research Program

A bleak picture of the situation of Roma and Gypsy minorities is evoked by descriptions of their “persistent economic and social marginalisation” (‘European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020’, published April 05 2011). Since the 1990s, the decision of the European Union (EU) to expand eastwards to include former socialist countries highlighted Roma minorities as the most discriminated and excluded minority group in Europe. The social integration of Roma formed a key part of the accession negotiations as the EU attempted to address the socio-economic disadvantage of Roma by putting pressure on national governments of accession states in Central and Eastern Europe to develop human rights and non-discriminatory institutions as well as specific strategies to improve the situation of Roma. Furthermore, structural funds were made available for projects aimed at the social inclusion of Roma minority groups. These interventions facilitated opportunities for European policy intervention discussions in order to address the acute and specific challenges facing Roma across Europe. Roma minorities largely remain in disempowered and marginal communities with poverty and discrimination still cited as major challenges to their health, social and economic well-being and stability. Indeed, the situation of Roma communities is as precarious today as it has ever been with the ongoing economic crisis and the rise of the far right contributing to this predicament.ⁱ

Annabel Tremlett & Aidan McGarry, January 2013

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I. INTRODUCTION²

European institutions are now developing two new initiatives that are significant in their scope and outlook. First, a common ‘EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies’ is underway for 2020, aimed at creating a set of common policy aims and outcomes for all member states. This Framework is attempting to

place the responsibility for Roma integration in the hands of member state governments, who have been hitherto unwilling or unable to address the socio-economic and political disadvantage of Roma. Second, the Council of Europe and the EU (in a joint action) have established a new ‘European Academic Network on Romani Studies’ (2011-2013), recognizing



the importance of quality research in understanding the complexities of such historically disadvantaged and heterogeneous communities. These initiatives provide the opportunity to draw on our experiences as researchers in this field and highlight the gaps in our knowledge along with methodological and theoretical caveats and challenges that still need to be addressed.

This document is called a ‘working paper’ as it recognizes the debates as in flux, contested, and unresolved. What we hope is to provide some content for deliberation and discussion for future research on and with Roma people. The paper is a result of six presentations and the ensuing discussion at the symposium ‘Grassroots Globalisation: Squaring the Circle of Roma Inclusion’ held at the University of Portsmouth on June 27th 2012 that focused on methodological and theoretical challenges of research on/with Roma communities and the policy interventions and discourses that surround such communities. The format of the paper draws inspiration from other such working papers such as Rampton et al (2003). Rampton et al’s paper offered an opportunity for researchers to draw upon close-up, detailed research to engage in a “data-theory dialogue [...] doing justice to the complexity of the issues intimated in the empirical scenarios” (Rampton et al 2003: 1). This paper, whilst different in content to Rampton et al 2003, stems from the same commitment to combining experience and critical knowledge to establish common concerns and challenges. We believe these common concerns and challenges are crucial to future research on Roma minorities.

The contributors come from various academic disciplines and practitioner backgrounds which allowed a diversity of interests and experiences to be drawn upon. Whilst not all contributors would necessarily situate their work in ‘Romani studies’ (the academic arena for research on Roma minorities), this working paper is aimed at that arena. At the same time - and this forms a fundamental purpose to this paper - the aim is not to remain in Romani studies. Romani studies has been establishing (thanks to courses and

summer schools such as those organized by the Central European University Budapest) the importance of quality research from multidisciplinary perspectives in addressing difficult questions raised by the continuing discrimination against, and impoverished situation of, many Roma minority groups (see for example the range of papers in Stewart & Rövid (eds.) 2010). However, Romani studies has still not managed to free itself from its so-called “splendid isolation” from other academic areas (Willems 1997: 305-306). We believe that the experiences of, and discourses surrounding, Roma minorities are fundamental to understanding wider notions of social inclusion and cohesion, and this working paper aims to speak to debates in education, migration, minority politics along with gender and race/ethnicity discourses.

This working paper thus seeks to draw in a wide range of academic readers and contributes to debates around research on/with Roma minorities in two main ways: first, to highlight the importance not just of different disciplinary perspectives side-by-side, but also joint dialogues (including academics, practitioners and stakeholders) and interdisciplinary papers. Such dialogues, we believe, encourage new and fresh debates and force us out of any disciplinary or theoretical silos. Second, interdisciplinary discussions should not come without a strong commitment to critique. By critique we mean a critical exploration of the wider practices, theoretical frameworks and debates within which our work is embedded or speaks to. Such critical readings and questions would enhance our sensibilities of the wider positioning(s) of research on Roma minorities, also working towards addressing the aforementioned “splendid isolation” of Romani studies from other academic arenas (Willems 1997: 305-306). We want to be able to use critique to progress research and ideas in order to better our understanding of minority participation in general and the emerging European agendas on Roma minority integration in particular.

In this working paper we have identified four major challenges that require further



research and which any researcher should be attentive to.

The first challenge concerns power and labeling. Willems (1997: 7) asked in the late 1990s “Who defines who is a ‘Gypsy?’” – *and what for* – we might now add. In this challenge we first ask about the current effectiveness of labeling in institutional settings, suggesting that there needs to be more research on the interface between defining groups of people for the purposes of directing funds and projects, and institutional/societal discrimination. We then ask how such labeling occurs in practice at a local level, briefly outlining three case studies that clearly highlight the tensions and challenges of labeling and identifications in local party- and community- politics.

Second, we see an urgent need to fully discuss the challenges and dilemmas of ‘evidence-based’ practice/policy making that is being suggested in European institutional documents as appropriate for building up a pan-European overview of the challenges facing Roma minorities. The danger is that the term ‘evidence-based’ is assumed to be ‘best practice’ without a thorough understanding of the pitfalls associated with current usage of the term. One of the current drawbacks of evidence-based research is that it often subscribes to a notion of ‘scientific’ research which does not traditionally encompass research carried out by stakeholders (i.e. Roma people themselves) as worthy or important.

This leads us to the third identified challenge in research on Roma minorities – we want to know how participation of Roma minorities can occur in a non-tokenistic fashion in research and policy making processes, something that as researchers we have found difficult to ensure. We believe in giving a high priority to the importance of a variety of Roma people participating in the process of research or policy making. The meaningful participation of Roma in research, including those considered ‘hard to reach’ is imperative but we currently lack the ontological clarity and methodological tools to address this.

The fourth challenge looks to how Roma people are currently very active in new

movements in politics, music and art. Some further understanding of how this involvement comes about and what it means would enhance our understanding of how agency and participation are currently taking place and how that knowledge can be transferred to the research agenda, contributing to current discourses around participation of stakeholders in research projects (also known, particularly in the UK, as ‘service user led research’ in social care, or in health care settings as ‘patient and public involvement (PPI)’).

II. RESEARCH ON ROMA MINORITIES IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE: FOUR MAJOR CHALLENGES

Background

The key modern historical juncture that forms the backdrop to this working paper is the system change from 1989 in which former socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe moved into a new era of self-governance, precipitating new economic and social structures in what is termed a ‘post-socialist’ era. Understanding this historical juncture – both in terms of its economic legacy and profound effect on society – is still in its infancy but is recognized as the most defining shift in Europe since the end of the Second World War (Eyal et al 1998, Kornai 2008). As these societies opened up, they faced challenges related to equality, freedom, and justice. The attempted convergence of monetary policies and trade agreements; migration from these countries; a greater awareness of each other’s politics, cultures, economies; along with information/research exchanges funded by research councils are all fundamentally transforming European societies. It is thus really important we try to understand the changes emanating from Central and Eastern Europe and their effects on Europe as a whole and how it



affects the discourses and practices surrounding Roma minorities.

In the late 1990s, Nancy Fraser usefully identified two broad approaches to injustice in this postsocialist era: redistribution and recognition. Fraser describes a constitutive feature of the postsocialist condition as a tension between these two paradigms: the postsocialist era saw a shift away from political claims of redistributing wealth to an emphasis on the recognition of different groups and their value in society (Fraser 1997: 2). Tensions occur in the different ways routes to combating social injustice and inequality are envisaged by the two paradigms. The redistribution paradigm views the formation of groups occurring under the pressure of socio-economic inequality and thus can be said to be for group de-differentiation, whilst the recognition paradigm promotes group differentiation as a means of greater participation through strong identity politics. “The two kinds of claims stand in tension with each other;” Fraser points out, “they can interfere with, or even work against, each other” (Fraser 1997: 16).

These tensions are manifest in approaches to Roma minorities. On the one hand, Roma minorities face entrenched structural injustices including lack of wealth and limited access to health and social services, education and employment. Such structural inequalities lends weight to the argument that the ‘groupness’ of Roma minorities – i.e. being labeled pejoratively as ‘a Gypsy’ – is produced because of a person’s basic lack of economic resources and thus redistribution of wealth would be an appropriate approach to improving their conditions (Ladányi & Szélényi 2006; Szalai 2003). On the other hand, the prominence of racism and general lack of appreciation of the diversity of Roma minority groups, their histories and experiences, gives credence to the argument for an identity politics that would appreciate the value of Roma people and their cultures, a ‘recognition’ politics that recognizes Roma people across Europe as a “nation without a territory” (Acton and Klimová 2001: 216). This recognition paradigm is one that prominent Roma activists have pushed for in order to gain a

stronger political voice in international institutions. Activists have used this stigmatized group identity as the tool to forge a shared solidarity and a justification in order to make demands in the transnational political context. The paradigms that Fraser notes can thus be linked to debates over whether Roma minorities should be seen predominantly as a societal construction that is strongly (and negatively) reproduced at certain historical points, or a cultural (stigmatized) group that needs to be recognized and valued in order for greater stability and participation to be achieved (see Tremlett 2009b and McGarry 2011 for further discussion).

Nevertheless, in practice the two paradigms do not necessarily take on consistent opposing positions and are often intertwined, “far from occupying two airtight separate spheres, economic injustice and cultural injustice are usually inter-imbricated so as to reinforce each other dialectically” (Fraser 1997: 15). The Council of Europe, for example, has mostly offered ‘recognition’-type recommendations and policies for helping disadvantaged Roma minorities. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1998) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1998) are both still cited as two of the most important and fundamental instruments for the protection of Roma rights³. These recognition approaches see supporting cultural efforts as a resource translatable into socio-economic enhancement, anti-discrimination and inclusion into mainstream society. However, it might be argued that such instruments focus on a particular kind of cultural difference which does not always comply with the reality of many Roma minorities (for example only a small percentage of Roma minorities speak a Romani language and so the above Charter would not help their situation). As the monitoring reports on the implementation of such frameworks and charters to member states also reveal, member states (particularly those from former state-socialist countries) struggle to understand their significance and an uneasy approach to such paradigms is struck, with a danger of re-



producing ineffective, negative discourses. In a case study from Hungary, for example, ‘anti-discrimination’ became linked only to the recognition paradigm, and separated from the redistributive measures of dealing with poverty and disadvantage which then took on more deficit, discriminatory notions of Roma minorities (Tremlett 2009b).

To this end, it is also argued that the EU has not actually fully addressed the politics of recognition as it ignores the significance of prejudice in constructing Roma as a deviant ‘other’ which is prone to criminality and do not belong (McGarry 2011). This is a crucial point for constructing an effective EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies that is envisaged by 2020. How problems of exclusion faced by Roma minorities can be addressed by a greater focus on redistributing wealth or recognising their cultural resources is a current unresolved debate, and the four major challenges in research identified below all point to this tension which are drawn together in the conclusions in second part of this paper.

1. Labeling, power and politics in institutions & community settings

1.1. Summary of challenge:

A major thread through all the presentations at the Portsmouth symposium was the challenge of articulating the experiences of individuals and groups without falling into the trap of imposing a limiting notion of ‘groupness’ onto diverse people or specific situations. In institutional settings, this is the problem of needing a subject to direct action towards and needing a voice to speak for a group of people. In community settings, the empirical reality of the power of representations needs further research – i.e. how are people ‘on the ground’ using labels, ethnonyms or identities to create benefits for themselves, and how others remain marginalised. This is particularly important with new waves of migrations of Roma minorities to

Western/Northern Europe and old stereotypes: the patterns and effects of homogenizing discourses on different perceptions and practices of ‘Roma integration’.

1.2. Academic context:

(a) *Romani Studies:*

- Roma as a political label created by political institutions & governments: Klimová-Alexander 2005; Kovats 2001; McGarry 2010; Rövid 2011; Sigona and Trehan 2009; Vermeersch 2006.
- Political use of ‘Gypsy’: Stewart (ed.) 2012.
- Gypsy as a folk image created and sustained by academic discourse: Tremlett 2009a, 2012a; Willems 1997; van Baar 2011.
- Labeling in empirical settings: Budilová & Jakoubek 2009; Durst 2011; Gay Blasco & Iordanova 2008; Lemon 2000; Nordberg 2004, 2005, 2006; Tervonen 2010; Theodosiou 2011; Tremlett 2012a.
- Sociologists & political scientists ask who defines who as Roma and discuss suitable methodological approaches: Ladányi and Szelényi 2006; Szalai 2011a, 2011b.
- The use of anti-essentialist theorisations that can investigate emerging hybrid Roma identities informed by political, cultural and regional changes: Trehan and Kóczé 2009; Rughiniş 2010; Imre 2011; van Baar 2011.

(b) *Useful wider academic discourses:*

- Institutional research on labelling: Brubaker 2004; Calhoun 1994.
- Empirical research on labelling: Taylor 1992; Turner 2007, 2010.
- UK British Cultural Studies’ theorists on anti-essentialism, ethnic absolutism and the limits of anti-racism: Back 1996; Gilroy 1993b; Hall 1996.
- UK British Cultural Studies’ theorists on plural and hybrid: ‘unfinished identities’ (Gilroy 1993a, 1); ‘multi- accentuality’ (Mercer 1994, 60); ‘cultural hybridity’ (Morley 1996, 331).



1.3. Detail of challenge:

There is an argument that ‘groupness’ is required in order to provide Roma activists with a clearer legitimacy which could yield a stronger political voice. However, despite efforts from activists at the local, national and transnational levels, Roma people still do not currently have an effective voice in public life which impedes attempts to address pertinent socio-economic and political issues – either their political parties are seen as ineffective or not unified; or policy makers represent Roma people as bearers of problems or symbols/products of certain historical junctures or policy failures that negate people’s capacity for agency and change.

Labelling Roma as ‘a’ group thus often produces negative images. Discourses constructed by the majority can serve to reinforce divisions and the image of Roma as a community which is a bearer of problems. We often hear and see references to the ‘Roma problem’ rather than the ‘problems facing the Roma’. The distinction is telling because the former collapses the group and the issues, making research and policy formulation more challenging. It could be due to this negative labelling why party politics also frequently does not interest ‘ordinary’ Roma people, but at the same we know there is also a general malaise across the wider population towards politics. Nevertheless, Roma people are always negotiating in local or community politics in everyday life. Politics is much more than party politics, thus we must search for a clearer understanding of how Roma people are engaging with politics and what types of political activity are used, why this is manifest and how (see case studies below in this section and also the third challenge in section 1.3 below). The challenge here is also to explore how to change/inform mainstream political institutions so they can incorporate some expressions of Roma mobilization.

European institutions have endeavoured to stimulate actions for the inclusion of Roma minorities into mainstream life, but this has always worked on three basic assumptions: there is ‘a’ group of Roma people who can be targeted; that inclusion is good; and produces

economic benefits (e.g. as more people become educated they become more employable). These assumptions can be hard to translate at a local level – the question of who is targeted, how, why, and whether ‘they’ actually want this type of group inclusion or if/how they are put off or kept out remains unclear. Many European funding streams have failed to actually reach targeted communities as their directed approach has not worked - when ‘Roma’ is seen as a particular type of authentic channel for funds and projects, such an approach can be naive about people’s hybrid identities and the impact of power relations and elitism. The following case studies illuminate these labeling and political dilemmas:

Three case studies:

1. Romanian Roma and the ‘Gypsy camps’ in Rome, Italy (Marinero and Daniele 2012)

Attempts to create a national Roma voice in Italy have failed, and promoting official channels of communication, such as the creation of a special Mayor for Roma Issues in Rome have not proved to be fully effective. Outside of these official channels, migrant Romanian Roma have been attempting to have their voices heard through protesting about their treatment in purpose-built (and so-called) ‘Gypsy camps’ in Rome and have been engaging with a range of NGOs. Two perhaps surprising elements are: first, some Roma people argue for the continued utilization of these so-called ‘Gypsy camps’ as they believe the camps have the potential to provide better protection and political clout than social housing. Second, negotiations with non-Roma NGOs are often seen as preferable to Roma-led NGOs as they are seen to have more political credibility and can better fend off the potential for the co-option of power by certain Roma political elites. The main problem is that the authorities in Rome do not recognize the voices of Roma people unless through the official communication channels which do not suit the majority of Roma people in Rome.



2. Finnish Roma ‘elite’ and their reactions to Romanian Roma migrants in Helsinki, Finland (Roman 2012)

The reluctance and/or difficulties settled Finnish Roma have had in engaging fully with debates around recent Roma migrants from Romania shows how problematic the idea of ‘one Roma people’ can be. The Finnish Roma have had an ostensibly united migration history with a distinct way of dressing and a certain discourse around moral codes, but when it comes to attitudes towards the recently arrived Roma from Romania they have conflicting opinions. Most feel uncomfortable by the pronounced poverty of recent immigrants and do not know how to react to media stories of begging in the street and criminal activities which recently arrived Roma are accused of. Who can claim the ‘Roma’ label becomes contentious as some Finnish Roma lament the perceived lack of moral codes displayed by the migrants, whilst in return the newer migrants question Finnish Roma identities as they are not speaking a Romani language. This case study raises important questions of the fluidity of Roma identity and issues of belonging and its juncture with elitism and issues such as economic migration, along with the question of whether a supra-national Roma voice is actually desired or required in the eyes of ‘ordinary’ Roma people.

3. The Hungarian media: reverting back to racist terminology (Messing and Bernárth 2012)

There are two striking results of recent media research incorporating a variety of news sources in Hungary: first, whilst the 1990s saw a decline in negative media stories and a refusal to use the deemed racist term ‘Gypsy criminality’ that was popular in the 1980s, the 2000s have seen this practice rescinded and once again the term ‘Gypsy criminality’, along with suggestive/acialised terms such as ‘populous family’ and ‘noisy kindred’ are used in all types of news stories in directly inflammatory ways. Second, the current research has also looked at the images that accompany news stories, and the results clearly show how images of Roma settlements and Roma people (often depicted in

faceless groups and at times showing groups of children) are frequently used as backdrops to crime news stories when the perpetrators have not yet been found or convicted – thereby clearly insinuating that the perpetrators are Roma, and that these dehumanized people are threatening and mob-like. This study suggests that there are strong homogenizing discourses about Roma that need highlighting as racist and damaging, and that there appears to be an interface between the use of such discourses and political and economic changes (including new policy measures) that needs further examination as to the respective causes and effects.

1.4. Recommendations:

Overall, we feel it is important to understand how discourses on Roma have changed over time (a genealogy of discourse) at the local, national, and transnational levels and to understand the political, economic and social mechanisms that influence this trajectory. In particular, this means:

- to further understand the genealogy of media discourses –
 - The interface between political and economic contexts and media discourses (historical and current);
 - how media companies pursue different types of discourses and when/why/how;
 - how media discourses reflect or feed into public and policy discourses – i.e. into practices;
 - how to feedback such research to media institutions and companies to raise awareness of the power of discriminatory media coverage.
- to further understand the dialectic between European institutional discourses and national/local practices that would assist an understanding of where and how EU efforts do not work. To this end, conducting further research and understanding the different perceptions and practices of ‘Roma integration’ at local, individual, group, media discourse and political elite levels, in particular keeping in mind the following:



- Not to assume that one type of ‘integration’ or ‘inclusion’ is always desirable or achievable.
- To further examine the effectiveness of a supra-national Roma voice and get the opinions and practices of ‘ordinary’ Roma.
- To examine case studies of good practice in communication/integration and discuss the transferability to other settings.
- To not under-estimate the effects of socio-economic status on positioning of minorities and to closely examine power relations empirically.

Possibilities for the future involve exploring how non-group participation and community action can form the basis for political engagement and intervention. What we see as necessary as the basis of all of these points that could thread through any research project is the re-visiting of an important debate in the late 1990s around who labels whom or what as ‘Roma’ (originating amongst Hungarian academics, see Ladányi & Szelényi 2006 for a detailed study). To this end close-up, empirical research on the changing identifications of Roma people and how their situations compare to other minority or disadvantaged groups is important. It is through very detailed, thorough, empirical research on the everyday lives of local (‘ordinary’) people, including comparisons with people from non-Roma backgrounds, that we can build on and critique previous research and further our understanding of the social, economic and policy landscapes. Whilst such research has been carried out with Roma people, there has not yet been enough done to compare their situations with other groups or find an effective way of directing that research to encourage real social change. Identifying the conditions under which this can occur is a key task.

2. Understanding the challenges and dilemmas of ‘evidence-based policy making’

2.1. Summary of challenge:

European institutions are now calling for evidence-based policy-making using “effective national monitoring structures and quantifiable targets” (FRA 2012) meaning that some research is considered more desirable or authoritative than others.

2.2. Academic context:

(a) *Romani studies*: Rughiniş 2011; Babusik 2004.

(b) *Useful policy/practice oriented research*: FRA 2009; Glasby & Beresford 2006; UNDP 2004; Webb 2001; Upton 2001.

2.3. Detail of challenge:

There is an ongoing critique of the assumptions underlying current descriptions of ‘evidence-based policy’ or ‘evidence-based practice’ that can be usefully drawn upon. In UK Health Sciences and Social Work professional arenas the concerns raised can be summarized in three major concerns:

1. Evidence-based research can be positivistic, relying on a set of standards/expectations that are unrealistic – either over-inflated or too low;
2. Evidence-based research can feed into current managerialistic strategies as ‘best’ and technical rationality that are restrictive for creative practitioner thinking;
3. Evidence-based research currently does not take the complexities of working with individuals and communities into account and can undermine professional judgment of those working in the field (e.g. social workers, health workers, teachers etc.).



‘Evidence-based policy making’ sounds good but in reality such measurements are too hard to collate as there are no objective measures to determine who is ‘Roma’ and no normative benchmarks that could measure the effectiveness of policy interventions. Thus, the problem of providing statistical evidence on various indicators such as accessing education or securing unemployment is complicated by the absence of objective criteria to determine who is Roma. Certainly quantitative research has a role to play but it is currently built on shaky ontological ground which undermines its supposed precision. Furthermore, there is also an on-going critique of evidence-based policy and evidence-based practice that should be drawn upon to highlight some of the potential drawbacks.

2.4. Recommendations:

The importance of carrying out robust research with Roma minorities is not disputed, there is a need to do research that can be compared and contrasted across settings. However, the challenge still remains of trying to standardize such research – including the difficulties of producing accurate statistical datasets and the dangers of attempting to establish baselines or objective measures that could result in minimal (and meaningless or potentially damaging) measurements or interventions. The mechanisms of collecting and standardizing research on Roma minorities needs more understanding in order to effectively monitor poverty and discrimination over time and gain an insight into a broad level of needs across Europe.

The EU Framework has no enforcement power and therefore more knowledge on how best to engage with member states in order to successfully implement ‘evidence-based policy making’ is required. The importance of the qualitative monitoring of any research processes should be highlighted along with a robust procedure to monitor output measures.

3. Participation in research & policy making processes:

3.1. Summary of challenge:

The earlier identified problem of identifying ‘who is Roma’ in political mobilization (point 1.1) is matched with a lack of Roma participation in research and policy making processes.

3.2. Academic context:

(a) Romani studies:

- Roma advocacy and elite movements: Klimova- Alexander 2005; McGarry 2010, 2012; Vermeersch 2006.

(b) Useful wider academic discussions:

- ‘Service user inclusion’ or ‘patient and public involvement’ in Health and Social Care: Barnes and Prior 2009; Beresford 2002; Glasby & Beresford 2006; Trivedi & Wykes 2002.
- Participatory discussions in Development Studies and Geography: Hickey and Mohan 2004; Fung and Wright 2003.
- Arnstein’s ladder of participation: Arnstein 1969.

3.3. Detail of challenge:

It is generally acknowledged that Roma people’s participation in research and policy-making processes has been poorly organised, leading to a dearth of Roma voices in academic and institutional interventions. This void needs to be filled. One of the first activities of the EU Romani Studies Academic Network has been the establishment of internships for Roma to help nurture active participation. There needs to be a greater exploration of the current debates around the position of marginalised voices in research contexts with a focus on Roma minorities. The questions are: how can we critique current practices of academics with regards to how they treat these voices? How can we create a methodology that is inclusive yet still academic, robust and rigorous? What theoretical/analytical approach might be useful for the future?



3.4. Recommendations:

There is a gap in the literature around how participation works with regards to including a range of people from Roma backgrounds (taking into account their diversity). Further research and reflection is required on successful examples along with a greater openness as to the challenges.

The importance of participatory processes in research projects and including a variety of 'Roma voices' in any research or policy making processes should be given high priority: e.g. having an advisory group to help with the research design; including in the research staff and consulting with academic and practitioners with Roma backgrounds; having a focus group of 'ordinary' Roma people who have an invested interest in the outcomes of the research (i.e. 'service users'); thinking of creative ways of disseminating the research to a variety of stakeholders.

4. Beyond the gloomy ghetto: agency and new movements in politics, music and the arts

1.4.i Summary of challenge: We need to further understand the invigorating movements of Roma people in politics, music, popular culture and the arts in the belief that Roma people do already participate, as Roma activist and political figure Nicholae Gheorghe says, "if the representation of Romani identity is a process of ethno-genesis which involves the Roma self-consciously playing with their identities, then perhaps we must recognize that constructing effective representations involves the artist as much as the scientist or politician" (quoted in Junghaus 2006). Suffice to say, social change is not only in the hands of political elite and is not only conducted through formal political channels.

4.1. Academic context:

(a) *Romani studies*

- On understanding contemporary Roma art: Junghaus 2006.

- Analyzing Roma positioning in popular cultural and media movements: Bernáth & Messing 2001, 2002; Hammer 2008; Imre 2009, 2011; Imre and Tremlett 2011; Tremlett 2012b.

(b) *Useful wider academic discussions*

- Ethnic minority involvement in art and cultural movements: Gillespie 1995, Hall 1993; Hall and Back 2009; Pieterse 1995.

4.2. Detail of challenge:

We see research into poverty and the ghettoization of Roma people as important. However, we do not agree that Roma people only exist in impoverished circumstances or that these impoverished circumstances necessarily dictates their cultures or behaviors. We want to further examine Roma people's involvement and engagement with different movements to shed light on agency and social and political mobilization.

4.3. Recommendations:

- To appreciate the diversity and significance of atypical movements in the arts as important networks and expressions of identity.
- To further understand Roma minorities' participation in mainstream society and the ways in which they affect local politics and the types of capital they draw upon to do this in order to see how change is stimulated.
- To examine Roma people's involvement in the economy, including popular cultural movements and consumerism (which are currently little understood), and ask what such involvement can teach us about inclusion and integration.



III. CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A 'COMPARATIVE' AND 'SOCIALY CONSTITUTED' APPROACH TO RESEARCH ON ROMA MINORITIES

Ontological puzzles are often tidied away in policies and research papers on Roma minorities through the use of footnotes and appendices that calls for us all to look to the margins of documents to find out where the real problems lie. A classic example is labeling – so often at the start of a research or policy document whatever term or terms are used to label the object of study – e.g. 'Roma' 'Gypsy' 'Traveller' or some kind of combination – come with a footnote that often deals with very challenging debates in a few short neat sentences. We believe the use of ethnonyms and the power/politics of labeling needs far more awareness and critical reflection. Two further examples from our own research follow.

Example 1: The importance of critical comparative research

Drawing on research from the European Commission funded project 'EDUMIGROM' (through the FP7 funding stream), Messing spoke of the challenges of researching the gap of educational achievement between ethnic minority and majority groups across different countries in Europe. Messing echoed McGarry's concerns about the process of defining such social problems by showing how hard it is to define what a 'gap' is as well as how we define and perceive a 'minority' (McGarry 2010). These problems really come to light in cross-national research, and Messing showed how the focus in their project became about how ethnic differentiation occurs, in other words what becomes visible and how it becomes defined as a problem, and then how it becomes defined as a problem with a certain ethnic minority. This was particularly interesting as EDUMIGROM's research did not exclusively look at Roma

minorities in each country but also included other youth and disadvantaged groups. Looking at how minorities are defined in different national histories and the attitudes and constructions of different groups did reveal some over-arching problems in the factors and processes of the successful inclusion of children in educational practices. However, the problem of finding common terms and a common language to articulate comparisons was hampered by a lack of understanding of the different approaches to debates around race, ethnicity, class and so on. This is where we see the opportunity for engaging more with critical comparative research when studying Roma minorities in order to contribute to debates around cross-cultural research and further our understanding of the use of ethnic categories across Europe (Messing 2012. See also EDUMIGROM).

Example 2: Understanding research on Roma minorities as socially constituted

In researching the response to Council of Europe recommendations from member states through monitoring reports, Tremlett (2009b) found 'Annexes' to the reports produced by the Hungarian government were used to give examples of reported incidents with Roma minorities. Written in a narrative style, the language used to describe the reported incidents was in direct contrast to the earlier espoused commitment to anti-discriminatory approaches and gave a startling insight into the uneasy relationship between the paradigms produced and required by such European institutional documents and the on-the-ground entrenched discourses and practices that are prevalent in new member states such as Hungary. Such addendums or footnotes in the margins of documents should be examined to enable a better understanding of the tensions and challenges that research or policy-making faces. Seeing the study of Roma minorities as socially constituted – i.e. affected and produced through the histories of member states along with their intra-local differences – would assist in our understanding of what paradigms are being used and where tensions and conflicts are occurring



that may limit the progression of effective policy making and other interventions aimed at improving the living standards and well-being of Roma minorities.

In conclusion, we hope to see research on/with Roma minorities move towards:

- holding up for debate the use of terms like Roma, Gypsy, Traveller across contexts and spending more time describing and analyzing the historical and political junctures in which these terms are used, both by broader discourse and for personal self-identifications;
- considering issues of class, socio-economic status, gender, sexualities, generation, disabilities, national and ethnic affiliations in each settings and to compare both internal differences within Roma groups or geographical/socio-economic communities along with comparing and contrasting with other minority or majority individuals, groups or communities;
- not always seeing the end product of research as necessarily having to counter

negative discourses – this has the danger of seeing ‘their’ world as opposed to ‘ours’. To use theoretical discussions about the potential limitations of current discourses on anti-racism without losing sight of racism (e.g. Gilroy 2002) to consider this further;

- encouraging more inter-disciplinary approaches in which conceptual problems can be discussed by a range of disciplines;
- ensuring the participation of Roma minorities in the research and policy-making process. Whilst we recognize and interrogate the use of the term ‘Roma’ with a keen awareness of the politics of power in using the term, we also want at the forefront and heart of any research or policy design transparent attempts to include a variety of Roma voices in a variety of ways.



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Endnote

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A summary of the symposium can be read in the latest UACES Newsletter (Issue 73, Autumn 2012, see www.uaces.org/pdf/newsletter/n73.pdf#page=4) and a special issue in the journal ‘Ethnicities’, based on the papers in the symposium, is planned for 2015.

² The paper has been written and edited by Annabel Tremlett and Aidan McGarry and with oral and written contributions and comments from: Timofey Agarin, Isabella Clough Marinaro, Raluca Bianca Roman, Vera Messing, Delaine Le Bas, Amy Lloyd, and Rebecca Harris.

³ See ‘The Council of Europe: Protecting the rights of Roma’ (2011). Available at: http://www.coe.int/AboutCoe/media/interface/publications/roms_en.pdf [accessed 13/12/12]

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