

“BEING WITH OUR OWN KIND”: THE CONTEXTS OF GYPSY-TRAVELLER ELDERS’ SOCIAL AND LEISURE ENGAGEMENT

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Introduction

Gypsies and Travellers are amongst the oldest and yet most invisible minority ethnic communities in Britain (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). Romany Gypsies, a people of Indic origin whose Romani language still retains strong links with Hindi (Kenrick, 2004), are first recorded as entering Britain in the early Sixteenth Century (Mayall, 2004). Since that time and despite the repeated enactment of draconian legislation (at times aimed at enforcing expulsion from the Kingdom on pain of death, imprisonment or torture) the population has retained a constant presence in Britain. Numerous historical records exist, recording both housed and travelling populations of Gypsies, typically engaged in entertainment and/or seasonal farm labour, a pattern which continued for over four hundred years, changing only with the advent of the post-modern world which emerged after the upheaval of the Second World War (Clark and Greenfields, 2006; Mayall, 1995). It is believed that until the early-mid 20th Century the majority of this population resided in caravans or wagons and travelled for seasonal work purposes, although records (e.g. poor relief applications and Census data) indicate that many families experienced intermittent movement in and out of conventional housing in response to urban employment opportunities, illness and disability or severe weather conditions (Mayall, 2004).

Irish Travellers, an ethnic population distinct from Gypsy Travellers who are indigenous to Eire (Hayes, 2006; Helleiner, 2003), are known to have nomadised between Ireland and Britain as early as the mid-1600s. An increasing population of Irish Travellers are recorded as making their homes in England and Wales (and to a lesser extent Scotland)

from the late 1800s onwards. Significant waves of Irish Traveller settlement appear to have occurred in the 1950s, associated with post-War employment opportunities and again since the 1990s in response to the worsening situation in Ireland which has resulted in considerable sedentarisation pressures (Power, 2004).

Over the past twenty years Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers (and since late 2008 indigenous Scottish Travellers) have, in respect of their distinct histories, cultures and practices, been recognised as minority ethnic communities in law (CRE, 2006), and they are thus subject to (limited) protection from racism and discrimination under the Race Relations Acts (Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009). It has been estimated that there are 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers living in the UK (CRE, 2006), a population similar in size to the Sikh community in Britain. The percentage of those who live in housing may be as high as two-thirds, with some families having been resident in 'conventional' accommodation for several generations (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). However, in the popular imagination, a synecdotal relationship exists between Gypsies, Travellers and 'nomadism'. In fact, whilst academics and front line service providers regularly report that *some* clients and respondents (particularly the elderly and those with health problems) have willingly exchanged the hardship of roadside or site life for running water, convenient modes of heating and conveniently located laundry equipment, the pace of transfer from sites/nomadising into public sector housing has frequently been driven by the shortage of authorised (lawful) sites, difficulties gaining planning permission for private sites, and the virtual outlawing of nomadism following the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (Crawley, 2004; CRE, 2006; Richardson, 2007). Several studies have reported Gypsies and Travellers referring bitterly to the fact that "it isn't possible to travel any longer" (Niner, 2003: pp. 56–57) or "they won't let us live how we want" (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). In some localities in which the authors of this chapter (and other colleagues) have undertaken research, as many as 75 per cent of housed respondents to Gypsy Traveller Accommodation (and other) Needs Assessments (GTANA)¹ reported having moved from caravans into 'bricks and mortar' as a result of site shortages and a lack of suitable alternative accommodation. Inevitably the rapid pace of change has had significant (and often negative) impacts on both socio-cultural and economic practices for Gypsies and Travellers, and although not subject to any formal research, indications exist of parallel changes in communal social and leisure activities. It is this latter element (which is subject to analysis for the first time in Britain), which we consider within this paper. In contemplating this topic the authors are drawing upon emerging data, and as such this paper should be treated as a 'work in progress'.

Older Gypsies and Travellers

As a result of the emerging body of evidence gathered whilst undertaking the administrative exercise of GTANAs, it is possible for the first time to both analyse variance in access to services and needs amongst differing age cohorts of Gypsies and Travellers, as well as explore a rich body of qualitative data on community practices of these populations. The policy focus on Gypsies and Travellers has, until very recently, concentrated exclusively on accommodation issues (Greenfields, 2009; Richardson, 2006) or health matters (Matthews, 2008) and exceptionally little has been written about the needs of older Gypsies and Travellers.

Cemlyn *et al.* (2009) in a review undertaken on behalf of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) summarise the limited literature on elders within these communities. The most common reference pertaining to the elderly is that of the discrepancy in life expectancy between Gypsies and Travellers and 'mainstream' populations. It is frequently reported that Gypsy and Traveller women live 12 years less than women in the general population and Gypsy and Traveller men ten years less than men in other ethnic groups (Crawley, 2004; CRE, 2006). In the absence of better data, these statistics have been extrapolated from data on Irish Travellers based upon health surveys and census data from Ireland (Barry *et al.*, 1987). The life expectancy of Irish Travellers in Ireland is still disproportionately inequitable, with recent findings from Eire indicating that a mere thirty per cent of Travellers live beyond their sixtieth birthday (Brack and Monaghan, 2007). Although no comparable data set exists in Britain, Baker and Leeds REC (2005) found shockingly that a mere 2.5% of Gypsies and Travellers in that city were aged over sixty, compared to an overall Leeds average life expectancy of 78.2 years. In the light of possible differentials in life expectancy by ethnicity it is noteworthy that a relatively high percentage of respondents to the Leeds study were Irish Travellers. Given these communities' decreased life-expectancy it is perhaps unsurprisingly reported that Gypsies and Travellers "considered themselves elderly at fifty" (Bromley Gypsy and Traveller Project Annual Report, 1996).

Cemlyn, *et al.* (2009) state that, despite undertaking an extensive literature review, they were able to discover very few reports and documents which referred to the needs of elderly Gypsies and Travellers. Of these, Power (2004) refers in passing to the high levels of educational exclusion faced by older Traveller women and only one 'mainstream' research publication (commissioned by Age Concern) was found which included Romany Gypsy participants in a study of older people's experience of poverty (Scharf *et al.*, 2006). Thus in the absence of other data sources, references to accessibility of leisure and other services, social

support and accommodation needs of older people become available through excavation of GTANA statistics and qualitative data gathered within such studies. The patterns emerging from these GTANAs are useful in enabling us to begin to build a picture of need and also the demographic profile of Gypsy and Traveller populations. Of particular interest in this context are statistics on household demographics (frequently showing multi-generational households) and some findings (dependent upon a number of variables such as type of accommodation and access to services) which challenge the perception that only a tiny minority of Gypsies and Travellers live until pensionable age. The majority of GTANAs moreover, ask participants to discuss their 'traveling patterns' and whilst older respondents are less likely to report travel for employment purposes, a significant proportion (decreasing with age) refer to travel to 'horse fairs' and other cultural events with their extended family.

Barriers to social inclusion of older Gypsies and Travellers

Not only do most Gypsies and Travellers experience a greatly reduced life expectancy but also significantly worse health than comparable populations, with morbidity rates in excess of age-sex matched comparators (Matthews, 2008; Parry *et al.*, 2004). In addition, barriers to accessing health and social care services (Greenfields, 2008a; Matthews, 2008; Parry *et al.*, 2004) coupled with an extremely high illiteracy rate amongst older members of these communities (Cemlyn, *et al.*, 2009) mean that older Travellers are likely to have untreated health conditions, and frequently do not have access to full information pertaining to support services or options which are available to them. A culturally fatalistic approach to ageing, poor health and disability which has been noted by a number of health care professionals (e.g Parry *et al.*, 2004; Van Cleemput *et al.*, 2007; Dion, 2008) also has significant impacts on how older Gypsies contemplate their life as they age, their self-image, and willingness to seek medical advice for treatable conditions. Indeed, actively seeking to engage with doctors and social care professionals is frequently regarded as tantamount to inviting professional interference in one's life or a diagnosis of a fatal condition (see Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009; Matthews, 2008; Van Cleemput *et al.*, 2007). For Gypsies and Travellers this combination has inevitable implications for engagement in later-life leisure activities and generally for community well-being.

A particular gender dimension exists in relation to older women's opportunities for leisure activities. Not only do cultural proscriptions exist in relation to female roles², but even in later life when less rigid 'reputation' concerns exist, and childcare responsibilities are few, women are often cast in the role of matriarch with all the responsibilities

that entails. Richardson *et al.* (2007) reported that women participating in a focus group discussed the ways in which they were particularly affected by bereavement and the loss of family members as, with short generations and early death common in their community, they had fewer older women to turn to for support, friendship and advice. Two participants in their early 50s were the oldest females surviving in their families and this in turn limited their own access to support at times of need: "I suppose with us, when you lose your mother you're head of the family, you've lost your mentor, so you're having to fill a pair of shoes as well as grieve a pair of shoes" (Richardson *et al.*, 2007: p. 112). The complex interplay of cultural practices leads therefore to a situation where women are effectively able to utilise their leisure time only in extended family or single-gender groupings and then only in the space which exists between family responsibilities. The pre-occupation with modesty impacts too on types of activities available to women, so that for example (in contrast to Roma, Gypsy and Traveller boys who list football and boxing as favoured leisure activities) few Gypsy and Traveller women appear to engage in sporting activities such as running or swimming which would involve not only being (un)dressed in skimpy clothing but also potentially transgress social expectations of gendered activities as well as exposing them to the 'risk' of contact with non-related males. In this way, for many Gypsy and Traveller women, their leisure practices are as constrained and melded by cultural practices as are those of women from other more visible minority ethnic communities (see further: De Knop *et al.*, 1996; Elling and Knoppers, 2005; Haw, 1998).

A lifetime of experience of hostility and rejection from sedentary populations and lack of familiarity with 'gorje/country people'³ are factors which are also likely to have a negative impact on Gypsies' and Travellers' willingness to engage with mainstream leisure activities or take-up of services offered to older people. Research and policy studies have repeatedly found that Gypsies and Travellers experience hostility, racism and discrimination in access to services (e.g. Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009) and are the minority community most likely to be 'disliked' or 'feared' by surrounding populations. Stonewall (2003) found that a third of the population surveyed admitted to prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers. The impact of such wide-spread discrimination is profound, not merely in terms of negative psychological impacts for those experiencing such prejudice. Numerous GTANA respondents (e.g. Greenfields, *et al.*, 2007) from across broad age-ranges report that, as a secondary effect of their negative experiences, they are less inclined to engage with other communities and tend to expect hostile reactions from those with whom they come into contact. In addition, considerable numbers of GTANA respondents, when asked which council services

they have accessed, volunteer examples of discriminatory behaviour enacted by service providers or staff when seeking to access leisure facilities.

Such experiences produce predictably negative outcomes in terms of reluctance of Gypsies and Travellers to access mainstream facilities, encouraging them to withdraw into mono-ethnic social and leisure engagements (e.g. Roma/Traveller Football Teams⁴). Thus an unintended consequence of casual discrimination or *gorje* stereotyping of Gypsies and Travellers can be the loss of opportunities for social engagement and the development of community cohesion which can arise through contact between Gypsies and Travellers and other communities. Ironically, the hostility and suspicion which exacerbates the tendency for communities to lead such *parallel lives* (Cantle, 2001:11) is frequently media-driven and insidious, as Gypsies and Travellers, along with asylum-seekers, were the only groups in a survey by Valentine and McDonald (2004) with whom the interviewees had no *personal* contact and yet whom they felt qualified to criticise.

Accordingly, residents of Gypsy sites are therefore not only likely to be physically isolated from mainstream leisure and other services as a result of planning regulations (nationally the majority of sites are either on the far edges of built up areas or in rural locations with limited access to public transport (Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009), but also excluded from accessing services through fear of hostility from sedentary populations. For Gypsies and Travellers in housing, whilst theoretically better placed to access activities and leisure opportunities, the factors outlined above, and a preference for 'being with our own kind' militates against take-up of services unless a large enough core membership of Gypsies and Travellers exists to provide a sense of cultural familiarity and personal safety (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). Indeed within Gypsy and Traveller culture, for an individual to engage in an activity on her or his own (whether leisure related or educational) would require significant self-confidence: in addition to the barriers considered above, such a person would usually be regarded as 'odd' or suspicious — 'mebbe they got something to hide going off of their own without family'. To wish to socialise away from other community members may potentially invite concern as to their motives and behaviour in a largely inward looking collectivist culture which regards individualism with considerable ambivalence (see Clark and Greenfields, 2006).

Older people in Gypsy and Traveller culture

Within traditional Gypsy and Traveller societies, older people are overwhelmingly afforded extremely high status, and are largely responsible for negotiating or taking community decisions. When a

spokesperson is required for a family group, whilst a younger individual's skills in literacy or dealing with bureaucracy may be utilised, it is still the 'elders' of a community who will hold the most power when decisions need to be made (see Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009; Clark and Greenfields, 2006). Hand in hand with respect for the authority of elderly community members lies a contract of responsibility for their well-being, with children, grandchildren and other relatives ensuring that care is provided to older relatives. GTANA and focus group evidence indicates complex webs of care-giving and receipt with travelling patterns, employment take-up and place of residence often considered carefully amongst groups of relatives to ensure that parents or grandparents are at all times supported by family members. The predominant preference for living in kin-groupings (particularly when resident on sites) and the socially mandated support for elderly people, means that ageing Gypsies and Travellers are rarely left socially isolated (unlike many older adults identified within Government research undertaken for the Department of Work and Pensions (2005) and Social Exclusion Unit (Barnes *et al.*, 2006). Accordingly many Gypsies and Travellers experience independent ageing within supportive communities, and are able to access practical support and personal care which is considerably superior to that available through statutory providers. Their ability to do so is predominantly predicated by the presence of a close-knit community in immediate proximity, rather than by any structures or support available through state mechanisms.

Because for Gypsies and Travellers it would be regarded as shameful and a breach of the social and moral intergenerational contract to expect non-relatives to care for older people — “you couldn't put an old person in a home you would be ladged [shamed] to death” (Home and Greenfields, 2006: p. 39) — lack of social contact with relatives is rare and leisure activities tend to focus around 'Gypsy specific' events where intergenerational and intra-community networks gather. Thus for older community members the support of family members is particularly important in enabling them to access such culturally appropriate leisure activities, especially if these take place in outdoor (often relatively isolated) venues with poor public transport links (such as when families attend at traditional 'horse fairs' or 'go to the races' on important dates in both the horse-racing and Gypsy calendar such as 'Derby Day' at Epsom).

For elderly Gypsies and Travellers who are isolated from their relatives (whether from personal circumstances such as childlessness, or external factors such as state accommodation policies⁵), the depth of social exclusion and vulnerability is profound and long-lasting, often leading to significant depression, decrease in health status and a risk of premature mortality (Parry *et al.*, 2004; Van Cleemput *et al.*, 2007).

Anecdotal evidence (see Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009) suggests that some older Gypsies and Travellers who have made an unwelcome transition into housing have committed suicide as a result of attempting to come to terms with unaccustomed social isolation and living in housing after a lifetime in caravans and trailers. For many other older Gypsies and Travellers in such tragically isolated circumstances, literacy problems, lack of knowledge of available community care services combined with fear of the consequences of contact with agencies perceived of as potentially hostile, leads to insularity and lack of take-up of benefits, support to which they are entitled (see further Cemlyn, 2009) or engagement with social activities provided by statutory and voluntary agencies.

Culture and leisure

The cultural importance for both sited and housed Gypsies and Travellers of attendance at socio-cultural events cannot be over-emphasised, particularly where there is otherwise limited contact with other community members (for example as a result of relatively long-term residence in housing or living some distance from kin). For Travellers and Gypsies of all ages, discourse pertaining to 'travelling' to fairs where they can spend time "catching up" or "living like we used to" remains inextricably linked to notions and retention of 'cultural authenticity' (Kabachnik, 2009) and renewal of bonding capital (Putnam, 2000). Not only does the travel to such traditional meeting places often take place within relatively large groups of relatives and friends who participate in the journey as part of the leisure experience, but once settled onto the fair site, activities are overwhelmingly kin-based. Typically these will involve activities such as trading in horses, dogs, harness and other accoutrements of business and leisure activities associated with Gypsy and Traveller lifestyles.

Other core activities participated in by attendees include engaging in discussion and gossip about relatives, friends and matters of importance to the community in general; observing or joining in music and dance sessions; and (amongst women), the intra-community trading and purchase of linen, crystal and china. These latter artefacts, fine specimens of which can be exceptionally sought after and expensive, are displayed in the majority of Gypsy and Traveller homes (whether caravans or 'bricks and mortar' accommodation) as both a cultural marker and a link with the way of life of earlier generations of women.

Indeed for older people, the opportunities afforded by such events to reconnect with relatives, friends and peers who are perhaps seen only once or twice a year and to indulge in encouraging marriage 'matches' between eligible families, perform a profoundly significant role in their leisure activities and social cosmology, reinforcing community bonding



Horse trading, Stowe fair. (Photos by Margaret Greenfields, previously published in Clarke and Greenfields, 2006)

capital and strengthening links which may otherwise potentially weaken in the absence of opportunities to travel or co-reside together.

Despite the clearly expressed preference for leisure activities which involve members of their own community, preferably within a culture-specific setting, inevitably there is some overlap in use of services provided for the 'mainstream' populations. However, based upon self-reporting, this is surprising low and where such engagement occurs it is more likely to involve very occasional family-based outings — for example a family going to a swimming pool or community centre for a specific purpose and the older person engaging with the activity as part of a larger kin network; or housed Gypsies and Travellers, who are settled into 'bricks and mortar' and who have inter-ethnic friend-ship patterns within their local area, going swimming with a mixed group or individual friends. Older participants in a range of GTANAs who were asked to refer to their use of local authority provided facilities (e.g. activities such as swimming; keep fit classes; use of library services) reported extremely low levels of use of such facilities. Where library services were used, the problematic of high rates of adult illiteracy (Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009), which is excessive amongst older Gypsies and Travellers who often have had no or very limited schooling, creates a significant barrier to access. Use of library facilities therefore tended to be in relation to inter-generational learning of IT skills (although this was reported by less than 5% of total respondents across nine localities); or attendance at exhibitions e.g. local history displays which involve pictures or information pertaining to Gypsy and Traveller culture. A slightly higher percentage reported occasional use of swimming or gym facilities (predominantly amongst the 50–55 age range and then usually with several other relatives) or attendance at leisure or sports centres to support grandchildren taking classes. Single-gender facilities were regarded as highly important by both men and women in ensuring that sporting activities which were on offer would be acceptable to them; but, broadly speaking, the suggestion that individuals would wish to engage with local or health authority provided classes was regarded with some surprise as "we don't tend to mix with Gorjes".

Indeed, perhaps partially in response to experiences of multi-factorial exclusion, racism and discrimination (although also as a corollary of membership of a strongly endogamous, kin-based social system), Gypsies and Travellers overwhelmingly express a preference for social and leisure activities which enable them to participate in closed networks with rich bonding capital opportunities (Schuller, 2007). In this way, in common with many other Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, thick layers of intra-group trust are enhanced, often at the expense of cross-community contacts and community cohesion initiatives, as marginalised minorities 'vote with their feet' and re-

emphasise the prominence and superiority of their own practices, often negatively contrasting the behaviours and interests of external groups. Thus as one interviewee noted, “most gorgers on my estate are filthy dirty and would argue over a penny piece”; whilst others commented on the fact that “[non Travellers] aren’t like us, they neglect their children and old people — we don’t want nothing to do with them”, comments which essentially mirror the hostile stereotypes levelled by non-Gypsies and Travellers against their neighbours, such as “dirty Gypos”, or “they are always unruly, rude, shouting and fighting”.

Ultimately, drawing closer to one’s own kind can, as referred to above, lead to the situation that “many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives [that] often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote meaningful exchange” (Cantle 2001: p. 9). The implications of such mutual withdrawal from community engagement are therefore profound, in terms of equality of opportunity of access to leisure activity for Gypsies and Travellers as well as the potential weakening of local community cohesion agendas if many members of the travelling communities decline to engage in mainstream social and leisure activities. Accordingly, without significant positive inter-ethnic social contact the potential exists for a media-enhanced, mutual escalation of fear (see further CRE, 2006), and the negative ‘othering’ of communities with whom little personal contact has occurred (Cemlyn, 2008).

Breaking down barriers

Given the considerable cultural hurdles to be transcended in terms of encouraging greater social and leisure contact between Gypsies, Travellers and sedentary populations, there is a clear need for policy strategies and approaches which can assist in breaking down barriers. In the remainder of this chapter we therefore outline some current practices and approaches to engaging with the Gypsy and Traveller population which emerging data suggests are beneficial in advancing a social inclusion and community cohesion strategy.

The influence of gender and culture in providing (or limiting) opportunities for Gypsies and Travellers and surrounding sedentary communities to experience each other’s culture is profound, with older women even less likely to experience intra-ethnic contact than are men or young people, as a result of their largely home and family based activities (see Cemlyn, 2009; Greenfields, 2008b; Richardson *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly approaches which will engage Gypsy and Traveller women in social and leisure activities present specific problems for the policy community. As noted above, amongst members of the Traveller community, in contrast to the pre-eminent role of family and intra-community leisure

activities, engagement in more open 'interest-based' groups which provide a forum for the development of bridging capital is rare — unless a specifically 'Gypsy/Traveller interest' is identified as a core element of the activity. Whilst for men, certain activities transcend cultures, for example, 'trotting' horses, boxing or other (predominantly masculine oriented) sports, the leisure opportunities which women avail themselves of appear fewer, and thus a different approach is required to engage them.

Walseth (2008) discusses the influence of bonding capital on BME young women engaging in sporting activities, exploring the manner in which shared interests across groupings can lead to a greater understanding of other cultures and people who are 'different' from oneself. In order to build such bridging capital (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000) locations of contact must first exist. Thus, in the present context, this will require providers of social, sporting and leisure activities to both contemplate alternative approaches to service delivery, and to be willing to work in partnership with Gypsies and Travellers to provide services which are of interest to their older people. The often inward facing nature of Gypsy and Traveller society, coupled with significant rates of illiteracy and the gendered approaches to activity outlined above, means that a lack of targeted services for elders covertly excludes many from engagement with mainstream activities.

Emerging evidence from GTANAs has, however, found that whilst women may be reluctant to engage in leisure activities on their own behalf, they are more likely to participate in family-based activities or learning opportunities which benefit their children and grandchildren. Indeed many female participants in research have commented that their contacts with primary schools are their first (potentially non-threatening) experience of meeting people from diverse backgrounds. Case work undertaken by the authors of this chapter and their colleagues (see further Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009; Clark and Greenfields, 2006) has led to findings that schools and associated community networks can fulfil an important role in developing inter-ethnic and inter-generational locations of contact. For some older men and women, being invited into schools or community groups (e.g. the Women's Institute; BME Fora) to talk about their traditional skills, crafts and life experiences of travelling (in some cases in discussing their childhood in horse-drawn wagons) can not only encourage other communities to explicitly recognise their history, their status as minority ethnic groups and the uniqueness of their knowledge, but can also enhance their grandchildren's pride in their heritage.

The '*Ghetto Warriors: Minority Boxers in Britain*' exhibition hosted by the Jewish Museum in Camden Town, London between May and September 2007 attracted considerable critical acclaim for the way in



*Image from the Ghetto Warriors Exhibition
(by Martin Power)*

which diverse communities including Gypsies, Travellers, Caribbean, Muslim and Jewish were represented within the exhibition. Attendees at the exhibition were encouraged to participate in debate and view a film which outlined the history of minority boxers' engagement with the sport as a mechanism for social mobility and integration, as well as seeing artefacts relating to famous minority boxers. For many Gypsy and Traveller community members, for example those who went as a party organised by the Irish Traveller Movement Britain, it was not only their first contact with the Jewish community but also an opportunity to express their pride in their sporting prowess. Older Gypsies and Travellers (both males and females) were present at the exhibition and were provided with a forum to explore similarities between their own community and that of other migrants who had in the past quite literally fought for acceptance.

The development of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month (GRTHM), a Department for Children, Schools and Families supported initiative which began in 2007, has paid dividends in terms of community cohesion and enhanced understanding of the culture, music and practices of travelling people. Developing from a small-scale

initiative in Brent (Inner London) in 2003 which aimed to enhance the social inclusion of a local minority community, by June 2009 (the most recent GRTHM) hundreds of leisure activities were taking place across Britain, with the explicit aim of connecting diverse communities and generations. Some events under the overall umbrella of GRTHM are targeted at the young, others at elders, but a wide range of activities from oral history workshops to step-dancing, peg-making, traditional song workshops and flower-wreath weaving have and do feature at localities across the UK. In this way, the leisure activities which are internally practised and valued by Gypsies and Travellers (and often passed down from elders to young people) are shared with mainstream communities in a manner which supports the development of cultural pride and the mainstreaming of awareness of both Traveller's leisure needs and the skills they have to share with others.

A small but increasing trend has been noted for exhibitions in local libraries (such as the one initiated in Surrey which has a large settled Gypsy and Traveller population) which display historical photographs of Travellers camping in local areas, and includes transcripts of oral history accounts of travelling and working in the locality. The location of such exhibitions attracts considerable attention from both Gypsies and Travellers (many of whom will travel from far afield to view the exhibits) and other local populations, as well as ensuring that meaningful contact occurs between populations. School groups may be taken to attend the exhibition and debate frequently occurs between attendees from diverse backgrounds, as library users are often intrigued and interested to meet the descendents of people pictured in old photographs, or even to have the opportunity of discussing the lived experiences of interviewees, many of whom are frequently to be found browsing such exhibitions with their relatives and friends.

Similarly, one and two day events at museums of Rural Life pertaining to Gypsy and Traveller culture, frequently culminating in dance displays and traditional music performed by Romany, Traveller or East European Roma bands, have become more common across England over the past few years. Such events permit both local populations and visiting tourists the opportunity to participate in inter-active events such as displays of traditional craftsmanship (e.g. wood carving, wagon restoration and painting, wax flower making etc.). Here Gypsies and Travellers display their cultural heritage and pride in their community in settings which are distinct from the large scale 'horse fairs' where non-Gypsy and Traveller visitors are often few, or who experience nervousness or embarrassment at seeking out and asking questions of Gypsy and Traveller community members who are 'at home' with their extended family and friends in a strong cultural enclave.

Conclusion

Whilst it is still early days to evaluate the success of such inter-community events, it has been acknowledged by community groups, local authorities, venues where such activities are held and indeed funders such as the Big Lottery who are pro-active in supporting Gypsy and Traveller agencies, that such small local actions as those outlined above are generally well-attended and evaluated positively by members of all communities. Accordingly, whilst it may be argued that only those individuals who are well disposed towards Gypsy and Traveller populations, or who are at least open minded to the possibility of finding out more about their distinct cultural heritage, will actively seek out or attend events at museums or cultural centres, the increasing diversification of such initiatives and the possibility of 'encountering the other' through a casual visit to a library or supporting a child at a local school goes some way to encouraging greater inter-cultural knowledge. Thus, both local initiatives and the well-resourced GRTHM offer early steps towards developing bridging capital between Travellers and diverse populations. In this way the growth of enhanced cultural awareness and the increasing presence of '*gorjes*' and 'country people' at such events bode well for the future of inclusive leisure activities for elders from all communities.

And yet the story does not, and must not, end there, as the shifting focus of leisure studies to include 'non-mainstream' (and particularly non-sporting) activities, and the opportunities afforded by greater recognition of diverse community needs creates, for the first time, an opportunity for practitioners to explore the hidden leisure requirements of Gypsy and Traveller elders. It may be, contrary to all (current) expectations, that should further research be undertaken with members of these minority communities (in a way similar to the explorations of the needs of the South Asian or Caribbean communities) older ladies will express a previously unacknowledged desire to play badminton — should the context be supportive and culturally appropriate, or elderly gentlemen will take up cycling or vegetable gardening. The fact remains that, to date, the leisure activities of Gypsies and Travellers and the needs and desires of these communities remain largely a closed book to service providers, researchers and the policy community. That this volume has provided a space to even contemplate the tacit (self-)exclusion of this population from leisure discourse is innovative in the extreme, indicating that leisure studies has come of age in welcoming all those who seek to enjoy a healthy, happy, inclusive older-age.

Notes

- ¹ Following considerable political and media concern about the growth of unauthorised encampments by Gypsies and Travellers, a specific amendment to the Housing Act 2004 was implemented which required all local authorities with housing responsibility to consider the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in separate Gypsy, Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs). Emerging Government guidance on how such assessments should be undertaken and an increasing emphasis on exploring how best to meet the health and educational needs of Gypsies and Travellers has led to local authorities undertaking a de facto full needs assessment of families included in the GTAAAs, hence the alternative acronym (GTANA) Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation and other Needs Assessments. See further, Clark and Greenfields (2006); Greenfields (2008a); Greenfields and Home (2006).
- ² For example, expectations of provision of practical and emotional support for adult daughters and grandchildren and a reluctance to 'mix' with unrelated males. Even purely social contact other than in chaperoned circumstances can, for some traditional families, compromise both a woman's reputation and that of her relatives (see Clark and Greenfields, 2006; Richardson, *et al.*, 2007).
- ³ *Gorje* is the Romany Gypsy term for people who are not of their own minority ethnic community. Irish Travellers tend to use the term *countryman/woman* (regardless of whether the person spoken of dwells in an urban or rural location) to denote someone who isn't an Irish Traveller.
- ⁴ See <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/cyberpilots/football/roundup.htm> (Friends, Families and Travellers' Young Gypsy-Traveller Cyberpilots website) for examples of Traveller/Roma soccer team fixtures.
- ⁵ For example, inequalities in the provision of appropriate adaptations to caravans, or failure of planning permission for bungalow accommodation which would enable older people to remain living on sites if they so desire can lead to transfer into housing for disabled or older adults. GTANA evidence has found significant numbers of older people reporting transfers to housing as a result of increasing disability, age or the requirement to live near to relatives where inadequate site provision exists. See further, Cemlyn *et al.*, 2009.

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