

Third Sector Research Centre

Discussion Paper F

## **Roma Civil Society: Deliberative Democracy for Change in Europe**

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the potential for deliberation and partnership between Roma communities and Roma civil society, national governments and European institutions and the research community. The authors argue that inclusive community development can have transformative potential by promoting a 'Social Europe', a vision of society based on solidarity, equality, social justice and internationalism.

It is hoped that the paper will facilitate discussion in the lead up to a conference on Roma Empowerment to be held in Budapest on 31 May 2013, which will be hosted by the Corvinus University, University of Bristol and Roma civil society groups including the Roma Education Fund.

### Key Words

Roma, Gypsy, Traveller, European Union, deliberative democracy, community development, inclusion, 'Social Europe'.

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## Introduction

The concept of 'A Social Europe' incorporates a vision of society based on solidarity, equality, social justice, internationalism, and the view that economic wealth should be fairly distributed, without excluding or discriminating against groups or individuals (Ségol, 2012). This paper seeks to assess the feasibility of the project for a 'Social Europe' by seeing how far it can include Roma communities through consultative deliberation about inclusive development. First the paper unpacks these concepts and then reviews the potential for progress in current policy frameworks and outlines how empirical evidence and analysis suggests impediments can be overcome.

The foundation of what has become the European Union (EU) was rooted in post war ideals to forge new forms of solidarity and an ideal of Europe based on the creation of universal human rights as a response to the destruction wrought throughout Europe by Fascism. Such principles have been reaffirmed in EU treaties in Amsterdam (1997) and Lisbon (2000) where commitments and frameworks to promote social inclusion and equality were agreed (O'Connor, 2005). It is often argued, however, (Kröger, 2007) that the development of European social policy has been slow and haphazard often playing second fiddle to the marketisation and commodification of the integration and Europeanisation process.

A key question to pose is whether this market-oriented vision of Europe can meet the challenges of the 21st century. Sirovátka and Mareš (2012) argue that those challenges are significant, leading to 'neo-liberal downward harmonisation', whereby more developed economic countries whittle down labour and human rights and wage protection to make them more competitive in comparison to economies in developing countries. Downward harmonisation accentuates poverty, in turn creating greater collective insecurity and fuelling xenophobia, a development exacerbated by the financial crisis of 2008 (Richardson and Ryder, 2012). Roma communities have been amongst the most prominent victims of both poverty and xenophobia in Europe and Filcak and Skobla (2012) exhume from the early industrial period the hackneyed metaphor of the 'canary in the mine shaft', to describe their role as harbingers of future dangers. Roma have experienced acute forms of marginalisation, in central and eastern Europe during the transition period to a market economy since the early 90s. Such exclusion could become the norm for ever greater numbers of people from all kinds of social and ethnic strata, as the negative effects of globalisation gain pace.

Roma communities in Europe are estimated at 10-12 million people (Council of Europe, 2012), although such numbers are inevitably fluid and ambiguous, as there are ongoing arguments about which marginal groups fall within the 'Gypsy/Roma/Sinte/Travellers' constellation, and shifting numbers of people of mixed or given Romani heritage who make different decisions in different circumstances as to whether to identify as Roma. The experiences of these groups present a major challenge to avowed European principles of social justice. The Roma issue has been recognised by leading political figures, such as the late Vaclav Havel, as a litmus test for European principles of equality (Kamm, 1993).

The EU has reacted to the economic crisis and corresponding challenges to social justice primarily by prioritising austerity. However, some of these measures have brought about radical new directions in terms of governance itself, most notably in the 'fiscal compact'.<sup>1</sup> Roubini (2012) suggests that the

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<sup>1</sup> The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union was signed on 2 March 2012 by 25 of the 27 member states of the European Union. One aspect of the treaty is fiscal stability, that

fiscal compact is a major paradigm shift that will signify unprecedented centralisation and intervention in the economic sphere, which in turn, through strict budgetary restrictions and austerity drives at the national level will limit the room for social policy manoeuvrability.

Europe appears to be at a 'crossroads' and a new debate has been sparked as to the direction of, and ideals upon which, the EU should be predicated. Amongst the proponents of an alternative strategy has been Habermas who has been alarmed at the lack of deliberation surrounding the response to the financial crisis. Instead, Habermas (2010) calls for greater deliberative democracy in Europe, which, he argues, will enable a better coordination in other policy fields, alongside new economic. He envisages changing the collaborative form of economic mobilisation across continental blocs, the most developed such model at present being the EU. Walker (2005) argues that these blocs would be able to stand up to and dictate their terms to corporations through regulation and supranational collective action in the global market system rather than vice versa. Craig et al. (2008) argue that such supra-collective action could counter 'social dumping' and create a system governed by principles of social justice based on equality and solidarity but which also understands and values human rights in the sense of Rawls (1971).

For Habermas (2010) a key dynamic in this strategy is deliberative democracy, which he defined earlier in 1984 (p.95) as one which can facilitate communicative action and new social movements, creating consensus and mutual understanding. Deliberative democracy involves citizens and their representatives actively debating about problems and solutions in an environment which is conducive to reflection and a mutual willingness to understand the values, perspectives, and interests of others. He echoes Lengyel's (2009) elaboration of the possibility of citizens reframing their interests and perspectives in light of a joint search for common interests and mutually acceptable solutions. But this in turn echoes the point made in Fleming's (2002) critique of Habermas (1996), that for Habermas, the hegemonic discourse of power elites in the twentieth century had been corrupted by 'refeudalisation' of the inclusive bourgeois public sphere, which Habermas conceived as an idealised version of the intellectual lifeworld of the enlightenment coffee houses and salons, which might yet still revitalise public discourse in the form of a 'radical democracy' where the people are sovereign.

Such an analysis is reminiscent of Kellner's (2000) criticism that Habermas does not recognise the exclusionary traits of the bourgeois sphere which marginalises 'plebeian' interests. Somin (2010) sums up arguments against the practicality of Habermas-style radical democracy in terms of the difficulty of involving highly marginalised people in deliberative processes, if they lack the cultural capital and access to forums to make meaningful contributions. Thus there may be a danger of professional and more affluent members of society monopolising transformative mobilisations in the name of the people.

But the fact that people lack such cultural capital *now* does not mean they will never develop it. The earliest studies of Roma political mobilisation in the West (Acton, 1974; Liégeois, 1976) show how Romani autodidacts have exemplified the assertion of Gramsci (1971), that everyone can be an 'organic intellectual', an expert on their own localised situation and, from this starting point, (and standpoint) be capable of developing valid and meaningful positions. Such respect for peoples' potential must be attempted and fostered if social movements are to be based not just on those who

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is, rules about the level of government deficit and government debt (the fiscal rules in the treaty are sometimes described as the 'Fiscal Compact')

have already reached the middle classes but include economically excluded groups marginalised in the labour market. Offe (1985) argues that the plight of these groups is the talisman of the structural failings of late capitalism, so that solidarity with the marginalised becomes both the motor and the condition for middle-class radicals to be involved with new transformative notions of social justice.

Correspondingly forms of deliberation centred upon inclusive community development are needed to mobilise the marginalised and legitimate the politics of the progressive middle class, but the marginalised themselves must come to own the process. Freire's (1972) methods of critical pedagogy aim to achieve this through deliberation and reflection which enable communities to achieve a form of critical consciousness and grassroots mobilisation. Darder (2002) follows up by suggesting inclusive community development is inherently 'deliberative' and can provide space for reflection, critique, challenge and action between different social factions. The effectiveness of the involvement of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities, as the proverbial 'canaries in the mine shaft', is a crucial test of the effectiveness of the construction of 'Social Europe' in the terms of Geyer (2000) as a transnational deliberative space.

This paper will argue, therefore, that the present low levels of formal Roma community organisation and weak links to actual Roma communities of the existing advocacy networks weaken *all* attempts in European society to mobilise marginalised people. This state of affairs might be reversed, however, by inclusive forms of community development which aspire to a more interventionist and redistributive vision of Europe.

The next section of the paper outlines the existing European policy framework and the scope for dialogue and engagement with Roma communities.

## EU Roma policy and participation

A key plank of European Roma policy is the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, which was launched in 2011 (known as the 'Roma Framework'). At its launch, Viviane Reding, the Vice President of the European Commission, described it as "beyond all expectations" and the "beginning of a new future" (EU Presidency, 2011).

To a student of history, this is not as auspicious as it sounds. As Liégeois (2007) notes, '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 (Acton 2005). Liégeois (2007) suggests that pan-European policy on Roma since the 1960s has been more benign than in previous historical epochs, and since the 1980s a series of directives from the Council of Europe and the EU have sought to promote measures to increase educational inclusion, outlaw racism and promote the application of Structural Funds to address exclusion.

Serious attempts to create Romani organisations which can lobby governments and inter-governmental organisations go back to the 1950s, and even those drew on the experience of isolated utopian endeavours from the 1920s and 1930s (Klímová-Alexander, 2005). Attempts to mobilise more activist-driven transnational campaigns in the past have utilised various forms of Romani nationalism (Acton and Klímová, 2001). Some of these mimicked European nationalisms, promoting exclusivity and distancing, rejecting the potential of broader empowerment networks. Nirenberg (2009) has argued that the development of a broad coalition has been further impeded by the manipulations of

'charismatic' leaderships, with little appetite to forge grassroots mobilisations. Under these leaders there has, in some cases, been a danger of forms of representation replicating the behaviour of other power elites by monopolising power and decision making, thus limiting the progress of transnational mobilisation. We suggest that a more inclusive model of community development might lead to a more outgoing and democratic transnational advocacy network shaped by cosmopolitan values combining (and moderating) pride in ethnicity with a wider solidarity which addresses other equality and social justice agendas. This form of cosmopolitanism has the potential to create transnational empowerment networks where criss-crossing social movements shape deliberative debate and influence and bolster visions of social justice and, in turn, policy development (Patrick, 2008).

The series of World Romani Congresses which started in 1971 (and its administrative body, the International Romani Union, founded in 1978 before the 2nd World Romani Congress) are perceived to have failed to build a substantial representative organisation (Acton and Klimova, 2001). They have left in their wake, however, a number of fora at a European level that Roma advocacy networks can use in engaging with Europe wide institutions. The most important, the European Roma Traveller Forum (ERTF) founded in 2004, is composed of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller delegates from the member states of the Council of Europe and is represented by a General Secretary and Secretariat (Liégeois, 2007). The ERTF, even though it was formally initiated by the Council of Europe, started as a bottom up federation of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to which any Roma-led NGO could affiliate, and vote in the elections for its ruling body. By the time of its second election, however, its constitution had been changed to the same system the International Romani Union had before. Just one compliant NGO in each nation-state was mandated to send a small unitary delegation. Other NGOs lost their right to send delegates. Some care was taken to choose substantial local NGOs who could put on 'a good show'. This, and the decision of the well-regarded radical critic of the International Romani Union, Rudko Kawczynski, to remain as President (despite its move to an unrepresentative structure) gave it considerable continuing legitimacy. The majority of Roma NGOs, not to speak of the great majority of Roma, are, however excluded from any meaningful input into the ERTF by its revised constitution. The Canadian Roma activist, Jud Nirenberg, (2009) who after working as an intern with the UK Gypsy Council and other grassroots NGOs, put the initial structure of the ERTF together and persuaded NGOs to affiliate, before being pushed out of the 'reformed' structure, has plausibly charged that it has failed to forge overall meaningful communication with and legitimacy among Roma communities in Europe. Rather than continuing to seek wide coalitions of local groups, as the ERTF at first advocated, in some cases it has reverted to a system of co-option or the 'election' of traditional and 'charismatic' leaders not well versed in developing grassroots mobilisation.

Nonetheless, despite these limitations it has retained the support of some large NGOs with a measure of internal democracy. For example, in the UK the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups (led by the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group) organised a ballot of its own affiliates to elect the UK delegation to the ERTF. The President of the ERTF, Rudko Kawczynski, with the encouragement of some progressive European politicians, has remained a vociferous critic of acts of xenophobia towards Roma in Italy, France, Hungary and across Europe. For the time being the ERTF remains a relatively successful transnational beneficiary of the state strategy that Marcuse (1964) termed 'repressive tolerance', which enables it to remain a credible negotiating partner for European

institutions, even if these negotiations have become a weary and repetitive dance of protests, exhortations and unfulfilled assurances.

Another important development has been the Roma Platform. The Roma Platform meetings are decided on and chaired by the member state holding the presidency of the European Council. They bring together national governments, the EU, international organisations and Roma civil society representatives. The meetings aim at stimulating co-operation and exchanges of experience on successful Roma inclusion policies and practices. The Roma Platform in Prague in 2009 established a set of 10 shared principles to address the inclusion of Roma. These included commitments on the 'involvement of civil society' and the 'active participation of the Roma' (European Commission 2011 website: [www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu)). Such statements imply commitments to forging a dynamic partnership with Roma communities, involving them actively in decision making and policy design. However, there have been growing complaints that the Roma Platforms are dominated by the European Commission, are hierarchical and tightly controlled leaving little space for Roma civil society to express its aspirations, report on progress in their home countries and, where needed, articulate frustrations (Rostas and Ryder, 2012).

These realities contrast with the aspirations of the European Union Open Method of Coordination (EUOMC), supposed to be 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 Roma Framework is based on the EUOMC and involves member states devising National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS). 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. The Commission has also stated that resulting strategies should 'be designed, implemented and monitored in close co-operation and continuous dialogue with Roma civil society, regional and local authorities' (European Commission, 2011: 9).

The EUOMC is what Kröger (2009) has described as a soft form of governance, a form of policy development based on advice and persuasion. Others, however, (O'Connor, 2005; Bailey, 2008) have argued that in fact the EUOMC is over-friendly to neo liberalism and does little to challenge power and wealth differentials between countries, it has also been contended that the European Union finds inclusive engagement difficult, as it is bureaucratic, complex and hierarchical (De La Porte and Pochet, 2005). It should be of little surprise therefore that a constant theme of protest from Roma civil society has been a lack of consultation in the Roma Framework. In February 2011, at the onset of the framework process, a coalition of Roma civil society groups appealed for more open consultation with NGOs on EU Roma policy related initiatives (ERRC, 2011).

In a study by the Open Society Foundation (OSF) five countries were evaluated in terms of their participation with the Roma Framework. These countries participated in the Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005-15), a similar process to the Roma Framework which centred on EUOMC and National Action Plans, and should thus have been sensitive to the requirements of the EU Roma Framework. The case study box below summarises how consultation and dialogue was conducted in these countries.

## Case Study– National Government NRIS Consultations with Roma Civil Society in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia

Based on the Open Society Foundation (OSF) Report (2012)

In **Bulgaria** there was active participation by Roma experts and civil society stakeholders in the Roma Framework however in the opinion of the OSF reviewer many of the proposals elaborated by the Roma experts and civil society were not incorporated into the strategy. In the **Czech Republic** debate took place between the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic and Roma representatives, both from the Government, Council for Roma Community Affairs and its committees, as well as non-members and experts. In terms of participation by Roma in drafting the Strategy, this is not mentioned in the Strategy directly, but its coordinator Martin Šimáček informed the OSF reviewer that the coordination body – the interdepartmental coordination group – contained representatives of all the key ministries, as well as the Government Commissioner for Human Rights and the Agency Director. Šimáček noted ‘Aside from them however there was also a member representing the Roma population in the Czech Republic who was chosen for the group not just on the basis of direct experience as a Roma citizen in the Czech Republic, but also due to experience with inclusive policies...’ (OSF, 2012: 38). Apparently in working groups there were other representatives of Roma populations in the Czech Republic who participate in public administration. According to Šimáček there weren't people in the working groups with direct experience of poverty and life in social exclusion; these were apparently involved in drafting the strategy indirectly, through local consultants. In **Hungary** the government has close co-operation with the Roma self-government (ORÖ). As the leader of ORÖ is a politician of the government party, this co-operation is important but does not cover the diversity of the civil society and Roma stakeholders. The OSF reviewer notes ‘There were several consultations on the strategy with representatives of the civil society and Roma stakeholders, and it was also possible to channel in inputs from a broader consultation organised by Partners Hungary, financed by OSI. It was possible to send comments to the draft strategy with an adequate deadline. A weakness is that neither the comments nor the responses were made public’ (OSF, 2012: 47). In **Romania** consultations with civil society and Roma stakeholders were organised by the National Agency for Roma. The draft document was initially displayed without actions plans but these were circulated two weeks later as a result of different pressures from NGOs and academics. An informal group created at the initiative of several non-governmental organisations (The Coalition for a National Strategy for Roma Inclusion) is cited in the OSF report and raises a number of concerns ‘During the two meetings the Coalition for National Strategy for Roma Inclusion had with the General Secretariat of the Government and National Agency for Roma they promised to organise another meeting with us during which we were supposed to discuss our feedback (what will be taken into consideration and what will not be). This meeting never took place’ (OSF, 2012: 59). In **Slovakia** the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma communities organised three roundtable discussions with civil society representatives and one roundtable discussion with Roma representatives. In these round tables the first draft of the goals in the four key areas were presented and opened to discussion. The OSF report notes that there was a perception that not all comments were adequately taken into account. A number of participants concluded that the events themselves did not leave much space for consultation and input because of the design of the agenda and format.

The UK Coalition Government in its *Equality Strategy* (Home Office, 2010) and *Equality Strategy Progress Report* (Home Office, 2012) lists listening to and involving the public and partners in the development of policy as central objectives. Despite this aim, the UK Coalition Government chose not to submit a NRIS and instead produced an inter-ministerial report in April 2012: *Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers* (DCLG, 2012). It is of interest to note that this report considers community engagement an important enough subject to warrant an entire chapter. However the materials discussed in the report pertaining to the importance of Gypsy/Traveller equality and ‘voice’ are meagre in the extreme. The report states that the Gypsy and Traveller Knowledge Network (hosted by the Department for Communities and Local Government) will promote examples of positive engagement through the Knowledge Hub website (DCLG, 2012: 8.3). The network will act as a mechanism for disseminating and discussing good practice examples in community engagement. Despite this commitment, no clear cut examples of such good practice are provided within the report. The report could have been significantly strengthened by reference to initiatives which can be shown to create a measurable difference to a range of community cohesion and engagements measures. For example, an apt model would be that built up from practical experience by Greenfields and Ryder (2012) of GTANA<sup>2</sup> (Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments in the UK). This has led to full Roma Gypsy and Traveller (RGT) participation in development and research initiatives, which in turn built bridges between RGT populations and statutory service providers through positive engagement processes. Given, however, that the Coalition has abandoned the previous government’s guidance on GTANA it is perhaps of little surprise that these ‘best practice’ models are not discussed. The major omission in the process of drafting the inter-ministerial report was that the ministerial departments responsible under the chairmanship of cabinet minister Eric Pickles MP actually failed to directly consult RGT communities, which caused some consternation amongst community representatives (Ryder et al., 2012).

The limited and narrow consultations listed in the European countries above are examples of the exclusion and marginalisation of minority groups and their NGOs in the OMC process, which Kröger (2007) suggests impede deliberation and inclusivity. The Open Society Foundation’s (2012) report, cited above, can be placed on the lower rungs of Arnstein’s (1969) ‘ladder of participation’.<sup>3</sup> It would

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<sup>2</sup>The assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs when carrying out a periodical review of housing needs under section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 is a statutory requirement under section 225 of the Housing Act 2004. Local authorities may also be required, under section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003 (as amended), to produce a strategy that addresses the need identified, including that of Gypsies and Travellers. The assessment and the strategy will need to be informed by a full understanding of their accommodation needs.

<sup>3</sup>a vertical scale to measure levels of empowerment. At the bottom are forms of ‘non participation’ which include manipulation and involve ‘rubber stamping’. At this level there is also a danger of ‘outsider’ agendas promoting ‘therapy’ where communities are to be changed and reformed. At the middle of the ladder is ‘tokenistic participation’ which includes informing communities but also conducting forms of consultation which are fundamentally hierarchical and placatory, offering limited room for negotiation and empowerment. At the pinnacle of the scale are forms of ‘citizen power’ where through partnership, delegation and citizen’s control communities can be accorded real say and power in the management and direction of a programme or institution (Arnstein, 1969). Community development, though, may not always be as ‘black and white’ as depicted by Arnstein. Marginalised communities may in the first stages of development be dependent on outsider expertise and hence only able to work within the lower rungs of the ‘ladder of participation’. For a fuller discussion see Ryder (2013, forthcoming).

appear that not only is the Roma Framework falling into the lower rungs of Arnstein's typology but it is also failing to offer a clear route as to how communities can progress up the 'ladder'.

A further criticism of those NRIS which have been assessed by the Open Society Foundation (OSF, 2012) is that they lack clarity and goals. Currently the OSF is trying to broaden the base of its campaign with the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) for the desegregation of Czech schools, realising that the historic legal victory in the 'DH case' five years ago (Devroye, 2009) does not by itself create the political will for ending educational apartheid, and is discussing ways of broadening European-wide consciousness of the issue with the 'April 8th movement', a Roma civil society ginger group led by veteran activists Toma Nikolaev and Grattan Puxon, whose core campaign is for mass electronic voting within Roma NGOs, and increased Roma voting registration on the model successfully pioneered by Petar Antić in Serbia (Barlovac 2010).

It is in this context that McGarry, (2011) argues that Roma civil society has maintained a longstanding call for a bolder Roma Strategy policy framework with clear targets, timetables and budget allocations, and the prospect of interventions and sanctions where member states fail. Europe is not a state with the mechanisms for a welfare state but it does have the capacity for supranational frameworks and laws (Kleinman 2001). Sharpf (2002) argued that it should be through these that a Social Europe policy regime could be premised, constituting 'hard law' as opposed to soft forms of governance. There has been widespread recognition of the need for moving in this direction by proposing that EU funding be conditional on member states' progress and input into the Roma Framework (Rorke, 2011).

Concerns have been expressed, however, that a Roma Strategy runs the risk of 'Europeanising' the Roma issue, letting national governments abdicate their responsibilities and declare the Roma issue is now an EU one and no longer a national one (McGarry, 2011). Moreover, as Medrano (2012) argues, *any* call for greater European intervention in the sphere of social policy runs counter to the growth in euroscepticism.

## Personal and community deliberation

The previous section gave an overview of existing policy frameworks and recent strategies for engagement with Roma communities. This section examines proposals for inclusive forms of community development which might have transformative potential to bring about a major revision of current Roma civil society approaches. The suggestion is, following Habermas's (2010) conceptions of deliberation, that the theory of inclusive community development in Freire's (1972) critical pedagogy, shows how deliberative processes can surmount the obstacles that have muted Roma participation in the past. Deliberation is urged at a number of levels:

- (i) Personal and community deliberation
- (ii) Institutional and policy deliberation
- (iii) Societal and transnational deliberation

The EU, starting from level (iii) has asserted that Roma civil society is a key partner in the Roma Framework as a motor for empowerment and deliberation but the term “Roma civil society” is itself ambiguous.

The Roma advocacy network is struggling to form channels of communication to Roma communities and create large constituencies of support, just as other would-be leaders of transformative movements for oppressed groups have done in the past. This problem is compounded by the acute marginalisation of Roma communities. Indeed the limited resources that can be raised for community mobilisation and the co-opting ‘strings’ attached to grant aid by funders, limit the room for manoeuvre and the potential to counter the conformity or despair and apathy induced by hegemonic control. Indeed, Trehan (2001) claimed that NGOisation, with its managerialism and paternalistic donor driven agendas, is stifling Roma community mobilisation. Kovats (2003) adds the claim that Roma politicians have been corrupted, forgotten their constituencies and have been sucked as pawns and puppets into wider power games.

Lacking meaningful support from government or civil society, some Roma have been looking to forms of self-help to alleviate exclusion, often founded upon traditional notions of identity and bonding social capital (Ryder, 2011). However, relying on in-group social capital is not always a ‘good thing’ in its own right, with the ever present danger of self-esteem turning into vanity, in-group sanctions into oppression and self-referential social networks into corruption (Kay, 2006). When marginalisation limits the space for manoeuvre some Roma have resorted to what Poole (2010) terms the ‘weapons of the weak’ where anomie leads to anti-social activity in the informal economy, or the passive fatalism that Freire (1972) termed ‘magical consciousness’.

Some researchers (e.g. Okely, 1997) have interpreted life strategies based upon distancing and social capital based on in-group bonding, as evidence of an alternative culture which does not want to embrace mainstream institutions. However, the appetite and desire for Roma communities themselves to embrace new strategies cannot be discounted. Ryder and Greenfields’ (2010) participatory action research confirms from the experience of 50 years of the UK Gypsy and Traveller struggle for sites that they are prepared to innovate and experiment in life strategies, which utilise bridging forms of social capital. In other words, as Acton (1974) also argued, they form links and alliances with actors outside their immediate community, constantly engaging in ‘cultural borrowing’, which leads to adaptation and innovation. This innovation has been most successful where it runs with the grain of core cultural traditions and as Ryder (2012a and 2012b) points out, negotiated rather than imposed, and most successful of all when self-initiated.

Inclusive community development, suggest Gilchrist and Taylor (2011) attempts to encourage such positive change by creating solidarity and giving real choice to collective actors. Inclusive forms of community development also consciously attempt to draw on organic (in the Gramscian sense) understanding, to centre on community concerns in a more direct way and avoid paternalism by giving the community voice a central role in determining direction and strategy. Craig et al., (2011) and Henderson and Vercsey (2010) both insist that to do this, the acquiring of transformative new skills has to build on existing skills and technical expertise if they are to challenge the domestication

and disconnection which Bunyan (2010) says are imposed by managerialism and donor-dominated community organisation.

In this process, personal reflection and deliberation are important building blocks. Level (iii) deliberation is built out of that at levels (i) and (ii), not ordained from on high by the OMC. Chambers (2003) suggests it can be built if communities are given space for dialogue in relational meetings where at first they can articulate personal stories and narratives. Such meetings can create solidarity and opportunities for reflection by forging links to local, national and global policy regimes (Ledwith and Springett, 2010). Inclusive community development is a slow and gradual process. It can also be an expensive one, if, as its professional advocates suggest, it often requires skilled and resourced activists to help guide and support new community mobilisation (Campbell et al., 2005), not activists parachuting into communities to dictate the terms of mobilisation.

Such inclusive community development principles may have the potential to challenge and change cultural practices, in particular where they represent forms of oppressive behaviour as reflected in gender inequality or forms of reactive identity which nurture intolerance.<sup>4</sup> Resource limitations, the need perceived by governments for quick solutions, and donor-driven agendas have limited such forms of development amongst Roma civil society. At a service level, a growing number of Roma mediator positions are being created by governmental bodies and services providers; these can provide useful bridges between Roma communities and institutions but often focus on instrumental efficiency not empowerment. Cornwall (2008) argues that activists need greater manoeuvrability than mediators to attempt transformative empowerment which will enable people to make their own decisions and take collective action. Whether saved from within the community, or negotiated from external funders, the tailored and flexible resources do not seem to be there for empowering Roma community organisations on anything like the scale that could radically transform their marginalisation. In an ideal world if more community organisers could be funded and allowed to work in the manner outlined, that would play a valuable role in providing the community partners which the EU has rightfully recognised as necessary to help shape institutional change at the local, national and transnational level (European Commission, 2011). The case study below reveals the value of inclusive community development.

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<sup>4</sup>Such an interpretation of community development draws from Skinner's 'starting from strengths approach' (1997). In conceptualising inclusive community development the authors have also been influenced by the ABCD approach which aside from asset ownership emphasises the need to build on the skills of local residents, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions. These aspects of asset-based community development thus draw upon existing community 'assets' and strengths to build stronger communities. For more information visit The Asset-Based Community Development Institute <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/>

### **A case study in inclusive community development**

A notable example of inclusive community development occurred in Vidin in Bulgaria and centred on desegregation and the bussing of Roma pupils from the Roma ghetto to mainstream schools (Rostas, 2012). Roma leadership and coalition building proved to be of fundamental importance in reaching into Roma communities at the grassroots. Rumyan Russinov (then Director of the Roma Participation Programme) and Donka Panajotova (a former teacher and leader of the NGO *Drom*) were key Roma leaders in this initiative, able to enthuse and mobilise a range of partners who, including Romani parents, were initially sceptical about the idea of desegregation. The value of this grassroots mobilisation is emphasised by the fact that Russinov believes it gave the campaign credibility and momentum:

'When I approached them [the government] to negotiate the [framework programme for Roma integration] the government tried to ignore us, as expected. The government at that time did not have a culture of listening to the voice of civil society. When I approached them to negotiate...their reaction was, 'who are you young man?' You are not legitimate'. To a certain extent, this was true, because I was an NGO activist, no one voted for me to be a representative of Roma in these negotiations. The way to become legitimate was to mobilise the big support from Roma NGOs and activists throughout the country' (Rostas, 2012: 135)

This popular support made it impossible for the government to continue to ignore them. Dialogue with Roma parents was also integral to overcoming fears and hesitations, a team of people from NGOs were engaged in ongoing dialogue and communication with parents (Rostas, 2012: 140). Roma parental involvement played an important role in desegregation by establishing good connections with the schools to which their children were bussed. To facilitate this training and lectures for parents were organised.

Sadly the Vidin model has not been widely replicated, reflecting not only the isolation and lack of skills within marginalised Roma communities but also the low priority afforded to such mobilisation by a range of donors. The potential to organise and motivate within these communities is evidenced by the development of Evangelical Christianity which has brought forward a new younger Roma generation as Pastors, which has in some cases displaced an older generation of leaders (Gay Y Blasco, 1999:168-171; Acton 1979). As Russinov has noted in some cases the potency of such religious movements within Roma communities is that they alone have been present at the local level and have in some cases been the only ones offering actual support and direction (Rostas, 2012). This is a salutary lesson many externally sponsored NGOs in Roma civil society have yet to learn, although a number of community activists from Loulou Demeter in the 1970s (Acton 1979:294) to Lars Demetri and Florin Cioba today, are pastors who draw political strength from the Pentecostal movement.

In Working and Discussion Papers (Ryder, 2011; 2012a and 2012b) the Third Sector Research Centre has also set out detailed profiles of good practice amongst Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (RGT) community groups in the UK in initiating inclusive forms of community development (ICD). These often involve work with service providers to deliver culturally informed and targeted services, work and

employment experience, which in turn enable RGT communities to influence decision making from the level of Traveller sites to governmental lobbying. Such good practice could be replicated and extended through the Roma Framework if the UK Coalition Government were to engage more directly and enthusiastically in this policy framework. Instead there is a danger that austerity, cutbacks and the threat of greater community division will weaken Traveller site delivery mechanisms, and may fundamentally weaken and distract the RGT third sector (Ryder et al., 2012). Across Europe the politics of austerity may well hold similar dangers for the growth of inclusive forms of community development amongst Roma communities.

## Institutional and policy deliberation

Over the past two centuries in Europe, Roma communities' interaction with institutional power has mostly been an uneasy one shaped by assimilatory policies which viewed Roma either as a dysfunctional group to be redeemed by 'civilising projects' (Powell, 2010) or a deviant and dysfunctional group to be punished and demonised (Liégeois, 2007). The residual legacy of such ideology continues to constrain institutional and policy engagement with Roma communities at a national and European level even within the Roma Framework.

This European Social policy tradition, talked of 'citizenship' (so making non-citizens invisible), and of 'race relations' (assuming racial distinctions are natural and inevitable) and 'community development' (assuming 'communities' are as naturally separate as 'nations'). A radical alternative to such post-racist communalism, however, is the 'Human Rights' approach of the Soros-funded Open Society Institute and its protégé, the European Roma Rights Centre in 1996, defending individuals' rights on the basis of their common humanity, not as a privilege of membership of a state or ethnic group. (Acton 2010).

While it would perhaps be exaggerating to say that the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) motto was "Don't conciliate; litigate!", its muscular and confrontational style helped steer a new generation of Roma activists towards organising, rather than agonising, even though its generous role as a funder helped create a mindset of dependency on foreign sponsorship in many of the new NGOs. The ERRC however, helped establish a climate in which non-Roma interventions had to be legitimated by Roma involvement and participation.

The European Roma Rights Centre and Open Society Foundation have combined with other transnational organisations in which Roma and non Roma work together to create the European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) and have sought to develop an EU lobbying strategy on behalf of Roma (McGarry, 2010). However, the transnational advocacy network does not appear to have deeply-rooted constituencies.

European Commission guidelines on the Roma Framework now advocate partnership approaches which should include Roma NGOs and communities in terms of micro-policy that will create opportunities for co-design and delivery in local, regional and national policy processes (European Commission, 2011). Roma civil society, if able to help develop real grassroots mobilisations, could be a key bridge and catalyst in projects that lead to joint ventures and co-production with local government and social enterprise ventures. Through more direct involvement in localised terrain that affects the lives of Roma, civil society organisations could acquire more grounded insights into the

communities they seek to represent. However, this needs to be combined with action. Freire (1972) notes the dangers of a 'verbalism' which mobilises community consciousness without matching that with action. For Freire 'verbalism' produces the risk of disillusionment and lethargy returning to mobilised groups. This is a further reason for adopting a bolder policy framework than that which is anticipated in the Roma Framework, in order to drive through change and action reducing the frustration of disappointment. Scepticism about radical and deliberative democracy may be undermined by Heller's (2011) examination of participatory budgets in Brazil, where inclusive forums enable those traditionally excluded from the policy process to have a say in determining budgetary objectives, demonstrating that highly marginalised people can participate in open democratic processes and such participation can enthuse and spur wider civic mobilisation.

Further opportunities for Roma communities to participate could be provided through civic engagement tools like 'search conferences' (King and Cruickshank, 2012). Such deliberative forums allow the voice of excluded people to be heard and provide new insights and visions not always evident or apparent to the educated professional campaigner focusing on macro policy development. Such tools have been used in previous EU Frameworks. For example, as a consequence of the EU Framework on Social Exclusion the UK Government in alliance with anti-poverty NGOs established 'Get Heard' in 2004 (Pemberton, 2008). This involved deliberative consultation events where those normally marginalised from policy processes could articulate their perceptions on exclusion and link these to wider policy frameworks. The exercise was found to have delivered highly useful data providing new and valuable insights for policy makers and assisted in the formation of a national action plan. These approaches have been replicated in the UK where the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition organised seven search conferences to mobilise support for their parliamentary advocacy work (Ryder, 2012b).

A useful example in an EU context of the use of new engagement tools could be presented by UK Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups, who, outraged at their exclusion from the work of the UK inter-ministerial committee on Gypsies and Travellers and the decision not to submit a NRIS to the Roma Framework, are forming policy hubs on accommodation, education, health and employment, the key action areas of the Roma Framework. Through these deliberative hubs, views will be collected from activists and communities producing a 'snapshot' of community aspirations that can be compared and contrasted to the outcomes of the inter-ministerial committee and will be relayed to the European Commission (Ryder, 2012b). Such community driven initiatives could be replicated across Europe, and, as Balme and Chabenet (2002) point out, if local NGOs or networks directly contact European institutions without passing through national power elites. This will accelerate the Europeanisation of the issues.

Roma communities can also articulate their aspirations to the EU on aspects of the Roma Framework through participatory research. As Ledwith and Springett, argue: 'Emancipatory action research must not be seen as an optional extra, but an integral component of any approach to participatory practice offering an evolving dynamic between theory, policy and practice in an engagement with the ever changing political context of our lives' (2010: 199).

Examples of such participatory research are provided by the Big-Lottery-funded 'Traveller Economic Inclusion Project' on Gypsy Roma Traveller (RGT) economic inclusion (Ryder and Greenfields, 2010). An important focus of this was RGT involvement in the research design and

collection and interpretation of data. This led to a lobbying agenda which resulted in the Department for Work and Pensions agreeing to the ethnic monitoring of RGT communities alongside other minorities in the work of the Department. This research had a strong intercultural dimension and explored change and adaptation across gender and age, and sought to establish greater understanding by and dialogue with policy makers as well as facilitate internal community debates about traditional and innovative economic practices.

Kennett's (2004) authoritative handbook on comparative social policy research emphasises that comparative analysis with transformative potential will be reflexive, and based on participatory data collection. The three key agents in comparative analyses of the Roma Framework will be academic researchers, 'Roma civil society' and the European Commission, none of whom have a good track record in effectively engaging and including Roma communities at the grassroots. The criticisms charged against the existing networks which constitute the NGOcracy of Roma Civil Society have been outlined already. Nicolae, (2012) accuses the European Commission of forming part of a power elite rather than engaging with the masses. He asserts the failure to appoint any Roma or Roma experts to a superior management position with decision-making power on Roma issues is indicative of its lack of expertise. Academics have also been criticised by community members and fellow researchers (Marti et al., 2010) for failing to engage properly with the realities of Roma communities, instead using abstracted conceptualisations of them as building blocks for theories and notions that hold little meaning or relevance to the communities on which they are based. In some cases such practices are maintained through notions of scientific inquiry derived from classical social anthropology in the colonial era. Conservative observers such as Barany (2002) contend that too great a level of familiarity with the research subjects can lead to 'going native' and producing biased and unsound research undisciplined by proper peer review. Against such classical positivist approaches, advocates of participatory forms of research (Greenfields and Ryder, 2012) assert that transparent forms of research and channels of communication with the researched (as opposed to scientific hierarchies of knowledge) produce research which stands up more broadly, bridges discourses and reduces the unchallenged prevalence of stereotypes. Marti et al. (2010) argue that a conscious and reflexive analysis, of how identifying 'othering' can help to deconstruct exclusionary ideologies and policies, may lessen the mistrust of Roma communities uneasy about participating in research.

If there is a political will, the European Commission and Roma civil society power elites could use forms of deliberative engagement to create new channels of 'bottom-up' communication. The academic community has an important role to play in capturing such dialogue and aspirations in research activities which facilitate and inform deliberation and decision making in the Roma Framework. As in the case of the 'Traveller Economic Inclusion Project' researchers, from within the academic community and civil society, can include Roma communities through participatory processes in the design, data collection and analysis of a research project. This process not only facilitates access but leads to research that is enriched with data grounded in real community experiences (Ryder, 2012a), and is applied, practical and embraces subjectivity (Hollander, 2011).

Moreover, such research can have transformative potential if it reflects genuine aspirations, has community 'buy in' and can therefore mobilise. But although the academics like to see themselves as independent agents, the aspirations which they seek to reflect are differently perceived by the other

two agents, the European Commission and Roma Civil Society, which is reflected in different academic visions. Since the academics are also in personal competition for career promotion, and for research funding, the academic debates have at times become increasingly florid, rhetorical and personalised, and any academic reports commissioned by European authorities attract robust criticism from other academics, especially if none of the researchers are of RGT heritage. The European Academic Network on Romani Studies (EANRS) was established in June 2011 by the European Commission and Council of Europe in the hope of a more consensual approach, bringing together the most respected scholars, both non Roma and RGT. According to its webpage (<http://romanistudies.eu/the-committee/>), the EANRS aims to facilitate intercultural dialogue and support efforts towards the social inclusion of Romani citizens in Europe. The academics, according to some critics, 'shot themselves in the foot' by using a 'first-past-the-post' system and or not allowing doctoral students a say in the election (it is here that most academics of RGT heritage are presently located) and failing to elect any scholars themselves of RGT heritage to their Scientific Committee. After a debate over whether this was a structural problem, or whether it meant Roma just were not ready yet, Thomas Acton resigned in protest. The Scientific Committee has changed its policy since to co-opt a scholar of RGT heritage who was among the runners-up, and elect two junior (pre-PhD) researchers, who happen to be of RGT heritage. It remains to be seen how they might influence the direction of the EANRS and how far the EANRS can facilitate deliberative engagement and bottom-up communication.

## Conclusion

We agree with Ram (2010) that Roma civil society has grown in its effectiveness in the past decade as a transnational lobbying tool. It has played an important part in pushing the issue up the political agenda, establishing the expectation that a vibrant Roma Civil society will have an important role to play in changing perceptions by feeding into deliberative processes at the local, national and transnational level.

More than this, however, it could play an important role in resisting the general threat to the European ideals of solidarity, identified by Habermas (2011), from technocratic and authoritarian responses to the economic crisis. Habermas suggests that a greater democratic willingness of European citizens to support each other would lead to an increasing 'uniformity of living standards' in Europe based on distributive justice. He warns that '...a political integration backed by social welfare is necessary if the national diversity and the incomparable cultural wealth of ... 'old Europe' is to enjoy any protection against levelling in the midst of a rapidly progressing globalisation' (Habermas, 2011).

This paper argues that the key to building this civic solidarity is a robust concept of a Social Europe, within which the EU sets out bold and ambitious policies. Assertive action at the European and local level can only be nurtured and sustained if supported by engagement and debate. In this battle of ideas social movements and empowerment networks based on broad coalitions of interests (Bailey, 2008), which are cosmopolitan and diverse (Kriegman, 2006), have a pivotal role as a counterpoint to the political 'othering' of Roma and narrow nation-building through the politics of xenophobia and scapegoating.

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## About the Centre

The third sector provides support and services to millions of people. Whether providing front-line services, making policy or campaigning for change, good quality research is vital for organisations to achieve the best possible impact. The Third Sector Research Centre exists to develop the evidence base on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Working closely with practitioners, policy-makers and other academics, TSRC is undertaking and reviewing research, and making this research widely available. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, ensuring its research reflects the realities of those working within it, and helping to build the sector's capacity to use and conduct research.

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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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