Discussion Paper G

Co-producing Knowledge with below the radar communities: Factionalism, Commodification or Partnership? A Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Case Study

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Abstract

There is a growing interest in the co-production of research knowledge involving academics working in partnership with marginalised citizens and communities. This is particularly the case where, for reasons of language, culture and histories academics may encounter difficulties in engaging those they wish to research.

However, the concept of community participation in research – certainly as equal partners – has been, and remains, contested. Is the knowledge generated 'tainted' by activism and engagement or can it be critical and objective? The following discussion paper explores the debates around community led research, drawing on the specific case study example of European Gypsy, Traveller and Roma research networks. It identifies the challenges in the co-production of research knowledge and how more inclusive models of research might be developed in future.

Whilst this Discussion Paper draws on a Roma specific case study, it is intended as a basis for further – and wider –debate on the role of, and challenges facing, participatory community research, its relationship with academic rationalism and its potential to promote social justice.

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In recent times there has been a growing trend for civil society (third sector) to engage in the co-production of research (Goodson and Phillimore 2012) either as partners helping advise and even collect data with academic researchers or in more exceptional cases initiating and leading in research projects. Civil society is increasingly aware of the value of research in community mapping, understanding the communities they serve and being aware of where strengths, needs and weaknesses may lie. Sections of civil society and critical researchers have realised that research can have an 'empowering' function. Forms of participatory action research have the power to develop the critical consciousness of those who are more usually the object of research by actively involving them in the research process – from design to analysis and completion (Recknagel and Holland 2013). Hence, inclusive and participatory research can have transformative potential (Mayo et al 2013). A key focus of this paper is the value of coproduction.

Despite extolling the virtues and benefits of civil society and participatory research it is evident that a number of serious obstacles are impeding the development of inclusive research. With reference to a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) related case study, this paper provides insights into those obstacles which deal with scientism and the commodification of research. The paper concludes with a number of proposals which can promote inclusive research and development with particular reference to GRT communities and the academic field where these communities are considered which is increasingly referred to as Romani Studies. Whilst the case study is GRT related the paper should be of relevance and interest to a broad range of civil society organisations involved in and or developing an interest in research. Although civil society activists and workers are the primary audience for this paper it is to be hoped that it will additionally have value to the academic community in particular critical researchers who seek to give recognition to the 'voice' of marginalised communities, enabling them to be the 'subjects' rather than the 'objects' of research.

Romani Studies

Romani Studies is an interdisplinary subject encompassing fields such as sociology, anthropology, linguistics and political science, centred on the diverse and heterogeneous communities that come under the labels of Roma/Gypsy but also includes analysis of Traveller communities. Romani communities have been a topic of study since the 18th century, one of the most noted scholars from this time was Heinrich Grellman (1783) who helped establish the Indian origins of this group but whose interpretation of these communities, as deviant and untrustworthy betrayed the enlightment principles of the times. In the nineteenth century the study of Romani communities received further stimulus in the romantic writings of George Borrow (1851) . There were others that followed in his wake including the founders of the Gipsy Lore Society, who promulgated an array of stereotypes about Romani communities (Acton, 1974). One of the most detrimental perceptions that emenated

from the 'gypsylorists' was that these communities were in a state of cultural decline. Cultural innovation and adaptation was interpreted as dilution and demise.

From the 1960s work within and around the orbit of Romani Studies took on the mantle of a more academic approach through the work of Thomas Acton, Donald Kenrick, Jean Pierre Liégeois, Judith Okely, János Ladányi and Michael Stewart amongst others. From the 1970s policy makers, in the West and East of Europe, were becoming increasingly interested in the research of Roma experts, elevating the status of the subject. Yet despite attempts to instil greater academic rigour, academics like Acton (1974) and Liégeois (1998) were able to comment on the derison that researchers working with Roma still attracted from their colleagues, often leading to marginalisation within their academic institutions and a slower and more awkward career progression. Thus numbers working in this area remained slight until recently. To these early pioneers of Romani Studies the fact that the number of researchers working in this field has exponentially increased, alongside funding opportunities, must be a source for some surprise. Despite this new popularity, all is not well within Romani Studies, the author of this paper, conjectures that factionalism and forms of commodofication may devalue the contribution that Romani Studies is capable of providing.

The theories of Bourdieu (1986, 1988) are useful in helping us conceptualise the academic field within which Romani Studies is located, which he characterises as being structured hierarchically. Those at the pinnacle of the pyramid have achieved and attain their position through the possession of forms of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) and are likely to share similar dispositions (habitus) which incorporate common viewpoints and stratagems which maintain and uphold their supremacy but also serves to marginalise and devalue those located in subordinate positions in the academic field.

The following typology – composed of fictitious characters – will hopefully give the reader some insight into the tensions within Romani Studies and the different interest groups within the academic field. One of the aims of this paper is to mediate greater understanding between these interests and promote what Bourdieu (1991) described as a 'working dissensus', an arena which affords critical acknowledgement of compabilities and incompabilities. In other words a space where academics from diverging intellectual traditions can at least agree to participate in constructive dialogue.

The Scientific Universe of Romani Studies - The 'Usual Suspects' and their Dispositions, Strategems and Grievences

Key Characters	*Dispositions, Strategems and Grievances*
Jane – retired professor and a founding figure in Romani Studies, she has a strong record of activism. Jane has attracted few major research grants in recent years	"The problem with Josh is he has 'sold out', he is chasing money and producing tepid research. He is in effect a 'neo gypsylorist', researching 'on' Roma communities"
Josh – a mid career researcher who has attracted significant research	"The mistake Jane made was to allow her research to become tainted by activism, this is why she has not

funding. He has produced a number of reports and has published widely in lead journals and is a sought after international expert	attracted any serious funding in recent years and has diminishing influence in policy circles. It has to be said that Jane's work has sometimes fallen into the trap of bolstering a narrow and insular form of ethnic nationalism"
Mikhail – Josh's PhD student, who has decided to focus on his PhD studies exploring Roma school participation through quantitative data. He has decided to avoid activism	"The best way I can help the Roma is by producing objective, clinical and neutral research and let the facts speak for themselves. How will it help my research if I devote precious and limited time to activism, the critics of my research will use that activism to deny the validity of my findings. I am not going to fall into the trap of Valeria and produce 'dumbed down' sociology which features in low level publications, which is not read or taken seriously by those with influence to make change".
Valeria – Jane's PhD student, a Rom and NGO activist who is a feminst and influenced by standpoint theory. She combines activism with research	"I think that Josh and Mikhail have become disconnected from Roma communities – this weakens their research as they fail to validate their findings through listening to and taking note of community views which runs the risk of disempowering Roma communities. My idea is to bring research into Roma communities and social movements and I try and write in a way which is accessible and prefer open access publications, thus avoiding locking away my research in elitist journals which cater primarily for the academy"
Ionel - an early career anthropologist who has conducted a series of studies on Roma self help mechanisms, including money lending	"I find some of Valeria's viewpoints rather naive, I am a trained academic researcher and have the skills to interpret community action in a manner which is scientific and valid. Valeria has become captive to those being researched, she 'sweeps under the carpet' things which show the Roma in a negative light. We need to be honest and reveal the truth and challenge internal oppressions. I also have to say that Valeria may be a Roma but her professional status and lifestyle may have made her as much of an outsider as me".
Artur – an associate professor and self styled critical researcher and a former high profile activist	"I am on a treadmill, fighting for my academic life. I have managers watching over me and monitoring my outputs and a large teaching and administrative workload. I seem to have little or no time to critically engage with the Roma communities I worked with in the past"

Miguel – a Roma and local community mediator who lives in a settlement which has attracted a great deal of research and media interest because of segregationist acts by the local authority	"So many researchers have been here, I sometimes feel like a bug on a pin being examined under a magnifying glass. Researchers come and go but rarely do they tell us what they said or what happened to the reports. There seems to be an academic Gypsy industry churning out reports and articles, nice work for the academics but nothing seems to change for us in the ghetto! "
Julia – an early stage PhD researcher considering switching the focus of her PhD away from Roma communities	"I feel rather perplexed by the bitter and protracted disputes by academics in Romani Studies which I have witnessed in the last year. Should I ally myself with activism or adopt a more scientific approach? Or is there scope to reconcile the two? I do feel frustrated by the academic squabbling in Romani Studies, and often feel nervous and hesitant to enter into debates and discussions, for fear of being 'shot down' by one of the established academics or being perceived as belonging to a particular faction and paying a heavy price through negative reviews of articles or grant applications "

The above typology gives some insight into the intellectual field in which academics work in and compete for resources and recognition. This is a complex universe with a number of points of division and controversy but the central theme of this discussion paper is the relationship between the researcher and those being researched The following discussion is therefore pertinent to some of the issues raised in the typology: a suggested academic typology that is by no means unique to the field of Romani Studies.

Knowledge Production

At the outset of this discussion it is necessary to map the parameters and define what is meant by knowledge production and co-production as these are disputed and contested terms (Pohl et al 2010).

Academics are arguably factional groups that can be categorised according to differing perspectives, disciplines and approaches which they may adopt. A number even operate and network within 'packs' with defined leaders, behaviours and outlooks: formations which invariably lead to intellectual tussles and the 'locking of horns'. One of the oldest forms of classification has been the divide between what might be termed Cartesian philosophy (rationalism) and embodied research (experiental/lived). It is a classification which has polarised, factionalised and triggered a great deal of friction and contestation and, in some respects, is mirrored in the divide between pure and applied science. In this contest perceptions of truth and validity in research have been at the core of the

debate, claims for which can be translated into power and prestige, a factor that explains some of the bitterness and intensity of academic factionalism. Debates have raged as to the legitimacy of traditional notions of hierarchies of knowledge which place the expert as the filter and shaper of what is perceived as knowledge and wisdom at the summit of the hierarchy, an elitist stance which reduces the value and recognition of grounded and localised knowledge (Weiler, 2009). With reference to the imbalance in power relations in knowledge production in a traditional conception of the knowledge hierarchy, it is useful to reflect on Foucault's use of the term 'power/knowledge' to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth' (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991).

According to Smith (2003), Descartes contended that knowledge was based on a form of dualism, namely the knowing subject and the known object, this can be termed as an enlightenment philosophy and encompasses scientism, with its 'glorification of objectivity'. In pursuit of this goal research should be detached and 'disinterested' in the researched as it is asserted 'that getting too close' to those being researched may lead to bias. In contrast embodied knowledge is a perspective which situates intellectual and theoretical insights within the realm of the material world, it is grounded in the reality of everyday life. These competing visions have been played out in the debates around pure and applied science, with pure science depicted as part of the classical liberal ideal but to its critics it has epitomised the 'ivory tower' aloofness and elitism of academia. In contrast applied science has been depicted as more interested in the realities of life and to offer solutions to problems lived (Roll Hansen, 2009).

This scientism is a matter of putting too high a value on 'pure' science in comparison with other branches of learning or culture (Sorrell, 2002). It has been argued that science based epistemologies are inherently anti-feminist (Code, 1991). Indeed critics contend that such positivist thinking is deeply conservative adopting quasi scientific methods and conceptions of detachment and that the pursuit of objective truth is delusional (Mies, 1983). Feminist and critical researchers believe that research should be situated (standpoint theory) in the concerns of marginalised people (Harding, 1991), and this can best be achieved through egalitarian research practices like participatory action research (Maguire, 1987). Such an approach brings the researcher closer to a more valid and meaningful form of knowledge and it is argued is more ethical for those being researched as forms of accountability are developed at all stages of the research including involvement in analysis and interpretation. Standpoint theory contends that scientism cannot detach itself from the class, culture and race of the researcher, though recognition of the impact of such attributes through reflexivity can minimise the influence of bias (Reinharz, 1992).

The critical researcher would also argue that what scientism labels as the 'truth' is highly contested and politicised. Foucault (1991) argued that power is everywhere and diffused in discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth', i.e types of knowledge and discourse which are given the status of truth by those in power, which includes those who portray themselves as the 'all knowing expert'. For

Gramsci (1971) the arbitration of what is accepted as the truth and what norms and behaviours are part of the controlling framework of hegemony can constitute a site of both power and control but also of resistance, hence there is the possibility to contest and subvert power (Gaventa, 2003). In what has been termed as counter hegemonic action not only are the intellectual elite capable of developing critical consciousness but so are those at the margins, what Gramsci described as 'organic intellectuals'. Gramsci's theory is evident within Freire's (1971) conception of critical pedagogy and participatory action research. These approaches take as a starting point the experiences of those at the margins but seek to expand their understanding of those experiences and link them with deeper perceptions, which connect immediate marginalisation with wider structural factors but also prompt a desire for transformative action.

The debates and divides between scientism and the critically engaged researcher are evident in Romani Studies

Research on and with Roma Communities

According to Blaikie research can be 'on', 'for' or 'with' the researched (Blaikie, 2007). A common accusation is that there has been a long tradition of research 'on' Roma communities. It has been argued that from the eighteenth century, with the start of academic interest in Roma communities, academia has adopted hierarchical research approaches but also forms of scientific, racial and cultural racism giving credence and support to policies of genocide and assimilation. From the later part of the twentieth century more collaborative and inclusive forms of scholarship appeared, as evidenced in the work of researchers such as Acton (1974), Kenrick (1995) and Gheorghe (2013) which identified more closely with Romani emancipation struggles (Ryder, et al, 2014). However, within the field such researchers have had to compete and contest with scholars more wedded to traditions based on scientism. Scholars in the field of Romani Studies imbued with aloofness and or scientism have been labelled by some as 'Gypsylorists' (Mayall, 2004), they have frequently clashed with more critically orientated researchers over issues related to the validity, objectivity and authenticity of their respective research approaches. The tension described in the typology presented in the introduction are also revealed in the following quotes: The academic Okely, an ethnographer who has researched Gypsy and Traveller communities in the UK, sets out the inherent dangers of academic hierarchicalism.

 "The very term 'expert witness' is hegemonically loaded. In the centres of power it carries with it the notion of detached knowledge and political neutrality. It also presumes that other lay people, including ordinary members of an ethnic group are not themselves expert witnesses" (Okely, 2003, 234).

In contrast Barany justifies a scientistic approach: "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, 2001, 18).

Through a discussion on the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, the potential role of research in relation to this Framework and a case study on some organisational developments within Romani Studies this paper seeks to provide insights into the theoretical debates between the two camps referred to above, namely those who research 'on' as opposed to 'with' or 'for' GTR communities. The paper notes that there may be limits to creating a more inclusive relationship between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' in Romani studies as evidenced by a growing trend of commodification and neoliberalism in academia and research practices. Factors that basically lead to the researcher being tightly controlled by their institution and funder through targets, time and resource restraints and donor driven research agendas, which impact on issues of control and framing in the research process.

Policy Background

The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies: The Potential for Inclusive Community Development

New directions in policy formulation and delivery at a European level have the potential to stimulate inclusive research and development. At the centre of European Union policy frameworks on the Roma is Open Method Coordination (OMC) which provides a framework for national policy development and coordination for EU members. The rationale is that EU members will examine their policies critically, thus leading to the exchange of good practice, and that peer pressure will spur on some to 'do better' (Meyer, 2010). The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies which was launched in 2011 (hereafter referred to as the Roma Framework) is based on the OMC and involves member states devising National Roma Integration Strategies. This can be described as a deliberative framework, and the European Commission has stressed the importance of on-going dialogue and partnerships between governments and Roma groups in the Roma Framework (EC, 2011).

At the launch of the Roma Framework the Vice President of the European Commission, Viviane Reding, declared that the Roma Framework was the "beginning of a new future" (EU Presidency, 2011). As Acton and Ryder (2013, 5) note "To a student of history, this is not as auspicious as it sounds.... 'New Futures' for the Roma have been multiplying themselves since the time of the Hapsburgs. These visions have all floundered, either being based on assimilationist templates, or lacking resources and political commitment, in a recurrent cycle of neglect and naive interventionism". In the present time policies which invoke the language of 'social inclusion' for Roma have often rested

upon narrow, assimilative, interpretations of what it is to 'civilise' and integrate (Van Baar, 2005). Development structures have led to bureaucratic processes stifling funding streams for community organisations and creating projects with limited goals to achieve service efficiency. Yet the rhetoric of the Roma Framework rests upon a conception of development where agency, diversity and democratisation appear to be valued (Acton and Ryder, 2013). A key question to pose is whether the Roma Framework is effectively fostering such inclusivity and whether forms of participatory research are being adequately promoted to facilitate such approaches. Before exploring this question it is important to survey Development theory in order to locate where the Roma Framework may be placed in this discourse.

Development Theory

Development theory encompasses the ideas and notions connected to the process of societal change and explores the utilisation and distribution of resources and power as well as technological, organisational and cultural change. There are differing interpretations of development and it is a highly contested and politicised concept (Pieterse, 2009).

The chequered history of policy intervention for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities mirrors the wider trends and debates in the sphere of economic and social development. In the post war period development theory was accepted and unquestioned and was built upon the premise that through planning and intervention deprived groups located at the margins of western society and or in the third world could be assisted to enter into and benefit from forms of mainstream existence premised on western capitalist notions of what is an effectively functioning society or community (modernisation and westernisation). It was within this context that development programmes were initiated for GRT communities, which incorporated forms of assimilation which deemed GRT lifestyles and cultural practices to be dysfunctional. In the Communist East of the post war period the Roma were to be 'proletarianised' (integrated and made to conform), through school attendance, occupation of housing estates and entry into waged employment in industry. Similar patterns of externally determined and homogenous models of society were imposed in the West, for instance in the UK a series of local authority Traveller sites and or entry into social housing were deemed as policy instruments which could lead to regular school attendance and entry into waged labour (Okely, 1997). The logic of these developmental approaches was that GRT would be assimilated and absorbed into what were deemed normative lifestyles and behaviours. With post development theory the benefits of development were questioned, critics revealed not only the hierarchical and paternalistic nature of development theory and policy but also its inherent eurocentric outlook (Kothari, 1988). Foucault (1998) argued that development theory constituted a form of control, through the concept of governmentality, which normalises neoliberal and assimilative policy agendas and 'responsibilisation', which individualises and pathologises the victims rather than the structural agents of exclusion. Criticism of development theory has had implications for views on knowledge production, critics have argued that in character with its exclusionary nature it exalts scientism above local knowledge (Escobar, 1995).

A danger of post development, which has critiqued the narrow notions of development outlined above, is that the concept of progress may be lost and an unquestioning exaltation of ethnic cultures can promote static and narrow versions of identity. More nuanced post development theory contends that a new way of development should be inspired from within the subaltern (social groups who are socially, politically, and geographically outside of hegemonic power), hence there is a need for empowerment and for the subaltern to look inwards and self organise and mobilise, avoiding the pitfalls of narrow donor driven control and manipulation (Udombana, 2000). It could be argued that the rhetoric of empowerment and partnership within the Roma Framework (outlined below) endorses new approaches to development and should in theory give stimulus to community based and participatory research. However as will become evident there appears to be a gap between rhetoric and reality.

Inclusive Community Development

The results and progress of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies have been disappointing. Member states have developed weak and narrow national action plans which fail to adequately involve Roma communities in the design and delivery of these plans (Ryder et al, 2014). The EU Roma Framework has failed to live up to the expectations of the Roma Platform. The Roma Platform brings together national governments, EU institutions, international organisations and Roma civil society representatives. The Roma Platform established 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion in Prague in 2009 to address the inclusion of Roma (EC undated). These included commitments on the 'involvement of civil society' and the 'active participation of the Roma' (European Commission 2011). The Roma Platform maps out and envisages a dynamic partnership with Roma communities, involving them actively in decision making and policy design.

There was some hope that the rhetoric of empowerment and participation inherent within the Roma Platform and EU Roma Framework would give impetus to more inclusive forms of research which empowered Roma communities giving them not only an active role in research but a voice in the design of policy and role in its delivery. It is important to note that the European Commission in a communication document for the Roma Framework emphasises the importance of applying the principles of the Roma Platform, namely community involvement and the need for robust evidence to assess progress within the Framework. The European Commission communication document calls upon the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to review progress. The FRA is promoting participatory research as part of the methodology for this review (EC, 2011; FRA, 2013). It remains to be seen to what degree such research is genuinely promoted and practised within the Roma Framework by FRA and the EU commission. The bureaucracy and complexity of EU funding streams for research is well known (Armingeon, 2007), this invariably means that community organisations are impeded from bidding for research funds and or are consigned to more tokenistic roles within research consortia led by universities. In addition there is a danger that genuinely participatory and innovative research approaches might fail to meet the approval of scientific committees charged with the review and evaluation of grant applications which invariably are dominated by more established and potentially

scientistic orientated researchers. To a degree it can also be said that those applicants who are most likely to succeed in the process are those who have proficiently played the 'game' in the academic field of power, pouring the majority of their time and energy into securing entry into elite academic institutions, circles and journals (Sparkes, 2007).

A concern expressed by some observers is that despite the huge volume of research (academic and policy related) the outcomes for GRT communities have been limited, leading to the question of whether the research conducted has been lacking and or whether research has become a ploy for inaction. In this debate some have even claimed that commissioned research by powerful institutions, with little or no community involvement, has in fact upheld longstanding stereotypes (Acton, 2006). However, a research driver which is of growing significance is the Decade for Roma Inclusion Secretariat, a Soros funded initiative which is funding civil society coalitions to monitor and evaluate member state progress within the EU Roma Framework. Some of the recent series of reports commissioned by the Decade Secretariat have sought to utilise participatory research approaches involving GRT community members in research design, data collection and interpretation (Decade Secretariat, 2014). In general though, the instances of more participatory research remain slight and the European Commission and other policy makers still too readily depend on 'expert' knowledge which privileges a narrow and limited body of knowledge. This is to the detriment of the deliberative nature of OMC and the Roma Framework as the views and perceptions of the subaltern are not being effectively heard in policy processes. Pohl et al (2010) argue that the co-production of knowledge between academic and non-academic communities is essential to ensure research which promotes more sustainable development paths. A key challenge in this quest is addressing power relations between the researcher and those being researched and re-orientating relations on a more equitable basis than that afforded by traditional research hierarchies based on scientism.

It can also be argued that another aim of the Roma Platform, namely the promotion of intercultural dialogue with Roma communities, is being undermined by a failure to adequately promote participatory action research. Inter-culturalsm acknowledges and enables cultures to have currency, to be exchanged, to circulate, to modify and evolve (Powell and Size, 2004). It has, as its essence, an openness to be exposed to the culture of the 'other'. The Traveller Economic Inclusion Project, a participatory research project managed by the civil society organisation the Traveller Movement, sought to promote intercultural dialogue by inviting Gypsies and Travellers to reflect on how traditional economic practices were declining but could be revived through greater access to mainstream business support and skills development (Ryder and Greenfields, 2010). Additionally the research sought to initiate dialogue with policy makers and service providers to make them appreciate that targeted and flexible services could be the most effective means to assist Gypsy and Traveller economic inclusion. The report also sought to educate decision makers and the wider public about the economic dynamism of GRT communities in the UK and their emergence in service and professional roles, all of which presented a contrast to negative stereotypes directed at these communities (Greenfields and Ryder, 2013). Inter-culturalism and participatory research can thus ensure change is

not a one way process, it is an approach premised on the belief that ethnic groups are not rigid and fixed entities but adapt and evolve through wider societal interactions and desires to discard behaviours and practices which are outdated, unproductive or discriminatory.

To illustrate the gap between rhetoric and reality it is of value to assess the Roma summit in 2013, where the EU Commission met with Roma civil society representatives. The summit largely consisted of a series of lengthy speeches from officials. Roma attendees protested at the lack of dialogue by holding up placards asking to be treated with dignity. Likewise, critics have argued that Romani Studies has also not done enough to facilitate Roma communities to have 'voice' and promote recognition and resources for innovative and participatory research approaches.

Case Study: Factionalism, Commodification or Partnership

Background

With the introduction of the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies some felt that there may be a shift in the relationship between scholars and Roma communities, given the Framework's emphasis on partnership and collaboration (Ryder and Rostas, 2012). It was felt momentum might be given to a more inclusive relationship through the establishment of a European Academic Network on Romani Studies (EANRS). Its stated aims include support for efforts towards the social inclusion of Romani citizens in Europe and facilitating intercultural dialogue and raising the visibility of existing research outside the academic community in order to foster cooperation with policymakers and other stakeholders. However, in its election of a Scientific Committee the EANRS failed to elect any members of the Roma community, leading to the resignation of Professor Thomas Acton. Since then two other renowned academics - Eniko Vincze and Jean-Pierre Liegeois have also resigned.

Roma involvement in the coordination of the EANRS did eventually increase through the election of Roma PhD students to two newly created posts for associate members on the Scientific Committee[1]. This organisational adaption was prompted by the protests over non Roma representation on the Scientific Committee and frustration of the associate members who were debarred from participation in the initial election which was reserved for members holding a doctorate. The following case study seeks to explore the nature of tensions within Romani Studies which centre on the relationship between the researcher and those being researched but also considers whether this friction can be resolved and overcome.

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[1] Associate members hold an MA and or are studying for a PhD

Scientism v Critical Research

One faction within Romani Studies could be viewed as being influenced by the concepts of scientism. As discussed above scientism can be viewed as an academic viewpoint which contends that the researcher must show detachment and maintain objectivity if research is to have rigour and potential policy impact. Notions of detachment mean that for such researchers questions of accountability can be interpreted through a narrower lens. Obviously such researchers conform to the now accepted ethical standards of informed consent. In fact with reference to university ethics committees and traditional academic approaches to ethics the process has focused on transactional agreements centred on individual rights such as informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (Flicker and Guta, 2008). This contrasts with a community based approach where participation and co-production takes centre place and which sees ethics as incorporating relationship and trust building and inclusive dissemination (Durham Community Research Team, 2011).

Despite sometimes intense interactions with the researched, some of those imbued with scientism have adopted set limits as to how much the researched should be invited to comment on the interpretations of the researcher or to have the opportunity to participate in the resulting analysis and knowledge production. The argument is that such a line needs to be drawn as the researcher can be drawn into a form of accountability where the researched can somehow have too great a say in interpretation and thus research can become partisan and invalid.

Judith Okely (2014) has rightfully noted that the television series 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' aped some of the practices of anthropology through intense interaction and observation of families but failed to perform the same rigorous practice of informed and ethical consent. The point also needs to be made that those who featured in these programmes had no say or ownership in the final product which, to the consternation of participants, became a 'mockumentary'. It could be argued that researchers have made similar mistakes. A number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities will attest to the researcher who 'became their friend' but was not to be seen again once the data had been collected or the thesis had been written (Liégeois, 1998). Some critics would even venture that such practice is unethical and has produced knowledge that is misinformed and promoted stereotypes which the researcher has failed to test and merely reflect the bias and frames of the researcher (Marti et al, 2012). Critics observe such approaches maintain a danger of misinterpretation and a hierarchical view towards those being researched and knowledge production.

An example of the dangers of hierarchical relations in social inquiry is evidenced by the case of classic anthropology in which the outsider observer colonised knowledge and perceptions of indigenous groups. Thus research becomes a 'one way process' in which the observed are excluded from the process of knowledge production (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003). Today some researchers may maintain such detachment and disinterest in the name of objectivity but it should be viewed as a continuation of the positivist tradition. Critical researchers influenced by postcolonial theory have

challenged the notion that developing theory should be solely based on the thoughts of academics but instead incorporate the voices and experiences of those experiencing racism and oppression.

For the critical researcher, who hopes to use research as a tool to promote transformative change, relationships with those being researched are of paramount importance. It is the contention of such researchers that empathy with the researched in the tradition of feminist and critical research can foster more equal relations between the researcher and the researched. In turn it is argued that more egalitarian relationships give those being researched involvement in knowledge production. In recent times researchers have experimented with forms of participatory and community based research giving Roma communities a meaningful say not just in research design, but data collection and analysis (Greenfields and Ryder, 2013). For researchers influenced by the teachings of Paolo Freire, such participatory relationships and alliances enable the researcher to facilitate forms of critical pedagogy where Roma communities can draw connections between their immediate experiences and the structural factors that shape their exclusion. This research, it has been argued, facilitates the development of critical consciousness and mobilises communities into forms of transformative action (Ledwith and Springett, 2010)

Scientism contends that such research holds the danger of becoming partisan, lacking objectivity, and thus minimises its chances of being taken seriously by policy makers (Barany, 2001). Wider criticism of scholarship with an emancipatory agenda has centred on how research and knowledge production has been used to form and shape nation building agendas amongst the Roma. The most notorious point of contention in this respect has been the debate around the Indian origins of the Roma and the claim of a single migration and or alleged Roma origins from a warrior caste (Matras, 2004). In this respect members of the academy have been correct to single out the weakness and fallacy of some claims centred on tenuous evidence, tempered to fit the needs of a political project founded on narrow notions of Roma nation building. Looking further at researchers working outside of a participatory tradition, anthropologists have produced research which has revealed the hollowness of some of the claims of representation by Roma civil society. Indeed some anthropological research has been adept at revealing the development of self-help and coping mechanisms amongst Roma communities, sometimes centred on faith groups and tradition and the lack of resonance and or appeal that Roma civil society and a Roma elite has achieved in reaching out to communities at the grassroots (Gay y Blasco, 2002). In addition political scientists like Kovats (2003) have revealed the hierarchical nature of Roma nation building agendas at a European level.

Despite the weaknesses of some previous emancipatory scholarship and even strategies, a cadre of researchers is emerging, many of whom are from the Roma community and or who have an NGO background and are keen to promote inclusive forms of research which are participatory, community based and or which mobilise and prompt change starting at the grassroots. These researchers are utilising sound methodological techniques including reflexivity to achieve objectivity. In pursuit of this goal some are giving those being researched an opportunity to comment on findings or contribute to

knowledge production. Such involvement does not mean researchers are under the control of the researched. Some critical researchers incorporate forms of intersectionality which has led to them challenging not only external and structural forms of exclusion centred on gender, race, socio economic and institutional factors but also forms of oppression which exist internally within Roma communities. A dilemma which might arise for the researcher is where the 'insider researcher' surfaces issues that a particular community does not want 'opening up' beyond the community – or where some findings might appear to re-inforce existing/negative stereotypes of their community (McCabe et al, 2013). The critical researcher may have difficult choices to make in this respect but should be ethical in the sense that choices and decisions made should be carefully balanced on the basis of human rights and fairness. In the field of Roma Studies this has been reflected in recent times by researchers who have sought to navigate the pulls and tensions of cultural conservatism and pitfalls of being misinterpreted. Such difficult, even contentious research has surfaced problems of domestic violence and hyper-masculinity within some GRT communities (Cemlyn et al, 2009).

The author of this paper ascribes to a critical research approach but recognises this is only one approach and that others have value. Indeed, the author appreciates the value of academic diversity and its role in generating debate and scrutinising the validity of the knowledge produced. However, there is a fear that forms of scientism are in fact stifling debate and or deriding the value of emancipatory forms of scholarship. These are limiting the progress which can be achieved through new and potentially inclusive policy frameworks. Academics imbued with scientism, despite proclaiming objectivity and neutrality, have been the most visible partners of power elites in their role as 'expert'. The danger is that an academic elite is seeking to monopolise 'expert opinion' on Roma and other marginalised communities and, in their role as 'expert advisors' of decision makers and centres of power, act as substitutes for an absence of genuine community involvement, while failing to question this state of affairs (Acton and Ryder, 2013). In the past, scientism in social science has combined an obsession with objectivity, rationality and technique with financial dependence on culturally and politically conservative institutional bases of support often leading to tepid reform (Gary, 1997). The author of this paper contends that the dangers of scientism chronicled in other social policy spheres are presently being played out in the realm of Romani Studies.

The resignation of leading academics from the Scientific Committee of the EANRS (referred to above) took place between 2012 and 2014. In May 2014 a major row erupted within the online forum of the Network about a proposed European Roma Institute. This brought to the fore debates about relationships with the researched but also how academics should best organise themselves and present their views collectively to centres of power.

For a number of years prior to the formation of the EANRS there had been proposals to establish an institute for Romani Studies. This idea was revived when the philanthropist George Soros expressed interest. The idea also found some favour within the Council of Europe and European Union. In April 2014 José Barroso the President of the European Commission raised the idea of an institute publicly (Barroso, 2014). In April 2014 a consultation process was initiated within the Council of Europe on the European Roma Institute (ERI) which mooted the vision some supporters of an ERI held. The ERI would have a focus on cultural matters and promote debate and research in this area. The paper outlined a proposal for an Academy called 'Barvalipe' which would serve as the governing body of the ERI and consist of 20 public intellectuals of Roma origin, who would invite 10 non-Roma experts to join them. The Academy would elect the ERI Board from among its members. The paper outlined also a proposal for the formation of a network of Roma chairs at universities. In addition the ERI would provide other institutions with a licence to carry out training and research on Roma culture and identity. The consultation paper, which was referred to as a 'draft non paper', by chance came into the hands of members of the Scientific Committee of the EANRS.

The Scientific Committee of the EANRS decided to issue a statement expressing a number of concerns about the proposed structure of the ERI. Some members of the EANRS felt that there should have been a wider consultation of the full membership in formulating such an important statement. The lack of deliberation on this matter within the EANRS replicated the lack of grounded debate that the sponsors of the ERI had equally failed to nurture. It should be noted that a number of critical researchers (including the author) also had some concerns over the proposed ERI, a principal concern was the proposal to create institutional licenses for research and training. Fears were expressed, on the one hand, that this could lead to forms of monopolisation in the realm of scientific inquiry. On the other hand an ERI might offer the prospect of greater Roma involvement in knowledge production and give the Roma a powerful institutional platform which could help frame discourse and counter that which is negative. Critical researchers felt that any constructive and valid points the EANRS could have raised in any discussions on the merits of an ERI were undermined through the lack of consensus the Scientific Committee created for its statement. Aside from the procedural methods involved in the drafting of the statement criticism was also levelled at a number of the sentiments and underlying concepts. A key section of the Scientific Committee statement was framed as follows:

> "We believe that the academic rigour of research and training in Romani studies, their reputation, their appeal to early career and aspiring researchers, and their ability to flourish in an environment that promotes genuine intellectual freedom and creativity are best protected within established and recognised higher education institutions that are subject to the standard procedures of student and staff selection and promotion, peer-review scrutiny of research and

research ethics, and quality assurance of curriculum design and delivery. The academic engagement with Roma culture belongs within universities. It deserves to maintain the same reputation as other serious academic disciplines. Only on that basis is it possible to produce knowledge that can inform policy and public attitudes in a reliable and transparent manner."

One of the dangers of this viewpoint is that it reflects some of the common traits of scientism, a belief that academia in the classic form of the academy is the best and most objective arbiter of what can be considered the truth. Here though scientism is flawed in its' rather positivist assumption that the academic observer is detached and value free. The reality is that academic status and hierarchy is translated into power and prestige a commodity which will influence some academics not only in their choice of interpretation of the life-world but also of the perspectives and viewpoints they hold of their rivals. Academics are thus a rather factionalised group and one means by which an academic can accrue symbolic capital is to claim their knowledge production is the most objective, informed and relevant to policy makers as it is centred within the universities. By developing this argument the authors of the statement were prioritising research about powerless people (by powerful people) rather than research by and with powerless people on the workings and manifestations of power. It is a line of thought which diminishes the value of knowledge production which is generated outside of academia or centred on more participatory and critical approaches. Indeed the statement of the Scientific Committee can be viewed as an example of what Bourdieu described at the domination of academic elites which seek to sacralize the institutions and practices upon which their authority rests (Wacquant, 1993), a form of cultural reproduction which, for Bourdieu, leads to 'misrecognition' where power relations are perceived not for what they are objectively but instead in a form which depicts them as legitimate in the eyes of the beholder (Jenkins, 2007).

As a consequence of this dispute, a number of network members, mostly early career and Roma researchers but including two members of the Scientific Committee that resigned, called in an open letter for the EANRS to hold early elections, an appeal which was denied by the Scientific Committee on the grounds that the letter was signed by less than 10 percent of the members. The dispute may be redolent of those which occur in many fields of academic study between established intellectuals and those who are more at the fringes of the academic establishment as a consequence of age or viewpoint. Bourdieu described such disputes as being positioned between the 'conservers' (orthodoxy) and those with a more subversive disposition (heretics) (Swartz, 1997). The field of academic discipline is in fact in permanent conflict, as academics engage in strategies or "position takings" directed towards the maximizing of symbolic gain (Bourdieu, 1993). Despite disputes and rivalries being part of the academic landscape the field of Romani research is facing a critical moment. The next stage of the debate and potential actions will have profound consequences not only for Romani Studies and its strength and support but the relationships between researchers and those being researched more generally.

A former Scientific Committee member has called for the EANRS Scientific Committee to move away from being a forum that 'scientifically' supervises decisions, but instead to become a body that coordinates the consultative mechanisms across the Network. This would facilitate the EANRS to take decisions that would be presented to wider EU research, policy and practitioner forums to maximise the transfer of knowledge and cultural awareness. Improved engagement and dialogue could be an essential ingredient in establishing a more inclusive vision of research with Romani communities and knowledge production.

Towards Inclusive Research

The proposed European Roma Institute (ERI) could be a useful hub which could facilitate the exchange of information and transnational cultural projects, creating vibrant cultural partnerships. However, monopolisation should be avoided, hence the ERI should work constructively alongside other pan European structures like the EANRS and or the European Roma Traveller Forum (ERTF) [2]. All of these pan European bodies need to be more attentive to effective communications and links with Roma communities than hitherto if they are to avoid disconnection from the very communities they are involved in studying. This paper argues that there is an urgent need for innovative forms of engagement to be explored, in a similar vein destructive rivalry should also be avoided but this may be dependent on the availability of funding and level of competition.

The start of more open, and potentially grounded, discussion on a ERI may have been initiated through a second consultation document issued by the Council of Europe in October 2014 where a revised conception was presented to a wider pool of commentators including EANRS members. In addition Mr Ulrich Bunjes, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Roma Issues (Council of Europe) and a key advocate for the ERI met the Scientific Committee of the EANRS. Apparently the discussions were constructive and this may indicate a desire by a range of actors for a more deliberative approach to be adopted on the ERI.

It is to be hoped that, in parallel with discussions as to what form an ERI will take, there will also be meaningful debate as to what role an EANRS should adopt. This needs to refer to the statement of aims which includes a commitment to promote the social inclusion of Romani citizens in Europe, facilitate intercultural dialogue and raise the visibility of existing research outside of the academic community in order to foster cooperation with policymakers and other stakeholders. However, in November 2014 the Scientific Committee informed the membership that it had decided not to hold elections, as had originally been planned, since the project would be scaled down due to the present round of funding expiring in May 2015, instead the EANRS would focus on the legacy outcomes of the

[2] European Roma Traveller Forum was established in 2005 it is funded by and has privileged access to the various bodies and organs of the Council of Europe which deal with matters concerning Roma and Travellers. It has a Secretariat in Strasbourg within the Council of Europe's premises. During the first year, national elections for national delegates were organised in forty countries. The first Plenary Assembly was attended by 67 delegates from 33 countries.

project and the continuance of the online discussion forum. To this end a number of the members of the Scientific Committee would remain in place as a Validation Committee to vet continued membership admission and will invite the membership to think of ways in which the network and its resources can be further developed and promoted. The author of this paper believes that through improved channels of communication and online discussion, surveys and polls the membership could be empowered and present collective viewpoints on issues of importance. In such work an elected and representative committee, which includes Roma representation, could have merit.

So it would appear that three Europe wide bodies on the Roma may operate, namely the European Roma Traveller Forum, a European Roma Institute and a scaled down European Academic Network on Romani Studies. In contemplating the direction these entities should take it is worth reflecting on the thoughts of the Roma activist and scholar Nicolae Gheorghe, who noted "..we may generate a movement only if we manage to find ideological tools and messages to capture the feelings, the interests and the social imagination of the population in the grass-roots Roma communities or/and in the general public" (ERRC, 2006). Gheorghe was certainly emphatic that the ERTF could be a key factor in the development of Roma political culture at a European leve. However,l the key ingredient was to establish nationally representative organisations, based on inclusive networks of Roma NGOs, political parties or churches which would form the bedrock of the ERTF. This aspiration is yet to be realised in many European states (Gheorghe with Pulay, 2013). If communication, accountability and democracy are key facets of a Europe wide Roma social movement it is worth posing the question of whether such principles can or should be applied to bodies like the ERI and EANRS with a more academic and cultural focus. I would argue in the affirmative, believing such principles not only guard against disconnection with Roma communities but also promote inclusive visions of research.

An ideal of inclusive research needs to be promoted which 'goes beyond' the academy is centred on participatory and community based research as a tool for furthering social justice (Durham Community Research Team, 2011; Goodson and Phillimore, 2012). The Roma Research and Empowerment Network (RREN) based in Budapest has sought to promote an ideal of inclusive research which values coproduction, it stages debates in community centres and cafes in Roma communities for activists, practitioners and researchers[3]. The RREN is actively promoting the establishment of other localised groups across Europe. The RREN could be seen as an attempt to

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[3] An outline of Roma Research and Empowerment Network (RREN) activities can be found at the link below
http://romaempowerment.wordpress.com

The RREN currently has 500 facebook members, many of whom are students, early career researchers and Roma activists. In December 2014 it issued a statement on research and activism via the European Roma Rights Centre blog

http://www.errc.org/blog/workshop-reflections-nothing-about-us-without-us/45

overcome the dilemma which Bourdieu identified for critical sociological researchers in the sense that they do not have a social base, in other words subordinate groups more inclined to challenge power relations are not exposed to sociological literature and cannot afford it (Swartz, 1997). The RREN currently has no funding and is an informal network but this may be advantageous as it is freer from temporal and political influence and able to be more autonomous and even agile than the EANRS and ERI.

Another means by which an active contribution to inclusive research and partnership could be made is to establish a research bank, where civil society and community organisations outline key areas they would like to see researched and explored. Through a research bank established researchers and students can be informed by the questions raised and establish partnerships with community organisations in the research process. Thus such a research bank could offer the prospect of research endeavours which are grounded and relevant to the subaltern. In promoting forms of participatory research there is a need to maintain standards and rigour in this field. Brydon Miller et al (2003) note that increasingly participation has become a required component of evaluation assessment, appraisals and research but there is a danger that this approach is being subverted, tokenised and co-opted to reinforce existing power relations (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). Co-production offers practical benefits, including giving academics access to elites and other worlds, and the capacity to build trust quickly, bringing stories, experiences and insights into practice (Orr and Bennett, 2012).

To return to the EANRS, in accordance with its statement of aims, it needs to be proactive in identifying and promoting research which provides insights into inclusion for Roma and raises the visibility of research and knowledge outside of the academic community. This work now needs to be addressed with some urgency so as to raise awareness of the deficiencies of member state progress within the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and more widely within the Decade for Roma Inclusion and help to steer renewed commitment from the EU towards the Roma which is at a critical stage with the formation of a new commission. Such involvement in raising awareness and insights is in fact in the interests of both the EANRS and individual researchers given the growing pressure on academics to demonstrate research impact – especially in UK/EU research council funding streams.

It is important that the EANRS adopts an evidence based critical voice in EU policy deliberation on the Roma issue and emphasises the value of innovative and inclusive forms of research. As noted earlier in this paper in the past, social policy initiatives intended to assist Roma, Gypsies and Travellers have often failed where they have not included community members in their design and were counter-productive because they did not reflect the communities' needs and aspirations and were thus viewed as an imposition to be resisted. Thus inclusive research can inform policy development within the EU Roma Framework and help to measure progress and prompt intercultural dialogue. A greater level of resources and support needs to be directed to such research.

It is not just academia and governmental institutions which should reappraise and assess the inclusivity they afford to the Roma. Roma civil society also needs to reflect on the depth of its links with communities and respond to criticism that has been levelled at it of managerialism, disconnection and donor driven agendas (Acton and Ryder, 2013).These, however, are not exclusively, Roma issues but raise wider debates about the claims of connectedness of voluntary organisations to the communities they serve and the extent to which the potential for independent action (and, by extension, research) can be curtailed by funder agendas (Rochester 2013).

Conclusion

The paper reveals the dangers presented by 'rhetoric – reality' gaps. Despite commitments to empowerment, inter-culturalism and inclusion by policy makers and researchers the reality is either forms of tokenistic involvement are being offered to those at the margins and or the dominance and continuance of hierarchical forms of decision making, research and knowledge production; a disempowering experience of the research process which is shared with other marginalised communities (Goodson and Phillimore, 2012).

The case study presented illustrate the dangers of factionalism (especially around generating knowledge 'about' marginalised groups). Attempts to monopolise knowledge production through scientism and traditional academic notions of being the "professional expert" can damage and limit the opportunities for research to deliver transformative change.

The paper makes another important point in that different approaches to research prompt new lines of inquiry, test and temper hypotheses. Romani Studies by virtue of its interest in marginalised communities should reflect and embrace a diversity of opinions (working dissensus) and even structures. Basically qualitative and quantitative and scientism and participatory approaches can learn from each other. It is not a matter of academic hierarchies but looking to the strengths and weaknesses of both. Qualitative data can empower and furnish powerful insights but if coupled with quantifiable data is more likely to compel policy makers to take action.

Alas academics can be viewed as a dysfunctional family riven by arguments and inflamed passions but at the end of the day the ties and interconnections are strong. Debates and discussions though need to be less macho and competitive, instead of inflicting symbolic violence on one's opponents researchers in their debates should be more reflective and tolerant of and open to critique. Although arguing from a critical research perspective the author of this paper would not want to see such an approach monopolise and dominate. What is needed is in fact plurality which allows for peaceful coexistence of different interests and perspectives. Habermas and Freire amongst others have noted the power of deliberation in helping to form critical awareness and insights which can form and shape transformative action. In all debates we need opponents, we need our foils to react and respond to.

Critical research, scientism and or other viewpoints will hope to win the debate and indeed maximise its influence but respect and space need to be accorded to intellectual opponents who operate within accepted parameters of behaviour and thought. To draw a more general point with reference to the distinction drawn between pure and applied science at the start of this paper, the number of cases where research has been instructed and guided by 'understanding' and 'use' is profuse and confounds notions of pure and applied science being in diametrical opposition (Stokes, 1997). As Roll Hansen (2009, 20) notes "Theory provides practice with new concepts and theories, and practice presents theory with unexpected facts. Some of the most important achievements, both in basic and applied research, have their origin in settings which include both".

A major factor that will work against this rather platonic vision of a deliberative academy is the growing commodification of research and higher education. The traditional professional culture of open academic debate and inquiry has been replaced by a stress on measured productivity. Universities have become like corporations with formulae, incentives and targets guided by the principles of 'new managerialism' (Miller, 2010). Academia can in fact be viewed as a field of power dominated by an audit culture which exalts and promotes the 'competitive academic', adept at self-promotion, voluminous publication in top academic journals and the acquisition of grants (Sparkes, 2007). It has been said that the contemporary university has changed from a platonic academy to a commercial mall (Wood, 2010). In this market place other academics become competitors – less inclined to acknowledge and respect the views and aspirations of one's competitors but also less likely to forge links with the researched. In part such distancing will be prompted by time and resource factors as the 'managed' academic and researcher race to complete the task within the agreed budget and timeframe but such distancing will also be prompted by the desire to win the contract. Inclusive research which gives those being researched real voice is more likely to challenge the status quo and perceived wisdom of power elites and, in the commissioning of research, policy makers are more likely to commission research shaped by scientism and or tokenistic forms of engagement with the researched.

Despite the impediment that commodification presents to the development of inclusive research, a strong case can be made for the efficiency of such research approaches which can formulate policy which is informed and guided by those it impacts upon. Moreover, it is through community based participatory forms of research that citizens, including those at the margins, will reflect, understand and mobilise to bring forth transformative change.

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Below the Radar

This research theme explores the role, function, impact and experiences of small community groups or activists. These include those working at a local level or in communities of interest - such as women's groups or refugee and migrant groups. We are interested in both formal organisations and more informal community activity. The research is informed by a reference group which brings together practitioners from national community networks, policy makers and researchers, as well as others who bring particular perspectives on, for example, rural, gender or black and minority ethnic issues.

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