The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project: An Inclusive and Intercultural Approach to Research Combining Policy, Practice and Community in Action Research

Dr Margaret Greenfields, Senior Lecturer, Buckinghamshire New University
Dr Andrew Ryder, Lead Researcher, The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project

Practical background. Gypsies and Travellers are one of the most excluded groups in society as reflected in low life expectancy and poor rates of educational achievement and participation (CRE, 2006) There are reports of growing unemployment and welfare dependency (CRE, 2004). Site managers in Niner's 2003 study reported that 'on seven out of ten sites a minority of households work', with over one third of site managers noting that less than ten per cent of residents were in employment (Niner, 2003). Traveller economic inclusion has been neglected by researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

Research background. The main theoretical issue is whether Gypsy and Traveller identity can be preserved through economic inclusion and whether acculturation needs to take place. According to Acton (1974) Gypsies and Travellers develop a range of strategies in response to exclusion which includes 'conservatism' (maintenance of tradition), 'cultural adaptation' (accepting influences from other cultures), 'Passing' (assimilation), 'cultural disintegration' (poverty leads to assimilation). Another principal concept is 'social capital' both 'bonded' and 'bridged' notions of social capital (Halpern, 2007) and the role they play in diverging life strategies feature in the research. The 'Traveller economy' where cultural conservatism and bonded capital are fused has been well documented (Clark and Greenfields, 2006), less consideration has been given to the impact of 'Traveller mainstream economic activities' based on bridged social capital and acculturation (Derrington and Kendall, 2004).

Aims. The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain with key community and research partners is carrying out research to find out how some Gypsies and Travellers have secured economic inclusion. The project is being funded by the Big Lottery Fund to influence local and national policy and practice and will produce and disseminate evidence-based knowledge to improve policy and practice on Traveller economic inclusion.

Main contribution. The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project is focusing on the following:

- How some Gypsies and Travellers have achieved economic and professional success
- Schemes and initiatives that have assisted Gypsies and Travellers to achieve this success
- Actions that local and national government, as well as other agencies, can undertake to improve the economic inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers.

The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project will increase understanding of Traveller economic activities and existing and emerging life strategies. These factors are being considered at different stages of the life course and across gender as well as consideration of whether radical departures are taking place from tradition and whether acculturation, 'new ethnicities' (Hall, 1991), 'reactive identities' (Ballard and Ballard, 1977) or cultural assimilation (Hawes and Perez, 1997) is evident.

Action Research is a key dimension of the research (Greenwood and Levin (1998). Gypsy and Traveller involvement is achieved through:

- Traveller representation on steering group
- Traveller interviewers conducting 100 qualitative interviews with the community
- Giving Travellers who have been interviewed a chance to participate in analysis through regional seminars where findings are presented
- A 'call to context' ensuring the Traveller voice is heard by using a high number of direct quotations and Traveller life histories

Interculturalism requires an inherent openness and willingness to be exposed to the culture of the "other". Once a person is exposed to an element of a different culture, and seeks to understand, a dialogue will ensue, where all participants embark upon understanding the culture of the other. The project believes that the issue of economic and social inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers has been neglected by both community members and policy makers in terms of policy discussions. Through intercultural research the project will initiate dialogue between Gypsies and Travellers and policy makers and service providers, creating greater understanding and change. Such debate is also an embedded feature of action research – where 'insiders' and 'outsiders' join in a mutual learning process (Greenwood and Levin, 1998).

Implications. A detailed lobbying strategy is another innovative feature of this project. Community groups will forward the findings in a campaign strategy. The innovative research strategy will feature in a research manual to help organizations conduct research projects so that in future research is carried out '**with**' Gypsies and Travellers and not '**on**' this group as has been the case in the past.

Introduction

The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project (TEIP) is relevant to a number of core themes under consideration at cAIR in particular those of: ethnicity, group membership and multiple/evolving cultural identities; racism, xenophobia, intolerance, discrimination and prejudice; cultural diversity and interaction and migration and interactions among majority/minority cultures. The Project focuses on the economic inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers in mainstream British society. In particular, examining the diverse strategies utilised by members of these minority ethnic communities when seeking to make a living in a world which frequently requires them to experience hostile encounters with majority cultures.

Defining Gypsies, and Travellers as a group is a difficult task. The two predominant Gypsy and Traveller communities in the UK are Romany (English) Gypsies and Irish Travellers; other groups include New Travellers, Welsh Gypsies, and Scottish Gypsies and Travellers. It is important to distinguish between English Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Linguistic evidence suggests that Gypsies left India over a thousand years ago and arrived in Europe in the fourteenth century, where the reception by locals included persecution and exclusion, and their nomadism propelled their movement (Fraser 1992; Hancock 1987; Kenrick and Bakewell 1995, 14). The first record of Gypsies in Scotland was in 1502 and in England in 1514 (Fraser 1992, 111-112; Bancroft 2005, 12; Mayall 1995). The terms Gypsy or Roma does not include the Celtic nomadic groups, such as Irish and Scottish Travellers. Robbie McVeigh states:

> Irish Travellers have their roots in a Celtic (and possibly pre Celtic) nomadic population in Ireland. They are very definitely not Roma (or Gypsies). Neither are Travellers the product of An Gorta Mor or the 'Great Hunger' of 1843-50. While the original Irish nomadic population may have been supplemented at various times in Irish history by dispossessed labourers and other marginalised people, there was clearly a distinct Traveller population before the famine (McVeigh 1997).

The origin of Scottish Travellers is likely to be similarly ancient and complex, incorporating early nomadic inhabitants of the country with an increase in membership of the community brought about by intermarriage and forced nomadism associated with the 'clearances' of the Highlands during English rule. In this article we use the umbrella term 'Gypsies and Travellers', but in so doing we recognise the imposition of a simplistic eponym on a wide range of diverse travelling communities.

Gypsies and Travellers are some of the most excluded groups in British society as reflected in low life expectancy (CRE, 2006; Cemlyn et. al, 2009) and poor rates of educational achievement and participation (DCSF, 2009). There are reports of growing unemployment and welfare dependency of members of these communities (CRE, 2004; Cemlyn et. al., 2009) and the current economic climate is unlikely to have improved the situation for this population given the factors which impede their involvement in a rapidly changing post-modern economy

Local Authority site managers in Niner's 2003 study reported that 'on seven out of ten sites a minority of households work', with over one third of site managers noting that less than ten per cent of residents were in employment (Niner, 2003). Given that the network of approximately 320 local authority sites accommodates roughly one third of the caravan dwelling Gypsy and Traveller community economic exclusion rates could thus be extremely high (CLG 2009). The recent economic recession is likely to have impacted particularly severely on Gypsies and Travellers as a result of often limited educational qualifications which may diminish opportunities for seeking alternative employment or training if primary (traditional) income sources are depleted. Traditionally accommodated Gypsies and Travellers (resident in caravans) refer to the difficulties facing them in seeking and retaining employment once they are known to live at a caravan site (Greenfields and Smith, 2009), with many potential employers discriminating against applicants on the basis of their address alone.

Moreover, for the estimated two thirds of the Gypsy and Traveller community living in housing, (many of whom have come to occupy such accommodation as a result of a national shortage of sites) their employment situation is little better, despite the expectation that they would experience greater integration into mainstream populations and hence greater opportunity to access work. Some studies have indicated that many of these Gypsies and Travellers are suffering from isolation and the breakup of traditional economic and social support mechanisms (Shelter, 2007; Cemlyn, et. al., 2009) leading to increasing isolation and economic exclusion. Despite the European-wide concentration of Government policy on re-engaging the un (or under-)employed,   Traveller economic inclusion has been neglected by researchers, practitioners and policy makers with very

few projects exploring this crucially important aspect of socio-cultural interaction between minority and majority communities.

The Intercultural Context of Economic Policy Research

Before discussing the details of this project it is apposite to consider the intercultural underpinnings of the research model utilised in this study.

Powell and Sze (2004:1)Refer to the philosophical and political science theory of interculturalism,as one which *"recognizes that in a society of mixed ethnicities, cultures act in multiple directions. Host or majority cultures are influenced by immigrant or minority cultures and vice versa. Multiculturalism tends to preserve a cultural heritage, while interculturalism acknowledges and enables cultures to have currency, to be exchanged, to circulate, to be modified and evolve"*.

Thus, interculturalism requires an inherent openness and willingness to be exposed to the culture of the "other". Once a person is exposed to an element of a different culture, and seeks to understand and embraces it willingly, a dialogue should ensue, where all participants embark upon understanding the culture of the other (Bennett, 1998). The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project believes that the issue of economic and social inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers has been neglected by both community members and policy makers in terms of policy discussions. It is therefore hoped that through taking an interculturalal research approach to this project it will be possible to initiate dialogue, greater understanding and change both within the policy community and in wider practice. Such debate is also an

embedded feature of action research – where 'insiders' and 'outsiders' join in a mutual learning process (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, 80).

In terms of policy debate the primary focus since the 1960s has been on accommodation issues, in part because the national shortage of Traveller sites has increased tensions between the Gypsy and Traveller and wider community as the shortage has led to an increase in unauthorised developments and encampments (Richardson and Ryder, 2010). In addition to the highly publicised pressures on land and disputes between sedentary and nomadic people, lobbying by the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition prompted the Labour Government to embark on a series of consultations with Gypsy and Traveller groups which in 2003 became a formalised forum administered by the Department for Children Schools and Families. In 2006 The Government outlined a detailed policy framework for the delivery of Traveller sites (see Greenfields, 2007)

Another important area of debate and policy activity which intersects with economic inclusion has been that of Gypsy and Traveller educational attainment. Low achievement and participation rates in formal education have been a serious cause for concern in recent years, especially as improved educational achievement is perceived of as a central factor that can improve the situation of Gypsies and Travellers (DCSF, 2009). In 2009 the Department for Children Schools and Families established a forum to discuss educational issues directly with Gypsy and Traveller representatives to ensure DCSF policies are better informed by the community and to attempt to maximise

community 'buy in' for new educational initiatives.

Despite these important developments some key policy areas have still not benefitted from such direct dialogue, namely broader questions of what precisely social inclusion means for Gypsies and Travellers and how the social policy apparatus can manage to facilitate a form of inclusion that meets the aspirations and lifestyle patterns of Gypsies and Travellers.

A central feature of this debate would be the 'Traveller economy' as economic activities are a clear determiner of material well-being and life chances afforded to diverse populations. Such a discussion has a clear intercultural dimension as socio-economic relations and interaction between the state, mainstream society and Gypsies and Travellers need to be scrutinized within the nexus of employment-education-social inclusion. In turn such examination of opportunities and outcomes raises issues around cultural norms and values and the changing nature of group identity.

One of the earliest campaign objectives of the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition had been that the Social Exclusion Unit should enter into dialogue with Gypsies and Travellers through the formation of a Gypsy and Traveller Social Inclusion Taskforce with the explicit intention of formulating a report that would better inform policy makers and service providers on the needs and aspirations of this group (GTLRC, 2003). This request was partially met when in 2004 it was announced that the Social Exclusion Unit was to embark upon a study in which the exclusion experiences highly mobile groups would be assessed. Gypsies and Travellers

were to be included alongside groups such as army personnel and sales people. Regrettably however, in the resulting report (SEU, 2006)).only one paragraph was devoted to Gypsies and Travellers and promises of a detailed follow up report on this group did not materialise despite detailed field work being undertaken. An important opportunity to extend understanding of the exclusion of Gypsies and Travellers was missed but also a chance to 'mainstream' their needs into policy and service provision and solicit understanding and support for their now precarious way of life.

In 2007 the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain jointly organised a seminar with the Department for Work and Pensions on the topic of Gypsy and Traveller economic inclusion. At the seminar calls were made for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to establish a regular forum on this issue (ITMB, 2007). However, civil servants in the department have argued that such a special interest group focused on one minority would contravene its policy of 'mainstreaming' and running broad focus groups centered on equality. The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project feels though that such a stance is counterproductive as such forums can both assist government departments in tailoring service delivery for the highly excluded (so-called) 'hard to reach' minorities like Gypsies and Travellers and also increase the knowledge and awareness of community representatives in the policy area of economic inclusion.

Brown and Scullion (2009) are correct to argue that 'hard-to-reach', sometimes reflects a lack of knowledge on behalf of the researcher or an agency about how, who, and where to contact certain groups or individuals, rather than an innate inclination for separateness of the group or individuals

concerned. Accordingly a specialist forum is an important first contact point that can allow mutual trust, communication and understanding to be developed. The establishment of such a space for communication would also bring the DWP into line with other government departments as the Communities and Local Government (CLG) and Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) who have set up Gypsy and Traveller Forums. The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project therefore hopes that the final report will raise awareness amongst policy makers and Gypsies and Travellers of economic and wider social inclusion issues and also lead to dialogue and the setting up of a permanent forum helping to trigger and monitor policy change

Economic Inclusion: Theoretical and Practical Considerations

The main theoretical issue within the project in question consists of whether Gypsy and Traveller identity can be preserved whilst mechanisms of economic inclusion are developed and whether acculturation necessarily needs to take place to enable wealth to accrue to minority groups. According to Acton (1974) Gypsies and Travellers develop a range of strategies in response to exclusion which includes 'conservatism' (maintenance of tradition), 'cultural adaptation' (accepting influences from other cultures), 'Passing' (assimilation) and 'cultural disintegration' (poverty leads to assimilation). Within the project attention is paid to how these theoretical models play out in practice in the face of economic realities; the ways in which these intersect with concepts of 'social capital', economic opportunities or constraints which arise from access to both 'bonded' and 'bridged' capital (Halpern, 2005) and the role such capitals play in diverging life and economic strategies.

Whilst the 'Traveller economy' where cultural conservatism and bonded capital are fused has been well documented (Clark and Greenfields, 2006), less consideration has been given to the impact of 'Traveller mainstream economic activities' based on bridging social capital (e.g. access to education) and acculturation (Derrington and Kendall, 2004). A key point of discussion is whether rigid notions of identity (Greenfields, 2010, forthcoming) and acculturation are the products of xenophobia and exclusion or internally regulated and enforced as markers of 'authenticity'. Change has been stubbornly resisted by some Gypsies and Travellers in the form of reactive ethnicity as minority group members adopt a 'siege mentality' in response to exclusion (Ballard and Ballard, 1977). On the other hand, it may be asked whether acculturation is merely a more palatable form of assimilation, induced as traditional lifestyle options are being closed, impeding room for manoeuvrability and the viability of more traditional life and economic strategies.

The concerns précised above are some of the central research aims and areas of discussion within the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project. The concepts and areas of discourse centred on notions of identity and culture make the work of the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project highly relevant to the intercultural objectives of cAIR. A further area of relevance to the cAIR concerns the ways in which the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project has fused the interests of practice and research by designing a research project that encompasses key principles of action research., Within the remainder of this paper, we argue that action research of the type followed within the TEIP empowers the excluded, creates research that reflects honestly and accurately the lives and aspirations of the marginalised, and

accordingly results in policy proposals that can bring about meaningful change for those on the margins of society.

Traveller Economic Inclusion Project

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain working in partnership with key community and research activists is currently undertaking research to identify the mechanisms used by (some) Gypsies and Travellers to secured economic inclusion. The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project (TEIP) has been funded by the British 'Big Lottery' Research Fund and the study is taking place between 2009 and 2010. It is intended that the findings will influence local and national policy and practice in relation to economic inclusion planning for marginalised communities. Planned outcomes include enhancing and developing a partnership-formulated evidence-based knowledge base which will be disseminated through various mechanisms to improve policy and practice pertaining to Traveller economic inclusion.

The Big Lottery Research Fund is designed specifically to encourage third sector (voluntary agency) groups to design and undertake research which is grounded in the experience of service delivery and the planning of support services for their client community groups. Thus access to such sources of research funding sustains research that is perhaps more relevant and attuned to the needs of third sector groups and the communities than are some other forms of academic research that can be more detached from these constituencies and also concrete policy outcomes.

Action Research

The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project has an explicit focus of seeking to enhance community involvement through the adoption of action research principles.

Action Research is research that works explicitly **with** and **for** people rather than undertaking research **on** subjects, a mode of inquiry which has roots in the work of the educationalist Paolo Friere (1970) and also Antonio Gramsci who famously declared that all people are intellectuals and philosophers or *"Organic intellectuals". In particular, Gramsci was preoccupied with fore-grounding the conceptualisation that* non-academic (predominantly) working-class people are more than able to take their local knowledge from life experiences, and use that knowledge to effectively address changes and problems in society (Gramsci, 1971, 258),

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Participatory Action Research is an explicitly socio-political mode of research and the way in which it is undertaken is an active statement of political and policy ideals. In essence there are three core types of participatory research: Consultation; Participatory and Partnership and it is the latter form of engagement which the research team engaged on the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project has embraced, a model which enables the voices of marginalised people to heard and to have a full say in the development of both research methods and research outcomes.

There are sound reasons for adopting such a research approach, as Meyer notes 'Its strength lies in its focus on generating solutions to practical problems and its ability to empower practitioners – getting them to engage with research and subsequent development' (Meyer, 2004, 454). This point is elaborated on by

Greenwood and Levin, pioneers of action research whose seminal work 'Social Research for Social Change' (1998) has been influential in shaping our thought processes. According to these authors: 'Action research is social research carried out by a team encompassing a professional action researcher and members of an organisation or community seeking to improve their situation. Action research promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just or satisfying situation for the stakeholders' (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, 4)

It can therefore be seen that action research has a democratic impulse as 'Democracy in action research usually requires participants to be seen as equals. The researcher works as a facilitator of change, consulting with participants not only on the action process but also on how it will be evaluated' (Meyer, 2004, 454). Throughout the TEIP in line with these principles, findings are fed back to participants for validation and to inform decisions about the next stage of the research, in order that outcomes are meaningful and useful to the participants. As Meyer notes: 'The researcher strives to include the participants' perspective on the data by feeding back findings to participants and incorporating their responses as new data in the final report. (Meyer, 2004, 454)

The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project can be demonstrated to reflect the principles of action research by

- Having Gypsy and Traveller and community group representation on the project steering group
- Having Traveller interviewers in a mixed team of interviewers

- conducting 100 qualitative (semi structured/conversational) interviews with the community
- The development of training courses in qualitative research for Traveller interviewers giving them greater understanding of how to conduct a semi structured interview and analyse collected data
- Giving Travellers who have been interviewed a chance to participate in analysis through regional seminars where findings are presented
- A 'call to context' (an insistence on framing the lived experience of marginalised peoples within a specific context as a defence against universalised discourse of equality) (Gillborn 2008; Delgardo, 1995) is embedded in both the research proposal and all publishable and disseminated outcomes, ensuring that Traveller voices are heard in the final research report. In particular this is performed by using a high number of direct quotations and case studies of Traveller life histories, making the final report accessable and comprehendable to the communities who are parties to the research.

Rationale for the selected methodology

Many of the principal organisations and researchers involved in the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project have a long history of promoting participation and empowerment amongst Gypsies and Travellers in campaigning and policy development. Hence, action research seemed a logical extension of this work. Principle organisations and researchers were involved in the work of the Traveller Law Research Unit where academics at Cardiff University Law School (Rachel

Morris and Luke Clements) facilitated the emergence of policy aspirations of a broad range of community representatives by drafting the Traveller Law Reform Bill and introducing these community members to the intricacies of legislative policy development. Once this process of policy formulation was completed an umbrella campaign organisation 'The Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition' was established 'which introduced and actively involved coalition community members in lobbying and engaging in direct dialogue with policy makers. The success of this work was noted by Liberty who awarded the coalition the Liberty human rights award in 2004. The citation for the award read:

> "For exceptional achievement in uniting Gypsies, Irish Travellers and New Travellers and providing a powerful voice to lobby for positive change and recognition of their human rights and for effective engagement of cross party support for some of the most socially excluded groups in the UK".

The lead researcher for the Traveller Economic Inclusion is Andrew Ryder who was a founding member and the Policy Development Worker for the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition. Similarly the community groups the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain and Friends Families and Travellers were lead agencies in the coalition and are respectively the lead and one of the key partner organisations involved in the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project. Other modes of engagement have also brought about greater Gypsy and Traveller involvement in policy development and research processes and members of the research team have been fundamentally involved in the both the policy and practice development of these rapidly changing models.

Under section 225 of the Housing Act 2004 (CLG, 2007) local authorities are statutorily

required to undertake Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments (GTANA) to identify the housing and site needs of community members. One of the first GTANAs completd in the UK was the Cambridgeshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment on which Margaret Greenfields acted a co-Principal Investigator and research methodology lead . One of the unique features of this GTANA was that it involved Gypsies and Travellers in the design of the project and included community members as interviewers (Greenfields and Home, 2006). The Cambridgeshire GTANA has been described as 'best practice' by a range of organsations including the Race Equality Foundation; Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Fundamental Rights Agency in Europe and INVOLVE (the UK wide advisory group on promoting public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research). Communities and Local Government guidance on undertaking GTANA recommends community involvement as practised in the Cambridgeshire project. A number of successful legal challenges have been mounted by Gypsy and Traveller community groups where it has been proven that lack of community involvement has led to miscounting or poor practice in delivering adequate accommodation. Both authors of this paper believe that GTANA which have successfully involved Gypsies, Roma and Travellers indicate the potential such involvement could have in other research areas.

For many participants involved in the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project action research and an expectation of strong Gypsy and Traveller involvement in the research process, is a natural continuation of previous projects which have utilised such research methods. Other notable examples of action research which have influenced the approach of the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project include a small project undertaken by the Gypsy Council in which members surveyed the inhabitants of a Kent village whose parish council had banned the Gypsy Fair held there for generations (Acton, 2007). The resulting report found that most villagers actually favoured the fair being held and the publication of these findings was one factor that led to the fair's reinstatement. The Ormiston Trust consultation on the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy (Ormiston Trust, 2007) which gathered community views and aspirations on accommodation as part of a process by the regional assembly to map out a strategy to deliver sites in the region is a further example of good practice. As the report stated::

> "Participatory research has developed somewhat in the last few years as a means to empower individuals and to collect 'better' more 'real' data. As a result, individuals from Gypsy and Traveller communities were asked to become directly involved in this piece of work. The project gave Gypsies and Travellers the opportunity to be involved in the design of the questions asked as part of the research, the sequencing and structure of the questionnaire, and helped them to develop the skills needed to collect and record the data. The researchers came from a number of backgrounds - Irish Traveller, Showmen and Romany Gypsy, and included both men and women" Ormiston Trust, 2007.

Increased involvement and awareness of research methods by community members thus further increases the justification for their involvement in a range of future projects including GTANAs and spin-off studies such as health or educational need audits. Such involvement enhances the community's ability to challenge unsound research, ensuring (in the case of GTANAs) that the correct quantity of accommodation need is identified and developed and that policy makers do not take their prompts from faulty research and design flawed policy responses which are unfit for purpose.

In the past, social policy initiatives intended to assist Gypsies and Travellers have often failed where they have not included community members in their design. For example, Arnstberg (1998) notes that welfare interventions designed for Roma communities in Sweden failed and were in fact counter-productive because they did not reflect the communities' needs and aspirations and were thus viewed as an imposition to be resisted. In the context of Ireland, important insights into the consequences of uncoupling policy and research from community engagement have been noted by McCarthy, who in a discussion of the application of a 'culture of poverty' analysis on Travellers in the 1970s (influenced by her own academic work which she later renounced as flawed), stated :

> "Policy decisions that fundamentally affect Traveller lives are constantly being developed without any input from the Traveller community. Policy decisions reflect the cultural norms of the settled community. How these decisions will affect Travellers is never considered. Without knowledge of

this distinct lifestyle, policy decisions cannot be sensitive to their needs" (McCarthy, 1994, 28)

Given that the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project wishes to have a clear impact on policies affecting economic and social inclusion it is imperative that Gypsies and Travellers are involved in all stages of the research so that the data captured is valid, providing meaningful insights into the lives of the researched community.

Methodology

The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project employed Traveller interviewers and trained them in a range of qualitative research methods. In common with a number of practitioners who have worked with diverse communities (Gunaratnam, 2003) it is our experience that community interviewers can, in some circumstances, be more effective in gaining access to interviewees than 'outsiders' researchers. Accordingly their involvement adds additional value and in addition such team members can provide important cultural advice and guidance to the academic team as a project progresses. In addition, the employment of community interviewers is a clear declaration that a research project is striving to be inclusive and respectful of participants' worldview whilst enhances community cohesion and trust between parties to the research.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with the 100 interviewees of mixed ages, both genders, and across a broad range of localities and accommodation types. Research projects and consultations that involve highly structured and interrogative

interviews have anecdotally aroused Gypsies and Travellers' suspicions of inquisitive 'outsiders', circumstances which are conflated with past experiences of interrogative and prying officials who have meant ill will towards the community. The impacts of misuse of research has been acute for Gypsies and Travellers both in the UK and internationally (e.g. during the Second World War when specious racial stereotyping was used as a justification for genocide, see Kenrick, 2004) and the legacy of such unethical practice has been profound, arousing concerns and retaining immediacy amongst community members to this day.

The ethnographer Judith Okely reported that in her early experiences of contact with the Gypsy and Traveller community she found that highly structured interview questionnaires designed solely by outsiders could prove counterproductive to a research project in which the community had little 'buy in', forcing her to rethink her approach (Okley, 1983). Anecdotal evidence suggests that other academics have experienced similar difficulties. A conversational style of interview is more culturally conducive to Gypsy and Traveller engagement and empowers the interviewed by enabling them to set out their concerns, interests and aspirations without undue restriction. Thus such methodologies increase the ability of the final report to validly capture the mood of those being interviewed, especially where the authors adopt a 'call to context' (Delgardo, 1995) and through significant use of direct quotations, ensure the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller voice speaks directly to the reader.

Thus not only does a more conversational approach, but also the involvement of trusted community interviewers, significantly minimise the mistrust with which research is often treated by people who have been subject to some form of oppression (Smith, 2003). Accordingly, semi structured interviews may be particularly effective for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller interviewees. Such methodological approaches facilitate open discourse with participants at their own pace, whilst not creating potentially unproductive casual discussion. To maximise the potential of such research techniques interviewers were trained in the use of semi-structured topic guides to "ensure that the interview retains structure and direction" (Bernard, 1995, 209).

Research team participants involved in the TEIP were determined to avoid 'quick and dirty' research where the researcher extracts information and uses it in a way which has no intrinsic value for the community being researched. Moreover, such methods usually involve a failure to report back findings to the subject of the research. Where Gypsy–Travellers have been the topic of research and scholarship, it has sometimes been as passive 'research subjects' (an approach critiqued by Greenfields and Home, 2006) As a result, there has been at times little enthusiasm by Gypsies and Travellers to participate in something that appears to have little benefit for them (Brown and Scullion, 2009). Through active partnership and participation of the community being researched the TEIP team has endeavored to maximize community 'buy in' as well as remaining true to the political and philosophical roots of community development and action research.

The Sample

The 100 interviews undertaken within the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project have

been distributed across the English regions. The sample reflects an approximate gender balance but also a broad cross section of ages and employment types with activities ranging from traditional self employed traders engaged in typical 'Traveller trades' such as scrap metal dealing to professional and degree educated Gypsies and Travellers in managerial positions. In addition a number of community group members with campaign and advocacy experience, and individual service providers have also been interviewed across the English regions to identify good practice in terms of training and employment as well as the benefits of affirmative action.

Dissemination and Networking

As noted above, at the end of the project life-span not only will research participants be invited to participate in regional seminars and contribute to data analysis but they will be invited to contribute to the identification of broad policy goals. Participants will also be given access to the final version of the report which will incorporate findings from the regional seminars and they will also be invited to a launch event. It is intended that the report which will contain significant policy recommendations pertaining to economic inclusion and the launch event will give focus and impetus to a policy change agenda at a local and national level in which research participants engage in advocacy to promote the aims of the report and the project as a whole.

The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project is also liaising with third sector groups who work to promote the economic interests of other excluded groups e.g. the Black Training & Enterprise Group (BTEG) on agendas that promote and develop training and social enterprise across the broad black

and ethnic minority sector. BTEG also promotes and organises campaigns such as 'Need not Greed' (lobbying for greater understanding and sympathy for workers trapped in the 'informal economy' and/or low wage exploitation) and emphasises the need for welfare and income reform. By forming broader alliances with a range of excluded groups the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project is promoting an intercultural campaign agenda and developing an 'empowerment network' (Gilchrist, 2004). Forging alliances with marginalised groups averts the negativism of 'dual closure' (Parkin,1979) towards other groups at the margins and instead offers the possibility of broad coalitions of the excluded, that might form effective networks of empowerment (Gilchrist, 2004). Such intercultural exchanges with other minorities and interest groups (including the State) can thus facilitate a process of reflection on the part of both community members and also the broader research team.

> "Having analysed political economics, social structures and ideological systems from around the world and over long periods of time, professional researchers develop a sense of where the local systems fit into a larger range of variation. This broader contextualization is useful in action research because many groups suffering from acute problems feel stuck in a particular view of the situation and have a difficult time developing a sense of alternative courses of action. By setting the local situation in the context of these broader comparisons, the professional action researcher can assist the local group in opening up its sense of the situation and some options for the future" (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, 99).

For Gypsies and Travellers such intercultural reflection may also facilitate internal community dialogue about the feasibility of maintaining traditional economic activities and lifestyles and whether these can be strengthened through forms of adaptation. Where adaptation is taking place the community will potentially wish to reflect on whether this acculturation (if such it is) poses a cultural threat to the broad outlines of their identity. Such processes are constant features of the Gypsy and Traveller community, as no single minority has a fixed identity (Greenfields, 2010, forthcoming). Gypsies and Travellers like other groups are constantly molded and shaped in terms of identity by intercultural interaction with 'others' and cultural borrowing to strengthen and adapt life strategies. As Acton has noted Gypsies and Travellers have proven to be adept 'bricoleurs' over the centuries (Acton, 1997)

A Response to Criticism of Action Research

In action research professional social researchers and 'insider' community or organisation members are co subjects and co researchers in the research process, presenting many types of knowledge and action to the research project. Some social scientists welcome the notion of expert social researchers, but feel deeply uncomfortable about the thought of people untrained in the theories and methods of academic social science, making contributions to research processes. Such social scientists contend that the researcher should be detached from the researched. Barany, who has written extensively on the subject of East European Rom/Gypsies, reflects such sentiments:

"Given the truly pitiful conditions in which the majority of Roma live, those who study them can easily lose their objectivity and become de facto Gypsy activists.....I do find purportedly unbiased studies that overlook the fundamental principles of scholarly research and presentation quite disturbing, however those 'activist authors' may be motivated by a twisted sense of political correctness in so far as they over-emphasise the injuries the Roma have indisputably suffered at the hands of the prejudiced majorities while simultaneously ignoring the Gypsies' responsibility for their predicament and belittling the efforts of states and organisations to assist them. My approach is that of a social scientist and not of a Romanologist or a Gypsy activist" (Barany, 2002, 18).

A drawback, then, according to Barany, is that the research of the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project may not be considered neutral but instead partisan. One approach to the argument that non-participatory modes of research are more reliable than the methods we argue for above, is to deconstruct the argument of scientific neutrality.

The notion that one can be neutral is a fallacy. The qualitative researcher cannot assume they can observe with detachment and certainty in the same manner as a scientist working in a laboratory (Robson, 1993, 65). Indeed the obsession of some social scientists with impressing colleagues that their methodologies are 'respectable' and akin to 'hard science' lies at the roots of the conflicting paradigms which often bedevil social scientific practice, Good quality research and sound outcomes are

more likely to be forged by the researcher explicitly acknowledging the impact and influence of the personal views and life history that they bring to the research field whilst remaining scrupulously critical of their own practice, engaging with trusted – yet critical - colleagues who will challenge their findings, and remaining impassively incorruptible in the face of potentially conflicting pressures from research funders, commissioners and participants. As Meyer notes critical reflexivity is an important addition to collaborative research:

> In addition, the onus is on the researcher to make his or her own values and beliefs explicit in the account of the research so that any biases are evident (Meyer, 2004):

A strong case can thus be made that action research is *as* scientific and indeed potentially more likely than conventional forms of social science methodology to produce valid data and interpretations of social phenomena, than are other methods. Indeed members of marginalised communities or organisations involved in a research project may be unlikely to accept as credible the theories of 'outsiders' if they cannot recognise the connection to the own lived situation, or because specific local knowledge makes it clear to community members that the frameworks are either too abstract or simply wrong for the specific context. It is arguable that an important test of the credibility of action research knowledge is whether actions that arise from such studies effectively solve problems and increase participants' control over their own situation (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, 54, 75, 81). Thus the degree to which a research project mobilises Gypsies and Travellers and successfully changes the policy regime which impacts upon

economic and social inclusion will be the ultimate test of the validity of a project.

The above critique of the approach of Barany (and others) who are politically and philosophically opposed to participatory research does however highlight one potential obstacle that may face the action researcher. Any research project having a 'change agenda' is more likely to be viewed by some funders with suspicion. Thus official access to some institutions and data sources may be harder to achieve. Other difficulties likely to face the researcher include the level of practical and emotional support which may be requested by interviewers, particularly until their level of confidence increases, and indeed the close working relationship which develops between academic and community team members may at times need to be negotiated and re-assessed during the project as the relationship can potentially become 'blurred' around the edges leading to requests for assistance or advice which may on occasion be problematic yet understandable when viewed through the prism of relative power differentials. Such is the isolation and exclusion experienced by some Gypsies, Roma and Travellers that the action researcher (and indeed community research partners involved in the interview process) will in all likelihood feel at times overwhelmed with appeals for help and assistance for a broad range of problems. Here caution needs to prevail, if the researcher is relied upon too greatly as a source of primary support rather than directing those in need to agencies better equipped and resourced to give help, then research outcomes and funding could potentially be compromised or the researcher find themselves in conflict with their primary aim. The action researcher therefore has to be both selective and focused in forwarding a 'change agenda' as well as coldly self-critical. The value of clear reflexive practice is at its most

important in such circumstances to ensure that the academic researcher does not became so engaged that their practice falls below the standard of professionalism owed to the community, themselves and their professional discipline.

Conclusion

In this paper the researchers involved in the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project have set out the case for undertaking research with Gypsies and Travellers that is participatory, partnership-based, action orientated and which seeks to give something back to the community being researched.

To do otherwise, and en passant to treat Gypsies and Travellers who are one of the most excluded minorities in society as nothing more than a passive research subject on which to model and demonstrate some distant abstract argument, is perverse and alien to our political philosophy. Not all research projects can emulate the scope of Gypsy and Traveller participation as set out by the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project and in this we acknowledge that we are fortunate in that this project is uniquely well funded and resourced. However, most forms of research provide scope and opportunity to give something back to the 'researched' in terms of participation and honest dialogue between the researched and the researcher.

Within the UK, British academics are currently debating and arguing the case for establishing an Economic and Social Research Council Centre focused on research into, and in partnership with, Gypsies and Travellers. Such a centre has the potential to create broad research alliances and increase the ability of research to influence policy agendas. It is imperative however that this debate about new ways forward is focused on delivering new forms of inclusive research that work **with** and **for** and not **on** Gypsies and Travellers.

It will no doubt continue to prove difficult to secure funding for action oriented research projects given that some funders will decry such a research approach as falling foul of notions of detachment and scientism. The research team involved in the Traveller Economic Inclusion Project hope, on the contrary, to demonstrate that action research can more effectively capture the predicament of a highly excluded group such as Gypsies and Travellers and by this process facilitate meaningful and effective reform of social policy and society. We would therefore urge that this conference judges us on the outcomes of our work not on a pre-conceived notion of scientific independence.

Dr Margaret Greenfields & Dr Andrew Ryder March 2010

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