

The Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate

The National Wales Symposium, Pierhead Building, Cardiff
Bay, Wales 20th October 2014



Text Adrian R. Marsh Photographs A. D. Vaughan



ROMANI
CULTURAL & ARTS COMPANY

Acknowledgements



I would like to thank the participants of the panels, in particular those members who joined at late notice, Daniel Baker and Sarah Cemlyn. Their experiences, knowledge and insights added a great deal of vitality and energy to the discussions, complimenting the other experts who were panelists, admirably. Thanks are also due to the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, Lesley Griffiths AM, and the Chairperson of the *Cross Party Group Gypsies and Travellers*, Julie Morgan AM for Cardiff North, for their participation from the Welsh government and the National Assembly for Wales.

Thanks are also due to the panelists who did such an excellent job of debating the issues and answering the concerns and questions from the audience, in what was a new and perhaps challenging format, that was quite different to the usual lecture or seminar for many of them; Thomas Acton, Colin Clark, Ethel Brooks, Tanija Vasic, Isaac Blake, and Petr Torak. To the organisers of the event at RCAC, especially Aleksandr G. Marinov, Jamie James, Teleri Gray, Christine Virginia Lee and Ashleigh Price, who made the day both possible and a pleasure, ensuring the event ran smoothly and efficiently throughout.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the technical team from Genero Productions Ltd, who recorded the material that much of this report draws from, to Aleksandr for transcribing it and to the audience, particularly those that took the opportunity to raise issues from the community and from their experience, who asked questions of the panel and those who brought the wisdom and benefit of their knowledge to the wider public.

To the donors, BBC 'Children In Need Appeal', the Arts Council of Wales, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Open Society Initiative for Europe, and the OSF Early Childhood Programme, thanks are due for their support of this event and the continuing advocacy that has resulted from it. Thanks are due to the Welsh National Assembly, who provided the historically majestic Pierhead Building on the very shore of Cardiff Bay, to host the event. Finally, thanks go to the Romani musicians from Rumania, *Rroma Yag* who played at points during the day.

Adrian R. Marsh, international Romani Studies Network

Foreword

A dialogue between Gypsy, Roma, Travellers and decision-makers

The **Romani Cultural & Arts Company** (RCAC) has become recognised internationally as a leading non-governmental organisation in the field of Roma rights, which has, over a number of years, successfully demonstrated its serious and informed commitment to promoting the human rights of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in Wales. In the last four years RCAC has organised an annual national event to further these aims, ensuring that all members of these marginalised communities are included in mainstream society with dignity and respect. The advocacy strategy of the RCAC is unrepentant in its demands for the human rights of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to be respected by government, the media and majority populations. These noble efforts have often been against the odds, with classic examples of wilful discrimination being exercised on the part of official bodies including public services, who should know better.

The recent event on the 20th October 2014, of the Welsh National Symposium entitled “The Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate”, is illustrative of their effective advocacy role and their solid work to secure empowerment for all members of the communities. Their example and promotion of self-help advocacy is rightly seen as a vital tool in the fight against prejudice, discrimination and race hatred. The communities are everyday reminded of these social evils, particularly when they are manifest in restricted access to public services and the common rights of all European citizens. The Symposium was especially important in this context given its commendable ambition to inform and engage decision makers at all levels. The added value of the event was the skilful gathering of two panels of international experts who were mainly people of a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller heritage and who provided gravitas to the occasion and the exchange of accurate information about the history, culture and languages of these communities. The **Romani Cultural & Arts Company** should be congratulated on the event and it is hoped that their work will continue to prosper and not least with the support of the Welsh and UK governments.

Arthur Ivatts, OBE

Romani Cultural and Arts Co.



The Romani Cultural & Arts Company was founded in 2009, as part of the activities in Wales for *Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month* (GRT HM). This is an annual event, celebrating the history, languages and cultures of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities along and across the length and breadth of the United Kingdom and was first launched in London June 2000, in schools across the capital. Since then, the event has grown year-on-year, with each year in Wales seeing an increasing number of activities in libraries, schools, public buildings and parks. The decision to use the opportunity to engage in debate with policy-makers, decision-takers, educators, health professionals, local authority service and delivery managers, police

officers, prison officers, social services professionals, members of the judiciary, local councillors, National Assembly Members and government, came in 2010, with the introduction of the GRT HM Symposium, led by Dr Adrian Marsh and bringing world-class academics and experts, such as Professor Thomas Acton, OBE and Arthur Ivatts, OBE to Wales and into the dialogue. The latest in a series of highly successful these events was "The Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate".

The RCAC has been generously supported in its work by the **BBC's Children In Need Appeal Fund**, the **Heritage Lottery Fund** and the **Open Society Initiative for Europe** and **Open Society Foundations' Early Childhood Programme**. The RCAC is managed and led by members of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities and is the leading Romani non-governmental organisation in the country, with an annual budget of over £72,000 and a total reach of 1,500 adults and children, through various projects such as *1-2-1 Mentoring*, arts and performance workshops on Gypsy and Traveller sites, training *Community Champions*, research identifying young Gypsy and Traveller people who are not in education, employment or training (*NEET*), the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month Annual Poster competition and advocacy across a wide range of issues. The RCAC is underpinned by the notion of using arts, performance and expression (in all its multifarious forms) as a means of addressing and promoting human rights for GRT people in Wales.

'Performing' Romani identity is a political and personal act of affirmation, assertion and confirmation for members of the communities RCAC serves. Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities demonstrate their resilience, their longevity and sustainability, even in the

face of extraordinary challenges through their existence and the everyday lives of their members, their energy in the continuing vibrancy of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures, languages and traditions. The “Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate” in Cardiff was a way of introducing some of the complexity, the diversity and vibrancy of these communities to a wider public and inform the discussion, so topical at the moment, around the issues of Roma migration, Gypsy occupation, Traveller marriage and a host of other subjects that are appearing with ever-more frequency in the popular press and media. The consistent and corrosive identification with a range of entirely negative stereotypes and prejudices associated with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities has misinformed the views of members of the public and service providers alike. Our aim, for this day, was to continue the work of challenging these stereotypes and this misinformation to build trust and dialogue (and eventual understanding) between non-Romani and Romani people, Travellers and the majority.



Our vision is to ensure that the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities continues to strengthen and improve their capacities, led by our Community Champions, to become collectively able to advocate and influence the local, national and international policy and strategy agendas in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in Wales. The GRT Symposium continued to support our advocacy strategy for the organisation and we anticipated that it would influence the Welsh government at the national and regional levels, in the process of improving the development and implementation of Welsh GRT policies and practices. To this end, the day was successful, as the questions raised by the audience and the information that was shared by the panel participants, ‘spoke’ to each other, delivering new and sometimes surprising, details that helped to bring these aims a little closer.

Isaac Blake, Director RCAC

Introduction



I am an American Romani woman, who has a family history in the USA that dates from the 1870's; but originally my family had come to the USA in the 19th century from England and probably Wales and Scotland; there was a mix of people incoming to the family in these times. I had intended to write an introduction on very different lines, but the work of Thomas Acton and others who deal in personal narratives, as many of my colleagues do, has inspired me to begin this introduction to the report from the "Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate" in similar fashion and then to move into some of the policy implications facing individual Romani and Traveller people, with their families and communities and those

who are responsible for delivering them, in the non-Romani community.

One of the key issues in this area is, of course, accommodation and one of the issues with this is not just a question of housing and land tenure, but also the ways in which Romani communities, whether Gypsy, Roma or Traveller, really end up being part of wider, mainstream society, but also maintaining a kind of culture and community engagement of their own. And so, I want to begin with a personal story, or a family story.

When I was very young, there was a site in Massachusetts, in New England and it was a site my family had bought sometime in the 1890's and had the title deeds to. It was a private site and it was known, colloquially, all around New England as "Gypsy Hill". By the 1970's, almost a century later, it was the sort of a place where you had people who had brought their trailers, but others who had built tiny, more permanent dwellings and it had become a vibrant community for everybody who would move in and out for generations on end. It meant that for our people, when they had migrated from Europe to the USA, this would be one of the places they would 'stop in' first; but also it meant that for my family, who had horses and would, occasionally, move around with the horses, this was the place where everybody would come together – extended family, cousins, aunts and uncles. This is a very strong memory that I have from my childhood.

One of the things that happened toward the end of 1970's and into the early 1980's was that the State of Massachusetts and the local authorities, decided that this site was not a proper residential site and neither was it a proper business site. So, even though the site and land had been privately owned by my family for several generations, since the end of

19th century in fact, the state authorities were able to enact a compulsory purchase order, using a law called 'eminent domain', allowing them to take over the site and bulldoze the dwellings and the temporary stopping places there and construct some kind of official buildings together with social housing for the elderly in the community.

And what that meant, even though the local authorities did provide services to the older people in our community and house them in that new complex, for the remainder of the community, they really had no place to go at that point. So, we ended up being scattered all over New England which is a pretty large region but also, the horses ended up being sold, the various businesses people were engaged in and connected with each other through – they ended up doing individually rather than collectively, which is the norm amongst our communities. Over the course of my childhood and until today one of my deepest sadnesses really has to do with the fact this meant that our community ended up disintegrating in a lot of ways, as a result of this action and the subsequent development. This episode also provides the motivation for some of my politics around accommodation, the reason, at least in part, why I am truly engaged with the event in Cardiff and many other events that take place across Europe and the USA.

And in some ways, that is where I wanted to begin, to look at the ways in which the current shift from state or local authority provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers, into the idea of privately owned sites, which still depend upon both the agreement of local councils and with local and regional planning regulations, but also upon the goodwill of nearby neighbours and residents, really puts Gypsy and Traveller communities in a very precarious position. As part of European Commission's National Roma Integration Strategy in Wales and the United Kingdom more generally, this topic is something that I suggest has to come more to the fore and really needs to be urgently addressed. The other side of this question, I think, the other key part of the debate and discussion around accommodation is of course, connected with migrant east and central European Roma coming across Europe and into the UK (just as they do to the USA and Canada).

One of the things we were able to do in the USA, when the family had that site – which to this day is called Gypsy Hill in the census records, though no one has any memory of why it is called that – was to find a space, a sort of private, community engagement with welcoming new Romani migrants from various communities and in part, address the question of accommodation, a place to stay, a place of greater safety. I think accommodation really has to do with the second part of that – both the provision of sites that provide adequate housing for those who are mobile with the adequate provision and preservation of culturally appropriate resources for Gypsies and Travellers, but also

the provision of housing and social welfare for newly arrived Roma migrants so that they can become a part of the community and contribute to the vibrant, dynamic life of a community, not be further excluded. And the final thing I will note about this topic, because I am a Professor of Women's and Gender Studies is as we know, of course, a lot of the responsibility, in terms of housing and accommodation, falls upon Romani women. Women are the ones who not only have to bear the burden of taking care of their families, making sure their children access schooling, making sure that everything is there, but also they end up bearing a lot of the burden of racism, discrimination and exclusion that the larger Romani and Traveller communities are facing.

The Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate was an event that was able to look at these issues and many others, from the history of our communities to the adequate provision of safe and secure places to live, whether for mobile Gypsies and Travellers or for newly-arrived Roma, fleeing persecution and marginalisation in their countries of origin. In that



it was, in part I think, able to address some of these issues and will make a difference as a result, it was a success. It remains one step on the long road to ensuring the equality of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in Wales and elsewhere...

Dr Ethel Brooks, Rutgers University in New Jersey, United States of America

Executive Summary

The Cardiff event was intended to achieve a number of aims, including the *primary goal* of ensuring recognition, by decision-takers and policy-makers, of the need to incorporate experiences of the recently arrived east, south-east and central European Roma communities, into the overall national strategic plan for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales. The national strategic plan, called '*Travelling to a Better Future*'- *A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan*, (September 2011; amended November 2013), was first produced after consultation with the voluntary sector, Gypsy and Traveller representatives, national agencies and services, the police and the judiciary, education services and health providers. As with the Westminster government's own response to the call in 2011, to the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* (see EPSCO, 2012), to produce a National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS), the Welsh policy framework document "content ...focused overwhelmingly on inequalities and other issues impacting on indigenous UK Gypsies and Travellers; ...[and] the attention placed upon migrant Roma arriving, typically, from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) was minimal..." (Brown, Scullion & Martin, 2013).

In the content of this report:

- The term "Roma" used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The definition is included in a number of Council documents, e.g. *Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers (MG-S-ROM)*, *New terms of reference adopted by the Ministers' Deputies at their 1032nd meeting in Strasbourg on 9 July 2008*. The specific 'EU and Roma' section on the European Commission's website echoes this, stating "As it is most commonly used in EU policy documents and discussions, the term "Roma" here refers to a variety of groups of people who describe themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, Manouches, Ashkali, Sinti and other titles..." (*Council of Europe Descriptive Glossary of terms relating to Roma issues version dated 18 May 2012*); however, in this report (as is more general in the UK), the term Roma is used in a more limited sense, as pertaining to only those communities that have migrated to the UK, from central, eastern and south-eastern Europe; during the event, the term 'Roma' was used in both senses;

- The use of the terms, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller is in no way intended to ignore the diversity within the many different Romani and Traveller groups and other, related communities, nor is it intended to promote stereotypes; (EU and Roma)
- In the context of the event, the points below may be found useful as a summary:
- There were 146 participants (including panel members), at the event throughout the day;
- The voluntary and government sector in Wales was particularly well-represented, with individuals from over one hundred organisations coming along;
- Members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities were also well-represented (18.5% of the participants attending), though only 5% of those attending overall were from the Roma communities;



- The newly appointed government Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, Lesley Griffiths AM, addressed the audience and outlined a number of key initiatives and developments by the Welsh government, related to accommodation (caravan sites and temporary encampments), welfare assessments for children and the elderly in the Gypsy and Traveller communities, progress on the delivery plan of the *'Travelling to a Better Future'- A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan*, (2011/2013), and the continuing commitment of the Welsh government to improving services, promoting social inclusion and community cohesion;
- The National Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Symposium featured two panels of international Romani, Gypsy and Traveller academics (Dr Adrian Marsh, Professor Ethel Brooks, Professor Colin Clark, Tanja Vasic); internationally recognised experts from the field of Romani Studies - Professor Thomas

Acton OBE and Professor Sarah Cemlyn, from academia; Dr Daniel Baker and Isaac Blake, from the arts and media; Petr Torak, from the police and Roma NGO sector; Julie Morgan AM, from the National Assembly for Wales and the *Cross Party Group Gypsies and Travellers*, to address increasing concerns relating to intolerance towards minority ethnic communities across Europe, anti-Gypsy discrimination in Wales and the UK, and poor access to education, employment, housing and health services for GRT communities;

- The panels of experts (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) also addressed directly issues of representation, social inclusion, policy, the Roma inclusion strategy in Wales and community cohesion in an “any questions” style interaction with the audience, moderated by a Romani chairperson;
- The debate featured the views of Romani and Traveller “community champions” (Jamie James, the Heritage Officer for RCAC, Teleri Gray, Ashleigh Price and Wayne Price) who represented the ‘voices’ of the communities in Wales, supported by the Romani experts on the panel, in order to shape the future agenda of the national GRT integration strategy in Wales;
- Through effective networking and preparation, RCAC was able to ensure GRT representation from across the UK communities (including some recently arrived Roma) and the EU, to secure the broadest possible debate and encourage a genuine sharing of ‘best practice’ and experiences of “lessons learned” from the international context, in particular, a proportionately significant representation from women members of the GRT communities, as GRT women are frequently under-represented at such events and in taking lead roles in policy development;
- The GRT Symposium achieved its aim to inform national Welsh, and thereby UK and European policy, relating to Gypsies, Roma & Travellers, thereby improving strategy, services and provision and promoting a better, more inclusive and socially just and equitable society in Wales;
- The GRT Symposium also generated a more serious debate about the impact of migration, mobility and increasing diversity amongst the GRT communities and the wider Welsh population, that moved beyond the “bigger, fatter, Gypsy-er” stereotypes and prejudices of many in the majority population towards the GRT minorities;

- RCAC also successfully promoted, through the voices of its Community Champions, a more nuanced discussion around the national Wales Roma integration strategy, as submitted to the European Commission, with regard to education, employment, criminal justice, healthcare, accommodation and housing policy in Wales;
- The Symposium offered those attending an opportunity for formulating clear “road maps” for strengthening and improving the Welsh national Roma Integration Strategy (*'Travelling to a Better Future'- A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan*), through listening to the voices of *all* the communities who will be impacted upon by the final implementation process. If members of the communities were absent from the debate, or recognition of the necessary services was missing, policies, strategies, resources and funding will not be available in the future, to address needs that have been ignored or misidentified;
- The debate provided attendees with the opportunity to ‘hear’ to the voices of the differing GRT communities, whilst having the opportunity to raise concerns and receive clear, accurate and reliable information from panel participants and experts, that addressed questions of “who are the Gypsies?”, “why are they here?”, “what are the differences between Gypsies, Roma, Travellers?”, “what is Roma identity?”, and others, in the context of Wales and the UK;
- The contributions to these questions and deliberations, from the expert panel members, provided a body of information that represented the distilled knowledge of some of the world’s experts in the field and offered a powerful ‘counterfactual’ to the unreliable and incorrect fabrications, misunderstandings and illogicalities of the dominant narrative being purveyed by media and populist commentators, which has resulted in a particularly pernicious negative image of Gypsies, Roma, Travellers in the UK and elsewhere in Europe;

The *key recommendations* are given at the conclusion of this report; however, they can be summarised here as:

- the Welsh government, as a matter of urgency, should revise the current policy and strategy framework (most crucially, *'Travelling to a Better Future'- A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan*), to meet the requirements of the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up*

to 2020 and the transposed, *Council Directive 2000/43/EC* or 'Race Equality Directive' ([EU RED](#)), with particular attention to the inclusion of Roma from eastern, central and south-eastern Europe who have migrated in increasing numbers over the previous decade and a half, to Wales;

- improving knowledge and understanding, about Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, particularly in terms of challenging stereotypes and negative images, must be undertaken by *all*, not just GRT voluntary sector organisations and those academics from the communities;
- knowledge about GRT communities needs to be produced by academics from the communities, to be used in partnership with that produced by non-Romani and Traveller academics (and, where necessary, as a corrective to that knowledge produced by non-Romani and Traveller academics), to support improving knowledge and understanding about GRT communities;
- information relating to GRT communities, used to improve knowledge and understanding needs to be produced in accessible, lively and informative ways and media, without distorting or inadvertently promoting stereotypes and negative images, in addition to the scientific knowledge produced by academics;
- government has a role in both supporting this knowledge production, especially in terms of strengthening Gypsy, Roma, Traveller self-identity amongst adults and children – particularly in the early years curriculum – to be used across *all* education and care settings, to promote the values of tolerance, inclusion and social justice in Welsh society;
- an academic centre of excellence, in terms of knowledge production, should be established with Welsh government support, in the higher education sector, at one of the universities in the country, led by a respected and acknowledged academic from the GRT communities, to advise and revise government policy and strategy, devise materials to promote understanding, tolerance and social justice;
- education, health and youth are *primary* targets for improvement in terms of access and increasing attainment, opportunity and equality in Wales for GRT communities and individuals;
- the *Cross Party Gypsy and Traveller Group*, at the National Assembly for Wales, must, as a matter of urgency, bring into the forum and the

consultation process, representatives from the Roma community or communities, as part of the political process;

- the current system of managing Gypsy and Traveller sites and the accommodation needs assessment process (currently undergoing consultation on changes necessary), needs to be improved in the commitment to addressing standards and overall consistency on these sites.
- the accommodation needs of Roma should be included in these accommodation needs assessments as part of the whole process and to ensure that the difficulties many families face around cramped, insalubrious and insecure accommodation, are effectively addressed.

The “Great Gypsy, Traveller, Roma Debate” was a success, judging from the evaluations at the close of the event and presented what was, for many of the attendees, new and useful information in an innovative and interesting manner. The possibility of raising questions, in an area of profound uncertainty for many of the professionals and practitioners present, was appreciated and understood to be a departure from the previous, more lecture and presentation based events organised by the RCAC, in prior years.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the community members who attended were appreciative of the opportunity to both ‘showcase’ the depth and breadth of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller history and culture and debate with non-Romani and Traveller people (in an atmosphere of respect and trust), questions that have an everyday impact upon their lives. Undoubtedly, the presence of qualified, well-respected academics and experts from the GRT communities, as panel participants *as a majority* (as opposed to the usual scenario of one Romani or Traveller person as expert in a group of non-Romani and Traveller experts and academics), had a major influence upon the confidence and assurance with which GRT members and Community Champions were able to assert their identities, raise their voices and challenge the broader misconceptions and misinformation that colours and diminishes their lives in so many arenas.

Population

There are currently some 57,680 Gypsies and Irish Travellers registered as part of the England and Wales census in 2011 (as a result of a new category being included in the census registration form); slightly less than 20% of the 300,000 the UK government estimates to be the actual number of Gypsies and Travellers living in England and Wales at present. Of those who chose to declare their ethnicity under this heading, 60% of Gypsies and Irish Travellers over the age of 16 years have no formal, educational qualifications (as compared to 23% of the wider population).

In health terms, Gypsies and Irish Travellers have the worst health, with 30% reporting poor health (compared to 20% of the majority population). 45% of Gypsy and Irish Traveller families have dependent children (the average for England and Wales was 29%), with 45% of Gypsy and Irish Traveller households being lone parent families (as compared to 25% in the population of England and Wales). In terms of age, 39% of the Gypsy and Irish Traveller population were under 20 years old in 2011 – the figure in the majority population was 24%. Of greater concern, only 16% of Gypsies and Irish Travellers were registered as retired, compared to 58%, indicating the significant difference in life expectancy and confirming the lower level of good health.

The figures for accommodation show that 24% of Irish Traveller and Gypsies live in caravans or temporary structures (as compared to 0.3% of non-Gypsies and Travellers), whilst 61% live in houses or bungalows (84% of the majority population).

In terms of work, Gypsies and Irish Travellers were concentrated in the elementary occupations such as construction, labouring, sales, bar work, service staff and cleaning (22%, as compared to 11%). Far fewer Gypsies and Irish Travellers were employed in 2011, than their counterparts in the majority population; 47% as compared to 63%. Unemployment was much higher in the Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities, at 20% (compared to 7%), whilst many more were caring for family (27%), were long-term sick or disabled (26%) than amongst the majority population (11% in both cases; ONS 2013).

There are at present, no reliable figures for the numbers of people who would identify as Roma, in the UK and no category of 'Roma' currently exists on the census for England and Wales. Estimates for population range between 300,000 (a similar number to the Gypsy and Traveller population total; see EQUALITY 2013; Brown, Scullion & Martin, 2013), to 1,000,000 in the UK at present (Craig, 2011), though there is little evidence to support any figure.

Themes

The National Symposium was intended to bring together members of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities with politicians, policy-makers and public servants, to address the issues that have become so prevalent in the past few years. Why are Roma from east, central and southeastern Europe coming to Wales and the UK more generally? Who are these new groups and how are they related to the Gypsies and Travellers in Wales? How can the schools, hospitals, housing and social services best work with these newer communities? How can police and judicial services better understand the needs and demands of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities, for improved relationships and dialogue? How can the process of inter-communal dialogue be promoted and improved, to ensure better communication between the majority populations and the Romani and Traveller communities?

The event in Cardiff was focussed upon four, over-arching themes: migration and mobility; anti-Gypsyism; access to services; community and social cohesion. Within these themes, the topics of Romani and Traveller histories; identities; representation and political organisation; visual arts and performance; access to and attainment in education (especially early years education and care); health care and services to the vulnerable, children and the elderly in Romani and Traveller communities; criminal and justice systems; story telling, languages and traditional cultures in GRT communities; self regulation in GRT communities; hate crimes, racism and xenophobia towards Gypsies, Roma, Travellers (and other marginal groups) in Welsh society; improving GRT youth participation in local and national politics; addressing gender roles and inequalities in GRT communities; implementing national government policy at local levels in Wales; promoting equality, equity and social justice in majority societies, for GRT people; effective monitoring and evaluation of successful (or otherwise) projects and programmes, aimed at improving social and economic conditions for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families in Wales and the UK; encouraging diversity and plurality in majority Welsh and British society; together with many others that arose during the two panels, in the morning and afternoon.

One of the most important themes that was referred to throughout the day, was that of identity and terminology; what are the correct names to use in any particular case? The guidance given by the panel of experts was detailed and, at points, complex but can be summarised as *call people what they call themselves*.

The Debate

The structure the 2014 event was different to the previous events held in Cardiff and Newport. RCAC, as the organiser, wanted to avoid lecturing people, instead inviting experts, consultants and participants on a series of panels to respond to questions, to queries, in many ways, to a desire for knowledge or information or merely a kind of illumination of the facts about the situation here in Wales, or in the wider context in the United Kingdom or across Europe. So, the structure of the day was intended to encourage these from a panel in the morning then a lunch break and a panel in the afternoon. A summary of some of the notable discussion points and debates follows.

The event, as with previous events held to celebrate Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month (each June, across the UK), also introduced other media such as short animated films about GRT history (“Gypsies, Roma, Travellers: An Animated History” was shown as an introduction; see [A Short Animated History](#)), or about Gypsy and Traveller culture



(“Gypsy Ways” by Laurel Price, animated by the children of the Rover Way and Shire Newton communities). Music was provided by *Rroma Yag*, musicians from Rumania, during the morning registration and coffee and at lunch time.

An exhibition that featured the work of organisations such as the **Save the Children’s Travelling Ahead** project, that empowers young Gypsies and Travellers in participation in decision making processes and supports them to become advocates for their communities, and the **Derbyshire Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Group** (led by Romani people), provided an opportunity for the participants to see the breadth of work that is taking place in Wales and across the UK, with GRT communities and often led, as in the Derby group, by Romani people themselves. The presentation of varieties of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations and experiences, added to the overall impression of a vibrant and lively series of cultures surrounding the GRT communities in Wales and the UK. The breadth of work that is being done in the voluntary sector, with GRT communities, illustrates the importance of community-based services and provision and

the innovative nature of responses to the challenges facing communities in securing their rights and accessing services and provision.

One of the important contributions to the debate came from the **Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty**, Lesley Griffiths AM. She emphasised her experience of working with Gypsies and Travellers, as her own constituency has had a long-standing Gypsy and Traveller site in Wrexham (22 years) and was impressed by the commitment to the work with GRT communities, as evidenced by the people attending the Cardiff event. The Minister was particularly keen to share the Welsh government's vision, as expressed in the *'Travelling to a Better Future'- A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan* policy and strategy document, which enshrines the guiding principal that everybody in Wales, including the Gypsy and Traveller citizens, should have unhindered access and equal opportunities to goods and services, in the pursuit of a fair and just society. Quoting president Václav Havel, she reminded the audience that how any society treats the Gypsies, is the litmus test of a humane and compassionate civil society.

The *'Travelling to a Better Future'- A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan* document was the first national strategic Gypsy and Traveller policy developed in the UK, with Wales at the forefront of that process in 2011. It was written after extensive consultation with Gypsies and Traveller communities and other stakeholders, and as a *Framework...* it contains seventeen objectives, aimed at the inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers in Welsh society, with many more milestones identified in the delivery plan. The Welsh Government published the *'Travelling to a Better Future'- A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan*, in September 2011 and revised the document, through reporting progress on the delivery plan, in November 2013. A great deal of progress had in fact, been achieved, but there remained much to do.

Gypsies and Travellers in Wales continue to suffer worse health conditions and lower education outcomes than the general population; Gypsies and Travellers experience acute social exclusion and a lack of adequate culturally appropriate accommodation, whether this was caravan sites or housing. Accommodation is, in fact a crucial issue for *all* GRT communities and the *Housing in Wales Act* (2014) reinstates the legal duty upon local authorities, to provide sites where there are Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessments that have identified needs, in the current round of consultation on changes to this system. Local authorities can also support private site development, where feasible and preferred, so there is a greater degree of flexibility in meeting needs. The new legislation is intended to address the inertia that has overtaken the process, since the repeal of the previous duty upon local authorities, in the mid-1990's. More funds have

been allocated by the Welsh government, in the form of capital grants, to double the budget to £3.5 million during the period 2015 - 2016. Government has also published new guidelines for managing unauthorised and roadside encampments, identifying temporary 'stopping places' where possible and working with local authorities to improve toleration of these.

The Minister also informed the audience about reforms to the caravan camp system, in order to have better data regarding the number of temporary encampments in any period. Monitoring local authority use of welfare assessments to ensure the best interests of children, elderly and disabled people living on these sites are considered properly, is also being undertaken. The Welsh government is currently consulting on changes to the process of undertaking Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessments designing



Gypsy and Traveller sites and managing them.

Taken together, these examples can be said to demonstrate how seriously the Welsh Government is taking the issue of the lack of culturally appropriate accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales. However, the inequalities experienced by these communities are more deep-rooted than can be solved by simply by building more sites. The *Travelling to Better Health Consultation* process, which is due to conclude in at the end of October 2014, includes the proposal for local health boards to undertake health need assessments amongst Gypsy and Traveller communities to establish a baseline of health outcomes and to more effectively monitor progress over the coming years.

In education, the Welsh government and ministries have provided in excess of £1 million per year, in dedicated funding for Gypsy and Traveller pupils, with additional

funding to support the inclusion of Roma pupils from central, eastern and south-eastern Europe in our schools. In addition, funding has been awarded to Save the Children's *Travelling Ahead Project*, to develop knowledge regarding children's rights in the Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities, and it is inspiring to see young people being empowered to challenge local and national decision-makers and to publicly express their pride at being part of their community. Public misconceptions regarding these communities sadly remain. However, Wales is a home where Gypsies and Travellers can express their cultural heritage and hold decision-makers to account and this should be celebrated. Government has funded regional community cohesion coordinators to ensure the inclusion of Gypsy and Traveller communities and to monitor and react to any tensions that may arise in the local area.

The Minister agreed that there is much left to do; however, the Welsh government is not complacent and will continue to push for a truly inclusive Welsh society, which enables Gypsies and Travellers to participate in society without having to sacrifice their culture. The views from this symposium, regarding the further work, will be welcome and encourage everyone to understand what is needed to do to achieve this vision.

The introduction to the day from Julie Morgan AM, the Chairperson of the *Cross-Party Group on Gypsies and Travellers* at the Welsh national Assembly, drew some interesting parallels between the Welsh and English experiences, an example that was brought into the debate by both Colin Clark on the morning's panel and Sarah Cemlyn during the afternoon. The situation in Wales, as the Minister alluded to in her speech, showed distinct differences to that in England in a number of areas, particularly in the realm of social inclusion and marginalisation, where the policies pursued by government in England appeared to be rolling back measures that supported and encouraged inclusion in contrast to a much stronger commitment to what Julie Morgan called making Wales "... an inclusive place... a place for every sector of society". Colin Clark, in his introduction to himself and his work, called the current situation in the UK (and more broadly, across Europe), one where cruelty, punishment, secrecy, militarism, reckless financial adventurism and exclusion of the poor and dispossessed has become the norm, where "... People are marginalised by their class, by their race, their ethnicity and immigration status. They are deemed to be *excess populations* – this is the language of governance; to be removed from the body politic. *Disposability* – the social contract we once held dear that has been almost removed from us and made redundant."

Sarah Cemlyn also identified what she described as "...a vision which is actually totally missing in the English context..." as being one of the key differences with the

Welsh government approach, as the latter has both the policy foundation and national integration strategy for Gypsies and Travellers (though this needs revising with the inclusion of the Roma populations now in the country), that is both being monitored in terms of effectiveness and developing consultation processes that address some of the issues around representation, particularly amongst GRT youth. What was missing though, in a similar way to other countries, was the lack of implementation, as the example of poor maintenance on the Rover Way Gypsy and Traveller site, illustrated. A series of contributions from GRT community members, in the afternoon, highlighted the way in which inconsistent approaches to maintenance of sites across Wales, at the local level, resulted in undue hardship for vulnerable members of the community. Laurel Price described the situation that had resulted in injury for her, that would have been an easy matter to resolve quickly. Services and in particular, responses to the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community in Wales were poor on the local level, despite the national



government's commitment to inclusion and improvement.

Ethel Brooks, raised the question of the local government's approach to 'managing' accommodation issues in the UK and USA, that, in some ways, reflected these concerns and highlighted what might be seen as the similarities on an international level. Intervention, particularly around the location and type of accommodation chosen by GRT communities, even in the private sphere, were always open to challenge in a way that was not the case with the majority population. Differences in the application of regulations surrounding housing, temporary housing, caravan sites and other accommodation, left Gypsies, Roma, Travellers vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. Julie Morgan, responding to a question during the afternoon, again referred to discrimination in relation to housing and accommodation, citing negative attitudes expressed amongst Westminster politicians, even in the chamber of parliament, during the Dale Farm campaign – "it appeared to be acceptable for Members of Parliament to actually stand up and speak in a

way against Gypsies and Travellers sites in a way that I felt was racist and that was tolerated and this happened in the main chamber there in the Westminster and a lot more in Westminster Hall, where they had individual debates". Debates around these issues in the Welsh National Assembly were very different, she argued.

Isaac Blake pointed out that even safety standards were applied differently, in the case of Gypsies and Travellers, when it came to accommodation, with dire consequences for the GRT community, as reported by community members. Traffic accidents as a result of poor signage and a lack of awareness by drivers meant that the conditions at some sites were positively dangerous, especially for children and the elderly in the community. He described the condition of sites in Wales as a "post-code lottery", with some being maintained to a high standard and others very poor indeed, including Rover Way where the site is next to the local authority refuse tip and very close to the sea, which is corroding the site. John Davies highlighted the duties under the *Mobile Homes Wales Act, 2013* that makes clear the responsibilities for maintaining sites and mobile homes.

The conditions for newly arrived Roma families, in terms of their accommodation needs, was raised during the debate, as many families faced a very tough situation. Samantha Aston (Llewellyn) from the *Big Issue*, spoke about the changes in housing benefits that meant most Roma, as self-employed EU migrants, arrived in Wales and were faced with homelessness, as they were unable to meet the criteria by which they needed to earn £154 per week, in order to be eligible. Colin Clark added that the situation was similar in Glasgow and exacerbated by what he described as 'rogue landlords' who exploited Roma, meaning that many were living in very cramped conditions, with 14 or 15 people sharing a room and beds in rotation.

Thomas Acton also described a similar picture of Roma migrants, for whom the prospect of over-crowded conditions was one that was offset by the experiences of persecution and victimisation in their countries of origin; a point both Tanjia Vasic and Petr Torak confirmed in their descriptions of life, as Roma people, in the Czech Republic and Serbia. The 'push factors' in these countries of central and eastern Europe were such that the reality of life in the UK, with all its difficulties and limitations, was often better than the appalling conditions Roma left behind them.

The situation where widespread discrimination and prejudice was expressed towards Roma, Gypsies and Travellers, was to come up repeatedly throughout the day in various forms. Tanjia Vasic had described her own experience of being excluded and marginalised at school, when she was assumed that she would have no future need of education, as she would leave school early to get married. As a PhD candidate at the

University of Sussex, she was constantly reminded of the contrast with the situation in Serbia and other countries for Roma, as regards education. Roma students, without scholarships and frequently living in very difficult conditions whilst supporting other family members, were trying hard to pursue their studies or gain access to courses that would help them gain qualifications, battling against poor expectations from teachers, prejudice from other students and their parents and an environment that made it extremely difficult to succeed.

Early years education and its critical importance in strengthening equality, improving opportunity and social inclusion in the future for Romani and Traveller communities, was raised by Adrian Marsh and supported by Julie Morgan, who pointed out that the Welsh government had implemented its *Flying Start* programme for the under fives in Wales with the commitment to building quality, early childhood development opportunities for all young children, in urban and rural settings. Building societies for all



was something that began in the earliest years, argued Adrian Marsh, whose previous experience managing early years programmes for the OSF's Early Childhood Programme, in Roma communities across central, eastern and south-eastern Europe had convinced him that investment and partnership in delivering early childhood development, with major organisations such as Step-by-Step and the International Step-by-Step Association, UNICEF and Save the Children, was the key to change in the future and in particular, to challenging the system of segregated preschools and schools for Roma children, in many of the central and eastern European countries.

The situation where culturally biased testing was used to unfairly discriminate against Roma children, diagnosing them with so-called 'light mental disability', both stigmatised them and ensured they would remain trapped in a system of poor education with little prospect of ever breaking the cycle of poverty and deprivation that such labelling condemned them too. Tanjia Vasic confirmed the existence of segregated

education, even in those countries where it supposedly, was not official policy, as teachers would use a variety of stratagems to separate non-Romani and Romani children in classes or into segregated classes. Many of the audience were surprised and shocked at the existence of segregated education for Roma children and expressed their outrage, saying it made the perilous journeys and precarious existence that many Roma faced in Wales and the UK more generally, understandable. Petr Torak's own experience of fleeing persecution and discrimination, including segregated education that would never have allowed him to pursue his ambition of becoming a police officer, illustrated the case strongly. The need to know more about the situation for Roma in eastern, central and south-eastern Europe, in more detail, was expressed by members of the audience.

The evidence of better educational outcomes and higher attainment in the UK system, for Roma children was referred to by Adrian Marsh, in the evidence drawn from a study conducted by EQUALITY in partnership with the Roma Education Fund (based in Budapest), that showed marked improvements for Roma children from the Czech and Slovak Republics, in British schools, particularly in maths, science and English language. Evidence from education authorities such as Bradford, where the Traveller Education Support Services had supported the integration in local schools of growing numbers of Roma from east and central Europe, showed the same improvements in attainment and attendance; a finding that had challenged the assumptions of education providers at a recent conference in Ostrava, in the eastern Czech Republic. Questions there had revolved around the issues of how Roma parents were 'forced' to send their children to school, in the UK system and why Roma children themselves consistently attended.

Arts education, as an aspect of strengthening identity, was a recurring topic in the afternoon panel session, with Daniel Baker arguing for an improved and more creative approach to the visual arts and aesthetics, to build and bond communities, promoting social cohesion and self confidence amongst Gypsy and Traveller children in schools. Isaac Blake added to the debate, by illustrating the importance of what he and Ethel Brooks termed, "performing Romani identity". In Isaac's case, his education at and graduation from prestigious dance schools in London and New York had been, to some extent, at the expense of his identity which, he felt, he had wanted to 'hide' in the very real fear that discrimination and poor treatment would follow, should anyone know he was a Gypsy. Daniel Baker also related his experience of trying to "pass" at school for a non-Gypsy and how damaging that was to his development as a young person. Both he and Ethel Brooks stressed the importance of supporting the creative expression of identity, through the arts in education, for Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children. Isaac Blake added that the RCAC

effectively used performance and visual arts to both strengthen identity and promote an understanding, especially amongst children and young Gypsies, Roma and Travellers of their rights, building effective advocacy around arts workshops on caravan sites and in schools.

In the broader question of communication, responding to a question from Chris Brown of G39 artist organisation in Cardiff, Daniel Baker suggested, “the visual field is very important for that not just because within Roma communities visual culture is very potent; it’s the way for hundreds of years we’ve communicated with each other given that historically we are a non-literary community...” Chris Brown had referred to initiatives to “...minimise ignorance and maximise curiosity, educating people who don’t have regular exposure to the communities...”, opportunities to improve social cohesion and inter-communal relations. The need for more Romani artists to increase the wider understanding of any real political or cultural agency that impacts upon the wider



community, was something that a number of the panel agreed. Julie Morgan saw the potential, realised in some of the film that the Save the Children *Travelling Ahead* project had produced with young Gypsies and Travellers, for advocacy to come through other media, which Adrian Marsh agreed with and referred to an interesting documentary project that Save the Children in Sweden had undertaken with Swedish Roma and Travellers (*Romer och Resande*) in the city of Malmö and similarly, that Open Society Foundations Roma Initiatives Office had also supported the production of documentary films by young Roma film-makers, particularly supporting young Roma women to do such.

Resources dedicated to supporting arts, performance and communication education, whether through voluntary sector organisations such as the RCAC or in the education sector, is increasingly hard to secure and not seen as a priority in the national Roma integration strategies in England or Wales. Sarah Cemlyn, having conducted (with other

researchers such as Dr Andrew Ryder of the Corvinus University in Budapest) a survey of these strategy documents could not identify particular strands or points that referred to the arts and education, but could see that the strengthening of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities and the establishing of strong community-based organisations across the UK, crossed what she called the boundaries of arts into advocacy around challenging stereotypes. Women's groups that did so through writing and historical work, around the Romani Holocaust for example, strengthened this and could be at the base of building national federations and liaison groups. Resources were very much lacking though and this needed to be addressed.

The history of Romani and Traveller groups was a topic that came up repeatedly, through presentation by panel members such as Thomas Acton, Adrian Marsh and Ethel Brooks and in questions from the audience; Roxanne Nazir raised the issue of history and identity and the differences between communities, also developed, in the context of language, by Leigh Badgley, who expressed her fears "...in terms of culture, is there anything being done to empower the Romani community around language? Language is such a strong component of identification and empowering the community in the UK, but it seems to me that the language is dying out..." Whilst Julie Morgan agreed that there was little in the national strategy to support Romani mother tongue education, though mother tongue support in other languages was available, Isaac Blake described the content of the RCAC workshops that are carried out with Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children on sites and in schools, "...we do encourage them to use their mother tongue, so that they have a linguistic workshop..."; however, the lack of resources in schools meant that there was little that happened to strengthen this, "... but actually it would be nicer if there was a cash injection into the actual schools so the children knew more about their culture..."

Thomas Acton had addressed the question of differences during the morning session, looking at the emergence of Romani identity in the 10th and 11th centuries. "It is not because of a pre-existing group of Roma moved from India to Europe, it is because a very disparate and different group of Indians, from all kinds of class, ethnicity and languages were part of an Indian migrant army in Anatolia who actually developed the Romani language as its command structure..." Roxanne Nazir's question about the differences between Gypsies, Roma, Travellers brought this response from Thomas Acton, "...Gypsies has come to mean basically English Gypsies and some of the Scottish travellers who say 'we are Gypsies'. And they are distinguished from Roma who are the migrants, the people from Eastern Europe, and Travellers, which is usually limited to Irish and Scottish Travellers..." Colin Clark's tripartite division gave another perspective on the

question, "...which is a very important question, is looking at it at local level, national level and the global level", offering a dynamic view of changing notions of identity and the legal definitions of 'Traveller', 'Gypsy' and 'Roma' at these levels, "...local, who you are one of, the national – often in terms of legal definitions and an identity that is being imposed and at a European level..." where institutions define groups in ways that are often not the same as they would do themselves.

Ethel Brooks also took up the theme of differing understandings at different levels, what she called, "...the local level of your family, your group...", the recognition of other Romani or Gypsy people as being part of a larger collective but not being the same. The notion of three levels, from both Thomas Acton and Colin Clark was useful, but "...one of the key things is about the kind of porousness between these categories... and the ways in which... it is not that people are always necessarily defined. The agency question becomes key when people understand the strategy. So, how does one self-identify in order to gain



access to resources, to gain access to law? How does one not self-identify in order to make sure that violence isn't visited upon your family? So, in some ways these processes are a constant negotiation. And I think what others were saying in terms of how you sort of find each other out, the "who are you?" within the community, is also really clear, because growing up it was always, "which family are you from, who is your father, your grandfather, your great-grandmother..." "Who are these people, do you recognise them?" There was a very familial structure in that, but at the same time then, thinking about within the community, the way people self-identify, really shifts when one self-identifies to the state or to your neighbours or, with regard to internationally. And especially, I think now, with what I see is an international Romani movement emerging which is not always based on linguistics, but it really is about politics and a political agency that is really opening up in the face of ...immense violence and discrimination and marginalisation, faced by Romani people across the world."

Conclusions & Recommendations

The “Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate” provided an unusual and all the more significant, opportunity for the beginnings of a genuine dialogue between professionals, practitioners, politicians, activists, academics, community spokespeople and members, around a host of questions and issues that are rarely aired in the public forum. The concern with roots, origins, cultures and languages that underpin modern Welsh society, is a positive reflection of the fascination with the question of who the Gypsies are, by and amongst non-Gypsy people. The origins of both Welsh identity and Romani identity can be traced to about the same period; the 11th and early 12th centuries, when the “Egyptians” were arriving in Constantinople and Welsh literature was emerging as a distinct ‘voice’ and vision of identity.

The concern with roots and origins though has often been used as a mask for the deliberate obfuscation of the present for Romani and Traveller people, with the notions of ‘mysterious’ origins, ‘lost’ in the mists of time, furthering alienating and ‘othering’ these communities in order to deny a common humanity and rights to the same compassion, dignity and respect as those with a ‘national’ history. The GRT communities in Cardiff were able to demonstrate the fallacy of these notions and many others, challenging the misconceptions and misinformation that has been so readily and wickedly brought against Gypsies, Roma, Travellers.

The *key recommendations* derived from the event are:

- it is essential that improving knowledge and understanding, about Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, particularly in terms of challenging stereotypes and negative images, must be undertaken by *all*, not just GRT voluntary sector organisations, activists and those academics from the communities;
- knowledge about GRT communities needs to be produced by academics from the communities, to be used in partnership with that produced by non-Romani and Traveller academics (and, where necessary, as a corrective to that knowledge produced by non-Romani and Traveller academics), to support improving knowledge and understanding about GRT communities;
- information relating to GRT communities, used to improve knowledge and understanding needs to be produced in accessible, lively and informative ways and

media, without distorting or inadvertently promoting stereotypes and negative images, in addition to the scientific knowledge produced by academics;

- government has a role in both supporting this knowledge production, especially in terms of strengthening Gypsy, Roma, Traveller self-identity amongst adults and children – particularly in the early years curriculum – to be used across all education and care settings, to promote the values of tolerance, inclusion and social justice in Welsh society;

- a centre of excellence, in terms of knowledge production, should be established with Welsh government support, in the higher education sector, at one of the universities in the country, led by a respected and acknowledged academic from the GRT communities, to advise and revise government policy and strategy, devise materials to promote understanding, tolerance and social justice;

- the Welsh government, as a matter of urgency, should revise the current policy and strategy framework (most crucially, *Travelling Ahead to a Better Future* 2011/2013), to meet the requirements of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 and the transposed, Council Directive 2000/43/EC or ‘Race Equality Directive’ (EU RED), with particular attention to the inclusion of Roma from eastern, central and south-eastern Europe who have migrated in increasing numbers over the previous decade and a half, to Wales;

- education, health and youth are primary targets for improvement in terms of access and increasing attainment, opportunity and equality in Wales for GRT communities and individuals;

- the *Cross Party Group Gypsies and Travellers* at the Welsh National Assembly, must, as a matter of urgency, bring into the forum and the consultation process, representatives from the Roma community or communities, as part of the political process;

- the current system of managing Gypsy and Traveller sites and the accommodation needs assessment process (currently undergoing consultation on changes necessary), needs to be improved with the commitment to addressing standards and overall consistency on these sites, particularly in terms of response times for repairs and maintenance. The current inconsistency of standards between sites causes distress and undue hardship to residents on some sites, with consequences that could be prevented by improved response times and maintenance planning;

- the accommodation needs of Roma, need to be included in these assessments as part of the process and to ensure that the difficulties many Roma families face around cramped, insalubrious and insecure accommodation, are effectively addressed;
- the health needs of GRT communities must be addressed, to effectively improve the health outcomes of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller people - especially the young, women and the elderly. Access to services needs to be improved, using successful models developed elsewhere in Europe (Ireland, Rumania, Serbia) for working with Travellers and Roma, with health education being brought into community settings and at an earlier stage, using culturally relevant materials, community mediators and partnerships with GRT NGO's and voluntary sector organisations;
- the management and teachers of education provision, at preschool, primary and secondary levels, need to have access to effective training and resources (INSET and



curriculum materials for use at differing levels) to enable them to successfully accommodate newly-arrived, Roma children in their settings and ensure a successful transition into mainstream, inclusive education, thereby improving educational outcomes;

- mother-tongue education for Romani language speakers, should be supported (whether through community language learning courses or as additional to the preschool and school curriculum), for strengthening confidence and self-identity, improving communication skills and promoting a multi-cultural, multi-lingual learning environment for all children and young people;
- work with young people, particularly young women, in the GRT communities is an essential part of building social inclusion and community cohesion in the future and significant investment needs to be made in this area, building upon the excellent work

and experiences of a number of projects and programmes aimed at supporting GRT communities. Partnerships between youth organisations and GRT voluntary sector associations, to ensure the implementation of 'best practice' and innovative, joint approaches, need to be encouraged through funding strategies and government supported networking opportunities;

- the Cardiff event built upon the successes of the previous symposia and GRT History Month activities, over the previous five years, in Newport, Swansea and Cardiff. The consistent attendance at each of the events over the years demonstrates that there is a need from professionals in the education, health, planning, housing and accommodation, prison and justice, social services and welfare sectors for information, guidance and knowledge regarding effective working with Gypsy, Traveller and increasingly, Roma communities in Wales. The Welsh government must recognise this need and support measures to address these professionals in the front-line services, particularly in committing support and resources to ensuring these kind of events take place over the next five years.



Afterword

What emerges most clearly from this report is that the search for simple answers is endlessly frustrating because the simple answers never quite mean what they seem to say.

This does not mean that there are *no* answers, just that they are inescapably complicated. The narratives that most people accept of how different peoples came to be “here”, were largely developed in the era of scientific racism – these are the very stories of what a nation is – and they are flawed. So we cannot actually produce an accurate representation – a working narrative of whom Roma, Gypsies, or Travellers are, that will sustain a workable policy, without dismantling the historic narratives of who we *all* are; an uncomfortable and discombobulating process.

So, yes, Gypsies *did* “come from India,” but it does not and cannot mean what you, or even some university centre of Romani Studies thinks.

Yes, some Gypsies, Roma, Travellers *are* nomadic (the word “Traveller” *does* give us a clue), but that does not mean what you and three centuries’ worth of romantic poets think.

Yes, Gypsies, Roma, Travellers *are* migrants, or the descendants of migrants, but so are we all. Humanity is indigenous only in the East African Rift Valley; everywhere else humanity is an invasive, migrating species. Human history is the story of our colonisations and re-colonisations; *post-coloniality* is the human condition, not some ‘special’ or exceptional relationship of oppressor and oppressed, as theorised by those who wish to fantasise away the sheer normality of human depravity.

And yes, culture is the explanation, *not* race; but the very fact that we put it in those terms indicates how much we see culture as *replacing* race, as offering answers to the same questions to which race used to be the answer, as possessing the same essential quiddity to explain human diversity. “‘Race is real because people think it is”, those from the ‘common sense’ school of ‘race relations’ used to proclaim; now their successors would have us believe culture is just a social construct and not also the organic and infinitely diverse outgrowths from a varied, yet finite, material base.

Every family has a slightly different culture to the next, yet we can translate between the most diverse dialects on earth. We exhibit culture when we adapt the material universe, including our own bodies: when we cook, when we sing and in whatever we fabricate. Our knowledge of how our own culture meets our physical needs enables us, with a little intellectual effort, to understand the culture of others. Culture is the bridge between societies, even as it is the definer of their differences. We are not actually ‘rooted’,

as the curiously inappropriate vegetable metaphor beloved of racists and nationalists has it, we're animals and we *locomote*.

So, Romani music and musicians constantly interchange themes and techniques with those of other ethnic groups; like them, they play with genre to cross any boundary as soon as that boundary has become apparent; but so do all schools and varieties of music. Composers, rightly, have no conscience about appropriating whatever works. If you want to tell your own story, you have to use the language of your audience; the larger your audience, the more comprehensive your language, your *system of signs* needs to be. Romani cuisine everywhere uses the techniques, the meat and vegetables of its neighbours, but everywhere has its local distinction, which yet contrasts inter-continentially with Romani food in another continent even as it influences it. The fifth cuff-button on the sleeve of a custom-tailored suit for a wealthy Gypsy or Traveller businessman in southern England, tells everyone who needs to know that the man who



wears it is a man of some standing, but gives nothing away to those non-Gypsies or Travellers, who do not need to know¹.

The changes wrought by time are slow and insidious, only brought to our attention by historians (or possibly old and self-aware journalists), but moving long distances, whether for pleasure, economic advantage or out of dire necessity, like many of the Roma migrants of the last twenty years, brings geographical variations in culture sharply into focus. Cultural variation is actually continuous, without natural sharp breaks; it is only migration that permits us to construct the concepts of ethnic diversity and ethnic community at all. Linguists used to point to the alleged fact that in the 19th century, every village along the Rhine thought it spoke the same local dialect as its neighbouring village, even though the river passes through states with Dutch, French and German as official

¹ Of course, this stylistic comment is 15-20 years out of date. Fashion is a constantly changing semiotic system.

languages. Can these languages mix? What else is *Letzeburgish*? Yet the speakers of these languages spent a tenth of the last century at war with each other, leading to vast movements of peoples and re-drawing of national boundaries which would leave an imagined observer from another planet amazed that we remain the dupes of a conservative ideology which naturalises the nation-state, even as statesmen and stateswomen ceaselessly try to construct transnational organisations.

Migration however, is not the same as *nomadism*. Migration is a once and for all change of location; nomadism is the regular movement of residence (and portable resources at the disposal of the nomad), for the recurrent exploitation of spatially and temporally discontinuous economic opportunities. It is an economic phenomenon where the families able to move their residence comfortably, have an economic advantage over the sedentary family. Nomadism of different kinds arise at different stages in economic development; *hunter and gatherer nomadism* was perhaps the earliest human, collective economic adaptation. *Pastoral nomadism* arises as a specialism contrasting with a predominantly settled agricultural economy or as a response to environmental conditions that make arable farming impossible, where, because of the military prowess pastoral nomads develop, it is an unsettling political factor. *Commercial nomads* emerge with the development of urban settlements and trade concentrations, when the rural well-off require urban-quality services, but only intermittently. Their *culture* is a result of their *nomadism*, not vice versa.

However, unlike pastoral nomads, who can assemble in large numbers – even *hordes* – well-armed and well-mounted, commercial nomads tend to travel in small numbers, weak, vulnerable and peaceable. In fact, when we look back at feudal society or the societies of the Middle East and Central Asian regions that still exhibit rural feudal dependency, it is clear that commercial nomads can only operate if they have powerful protectors who will take vengeance if they are robbed or beaten, or if clients and customers fail to pay them. In return they provide music, bone-setting, blacksmithing and other services their patrons need. Thus Dom nomads still operate, from Syria, Jordan and Turkey to Baluchistan, never travelling beyond the reach of their protectors (who may themselves be aristocratic pastoral nomads, like the Baluch).

So what do we mean when we say “Gypsies, or Roma come from India” (with the implication that those who are ‘just’ Travellers, do not)? The traditional picture was one of a group of lower-caste, commercial nomads, who wandered a little further until they got as far as Europe, still speaking an Indian language and bearing the DNA of their Indian ancestors. However, this picture is just not possible; commercial nomads can only actually

migrate in a feudal world, if their protectors migrate with them. We cannot identify any one ancestral group for the Roma of Europe and beyond, in India. Defenders of the traditional hypothesis point to DNA evidence that the majority of the Indian ancestors of the Roma were of lower caste origin; but this is not really a surprise, as the majority of the ancestors of *all* Indians, the majority of *all* modern Indians in fact, are of lower-caste origins. The more plausible hypothesis is that these ancestors were a cross-section of Indian society.

Perhaps a key moment in the abandonment of the old racist account is Ian Hancock's (2006:69) self-criticism, when he wrote:

"I have argued, sometimes strenuously, that our people were one when they left India, one when they arrived in Anatolia, and one when they entered Europe. My findings are leading me more and more to believe that they were not..."

To cut a long story short, the still controversial historical narrative, developed by scholars such as Hancock and Marsh, is that the Romani language assumed its present identity only outside India, in what is now Anatolia, having its origins in the command language of a Hindu militia in the service of the Muslim *Ghaznavid* sultans of the 11th century Afghanistan, which had forcibly enslaved members of various castes and ethnicities, including many commercial nomads in campaigns in the north western and north central Indian lands. The Romani-speaking peoples – and those who have mixed with them in the same economic spheres in Europe – have always been diverse, but they share a common interest in combatting the anti-Gypsyism that affects them all.

It is arguable that Romani scholars like Hancock and Marsh look further because in some sense they feel this history has to make sense, if it is about people like themselves. Their account of the origins of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers may still be, in part speculative, but at least it is sociologically plausible, unlike the classical narratives about mysterious wanderings (a kind of racism without the racial explanation). Indeed, the classical narrative can lead to a traditional fatalism about the marginalisation of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers; these new narratives undermine that.

Such new scholarship is beginning to feed through to Romani civil society and organisation. Although it is quite long, it is worth quoting in full the explanation of the phrase "Gypsy, Roma and Traveller", on the website of the new *Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Police Association*, which explicitly draws upon the work of Hancock and Marsh. In fact we have to quote it at length, because we need complicated explanations of why the simple answers will not do. It answers the question why they use the terminology, "Gypsy Roma and Traveller" ([GRT PA](#))...

“...because this is the current, accepted terminology in the UK for a kaleidoscope of groups with overlapping histories and situations, who nevertheless distinguish themselves and call themselves by different names...

The word “Gypsy” is a short form of the word “Egyptian” in English, which itself has the same root as the word “Coptic”. Across Europe there are groups that call themselves *Gitanos*, *Gitanes*, *Magjup*, *Kiptii*, *Yifti*, *Gyupsi*, from the same root and even just *Egyptians* ...[in Kosovo and Albania]... Some speak Romani dialects, some do not.

The stereotype of the *Egyptian* as a travelling fortune-teller and dancer or entertainer, goes back to 8th century Constantinople, when Greek fortune-tellers began to claim they had inherited the mysteries of the ancient Egyptians from the ...[Chaldeans and] ... Zoroastrians of Persia, who had been defeated by Islamic forces. This role may have been taken up by Dom immigrants from India, but certainly the stereotype was well established by the time the Roma formed their identity in the Balkans ...[and Anatolia in the 11th]... and 12th century. The “Gypsy stereotype” is 300 years older than the Romani language! The earliest Romani groups to reach Western Europe were not believed when they said they came from India, but were accepted as *Egyptians*.

The word “Romani” is probably cognate with various terms for “human ...[being]...”. Its primary meaning is “decent, honourable, humane” and it is often still used in that sense. How did it come to be the name of an ethnic group?

In the middle ages ‘ethnicity’ was not ...[the]... primary source of identity. People were identified first of all by their religion – Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish (or... [one of the *heterodox*, or un-orthodox, forms of these major religions]... of some kind), and secondly by their rank or role in society, noble or knightly, mercantile, peasant or priest, or slave, all bound to each other by mutual obligations reinforced by religion, whatever ...[the]... language they spoke. Their dialects were actually many and various and the written languages of administration were Latin, Greek... [Persian] and Arabic. As, however, the Europe of Christendom and the *umma* ...[the community of Muslim believers]... gave way to empires and nation states, national or community, *ethnic* identity became important.

In the Ottoman Empire the “Romans”...[*Rum* in Ottoman Turkish, from the Greek *Romioi*]... were actually the Greeks who had been citizens of Constantinople, founded as the Eastern Rome by ...[the Emperor]... Constantine ...[in 330AD]. They had a special ...[legal]... status ...[in Islam as *dhimmi*, or people of The Book]... as citizens of the state, which had been conquered by the Ottomans... Since Roma had been present in the Byzantine Empire prior to its downfall ...[May 1453]... and ...[used the term, *Romitioi* meaning “sons of the Romans” in the 11th and 12th centuries]... it is hardly surprising that “Roman(i)” self-identification ...[remained associated with the notion, as in *Romani-chal*]...

Across Christian Europe from the 1530’s onwards, there were many examples where the new nation states passed ...[extremely harsh and genocidal, in their application]...

laws against *Egyptians*. It must have seemed to the people facing this threat that they were the only decent people left, and so it is understandable that the word “Romani” became a word applied almost only to their own people. (But not entirely – when English Gypsies call someone a “Romani Rai” they do not mean “a Gypsy gentleman” – they mean a non-Gypsy who speaks ...[*Rromani-chib*, the Romani language]... and acts like a gentleman to Gypsies. When immigrant Roma say to a non-Rom, “Romano manush san tu!”, they do not mean that that man is a Rom, only that he knows how to behave appropriately in the company of Roma.)

In the English, Welsh and Spanish Romani ...[language]... dialects, the word *Rom* does not mean *Gypsy* it means “married man” of any ethnicity. Some English Gypsies call themselves ‘Romanichals’ in their own dialect and some ...[have]... avoided stigmatisation by referring to themselves as *Travellers*. In recent years, in England, the word ...[Gypsy]... has been very much reclaimed; as some say, “People died because they were called *Gypsies*; we can’t give up the name now without dishonouring them!”

Many educated Roma from Eastern ...[Central and South-eastern]... Europe however, reject the name *Gypsy* because they see it as a translation of the derogatory terms, *Cigany*, *Tsigane*, *Cingene*, derived from a Greek term for a kind of heretic ...[the *Atsinganioi* of 9th and 10th centuries, in Phrygia and Asia Minor]... but this is mistaken. The ...words have different histories, etymologies and connotations. ...The GRT PA rejects the term “cigany” and its various *etymons*.

The word *Travellers* has become a general word for occupational nomads and, of course, many who call themselves *Gypsies* (and a very small minority of Roma) are occupational nomads. Probably the original Indian migrants to ...[Byzantine Asia Minor]... Anatolia who became the Romani people included many people with an occupationally nomadic heritage and skills... but across Europe, especially in small countries next to larger states with Romani populations, we come across groups who, despite possibly having some Romani heritage, traditionally started off their accounts of their own identity by saying “Whatever else we are, we are *not* Gypsies or Roma!” Actually, when one considers that in all these countries, at some point to be identified as *Gypsy* ...[could mean]... death or enslavement, it is not surprising to find such groups... ...[such as]... Irish Travellers and those Scottish Travellers, who reject *Gypsy* identity and have their own dialects, find today that they often face anti-Gypsy prejudice and share other experiences too with those who do call themselves *Gypsies* or Roma.

Whatever the history and from diverse perspectives on their own identity, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are today in the UK working together to combat discrimination, celebrate their inter-locking histories and learn from one another. Their co-operation, triumphing over past mutual suspicions and antagonisms should be a model for other ‘rainbow’ coalitions, bringing together different groups without telling them what to

call themselves or how to imagine their own identity..." (*Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Police Association*, 2014)

On April 21st 2015 a representative of the GRT PA will be addressing a conference at Oxford of students and staff from Further and Higher Education in the UK. Who would have thought, even ten years ago that we would see Romani police officers suggesting to an audience of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students that perhaps they, too, might consider a career of public service in the police force – just as if they were an Irish, or a Black student association? What could be more subversive of old stereotypes and at the same time more supportive of a self-confident ethnic identity, which can perhaps lead the way in subverting the old racist legitimations of ethnic solidarity for everyone?

Professor Thomas Acton, OBE



Glossary & Acronyms

| | |
|-----------|---|
| AM | Welsh Assembly Member |
| CoE | Council of Europe |
| Decade... | Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015 is an unprecedented political commitment by European governments to eliminate discrimination against Roma and close the unacceptable gaps between Roma and the rest of society. The Decade focuses on the priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing, and commits governments to take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender mainstreaming; see Roma Decade |
| EC | European Commission |
| ECP | Early Childhood Programme, Open Society Foundations, London (Early Childhood Programme) |
| ERRC | European Roma Rights Centre, based in Budapest that has taken on many of the most significant cases of litigation, on behalf of Romani clients, such as the case of <i>DH & others vs. Czech Republic</i> (Application no. 57325/00 ; see OSF DH Case), an international case where the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judged in favour of 18 students from the Czech town of Ostrava, as having suffered discrimination in segregated education, in the Czech Republic. |
| EP | European Parliament |
| EU | European Union |
| EUR-Lex | Database of European law, updated on a daily basis at EUR-Lex |
| Gypsy | in the context of Welsh national policy, a person of nomadic lifestyle, regardless of their ethnicity, notions of race or origin. In Wales, the term would include <i>all</i> Gypsies and Travellers, including New Travellers, but <i>excluding</i> Roma people from central, eastern and south eastern Europe. More usually, the term is used by Romani Studies scholars – linguists, ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists and historians - as referring to Romani people (who may also identify themselves as <i>Travellers</i> , but not Irish Travellers), particularly in the UK, who share common notions of origin, a range of similar beliefs regarding cleanliness taboos, similar notions of endogamous marriage practice (though many groups do, in fact, allow for exogamous |

marriage practice), an adherence to a particular communal model of decentralised autonomy, extended kinship networks and a decentralised private justice (feud) or self-regulation (as opposed to other Romani communities that practice public tribunal, or 'court' models of communal regulation, or elder tribunal models). Additionally, the notion of a shared experience of historical migration, persecution and marginalisation is common, as is the economic mode of commercial nomadism or economic itinerancy;

| | |
|-----------|---|
| OSIfE | Open Society Initiative for Europe, based in Barcelona and carrying out a programme in Europe, the western Balkans and across EU Member States (OSIfE). |
| RED | Race Equality Directive or <i>Council Directive 2000/43/EC</i> |
| Roma | (singular, <i>Rom</i> ; see the Council of Europe's definition: CoE Roma Glossary) in the context of the policy and strategy internationally, the groups of Romani, Sinti, Kale, and related peoples (including those groups in Anatolia, the Middle East and North Africa [MENA] region, the Caucasus and central Asia, calling themselves <i>Dom</i> , <i>Romanlar</i> , <i>Lom</i> , <i>Luli</i> [<i>Luri</i>], <i>Mughats</i> , <i>Ghurbeti</i> , <i>Jughi</i>); in the context of Welsh policy (such as it is), <i>Roma</i> are predominantly from central, eastern and south-eastern Europe (including the Czech and Slovak Republics, Bulgaria, Rumania, Kosovo and Albania [where <i>Ashkali</i> and <i>Egyptians</i> are present], Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, FYR Macedonia), with those communities in Wales being primarily Czech and Slovak <i>Roma</i> . |
| REF | Roma Education Fund, Budapest; supports the access and inclusion of Roma children in non-segregated education in many of the Decade countries, promoting early years access through its <i>A Good Start</i> programme; also supports large numbers of young Roma university students (see romaeducationfund.org) |
| Traveller | (see above for the Welsh government definition); in Romani Studies and scholarship, Travellers are more usually <i>Irish Travellers</i> , <i>Scottish Travellers</i> , <i>Swedish</i> (Resande) Travellers or other groups, where the self-identification used corresponds to the term in English – <i>Gezginler</i> in Turkish for example. Some Travellers are of Romani origins, such as the Scottish Travellers and Swedish Travellers (and those English |

and Welsh Gypsies that use the self-ascription), whilst others are not, as in the case of Irish Travellers, who subscribe to a different notion of origins.



References

Acton, T.A. *et al.* (2001), "The Theory Of Gypsy Law", in Walter O. Weyrauch [ed.], *Gypsy Law; Romani Legal Traditions & Cultures*, Berkley: University of California Press

Aspinall, P. J. (2005), *Review of literature on the health beliefs, health status and use of services in Gypsy, Traveller populations and of appropriate health care interventions*, (Health ASERT Programme Wales Report 2) Cardiff

Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M., *et al.* (2009), *Inequalities Experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities: a review*, Bristol: Equality & Human Rights Commission

Craig, Gary (2011), *The Roma: A Study of National Policies (United Kingdom)*, Brussels: European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities

European Commission (2011), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, Brussels: European Commission, 5.4.2011 COM(2011) 173 final, [EC Europa EU](#)

Equality (2013), "Roma in the UK", Equality. [EQUALITY](#)

European Roma Information Office (2014), *Implementing National Roma Integration Strategies: Challenges & Solutions for Local Authorities*, Brussels: ERIO

EU Employment, Health and Consumer Affairs Council [EPSCO] (2012), *Council conclusions on an EU Framework strategy for Roma integration up to 2020: Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, [EPSCO](#)

EUR-Lex (2000), *Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin*, Official Journal L 180, 19/07/2000 P. 0022 - 0026; [EUR-Lex](#)

European Union (2011), *Working together for Roma inclusion - The EU Framework explained*, Brussels: European Union, [EC Europa EU](#)

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Police Association (2014), Why “Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller”? [GRTPA](#)

Hancock, Ian F. (2006), “On Romani Origins and Identity” in Adrian Marsh and Elin Strand [eds.], *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested*, Istanbul and London: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul and I. B. Tauris, pp.69-92

Jones, G., Powell, R. & Reakes, S. (2006), *Research into the Education of Gypsy, Traveller Children in Wales*, National Research for Educational Research



Office for National Statistics (2014), *2011 Census Analysis; What does the 2011 Census tell us about the Characteristics of Gypsy or Irish Travellers in England and Wales?* [Office for National Statistics](#)

Welsh Government (2011/2013), ‘*Travelling to a Better Future*’- A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan, National Assembly for Wales, [Travelling to a Better Future Publication](#)

Welsh Government (2014), *Travelling Together: Resources to Promote the Integration of Gypsy and Traveller Culture into the National Curriculum*, Guidance document no:123/2014

List of panel participants

Dr Thomas Acton - Professor Emeritus in Romani Studies | University of Greenwich, London | Corvinus University, Budapest

Isaac Blake - Director | The Romani Cultural and Arts Company

Dr Ethel Brooks - Professor in Women's & Gender Studies | University of the Arts London; Rutgers University NJ, USA

Dr Colin Clark - Professor of Sociology | University of the West of Scotland

Lesley Griffiths, AM - AM | Minister for Communities & Tackling Poverty, Welsh National Assembly

Dr Daniel Baker - Romani visual artist and theorist

Dr Adrian Marsh - International Romani Studies Network | Researcher in Romani Studies | Romani Early Years Education & Care

Julie Morgan, AM - Chairperson of the Cross-Party Group, Gypsies & Travellers, Welsh National Assembly

PC Petr Torak - Deputy Chairperson | Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association (GRTPA)

Tanja Vasic, MA - Roma Education expert | PhD candidate, University of Sussex

Dr Sarah Cemlyn - Research Fellow | School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol



ROMANI
CULTURAL & ARTS COMPANY

