

# **“Social innovation in social intervention and the politics of need interpretation: A local case study of Roma inclusion ”**

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**Extended abstract of the draft paper<sup>1</sup>**

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Roma migration thus present us with an ‘extreme case’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006)<sup>2</sup> to study if and how governmental bodies and service providers open up their institutions in order to guarantee social cohesion and fight against marginalization. Social innovation is often invoked when dealing with the arrival of migrants in countries implementing austerity policies. Under pressure to respond to changing socio-economic and cultural conditions, governmental bodies try to answer demands for enlarged public participation within available resources. Generally, the pressure to redefine understandings and procedures only arises when new communities are numerically significant and their numbers burden the system.

In exceptional cases like those of Roma migrants, however, the challenge to redefine the working of governmental bodies is perceived immediately, even when groups are not numerically significant. It is widespread through popular media and well-documented by academics and practitioners that the visible presence of Roma migrants in west-European countries gives rise to often heated discussions about the impact of Roma migrants on the institutions of the welfare state and local social cohesion. Such concerns can be understood as questions about “what do they need?” and “what are they entitled to?” (questions of distribution), which cannot be detached from question on the identity of the subject at hand i.e.: “who are they?” (questions of recognition) and questions about involvement in deliberating and/or communicating policies like “who can speak on behalf of the Roma?” (questions of representation).

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<sup>1</sup> As the authors are still in the process of finalizing their paper for publication, they preferred to not yet make their draft available for the wider public. They shared their full draft with the session organizers for discussion.

<sup>2</sup> “Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: p.13). Tensions and dynamics that are also present in similar cases are more clearly articulated and more dramatic.

In an ideal situation, social innovative initiatives would facilitate social learning processes that provide answers to these questions and transform the social relations between members of the Roma community and mainstream society to allow marginalized groups to better alleviate their needs (Moulaert et al., 2013) and participate as peers in society.

The paper aims to develop an analytical framework that allows a critical appreciation of social innovation and social work practices of Roma inclusion that takes into account the impact of (welfare) state reform, considerations of social justice and the position of policy subjects in the process of naming and claiming social needs. It is argued that the work of Nancy Fraser on 'politics of need interpretation' (1989) and redistribution, recognition and representation as the 'three dimensions of social justice' (2008, Fraser & Honneth, 2003) provides a normative criterion ('participatory parity') and analytical tools to do this. Drawing on other literature in welfare-, social innovation- and Romani studies such a framework is developed and used to analyse the emergence and developments of Roma engagement strategies in Manchester, the Romanian Roma in the Gorton South area in particular.

The authors analysed relevant minutes from various Manchester City Council (MCC) committees and the meetings of the Roma Strategy Group (RSG) as well as the informational materials produced by the International New Arrivals, Supplementary Schools and Travellers (INA/TT/S) within MCC and by the third sector agency BHA for Equality (BHA) about their work with Roma. Interviews with relevant actors in the engagement with Roma in Manchester have been carried out and analysed. They comprised officers from the MCC Regeneration and INA/TT/S teams, members of BHA and both the research and outreach staff at MigRom<sup>3</sup>. The latter is an FP7 funded research project on Roma migration, which includes academics, a local authority, an umbrella of Roma NGO's and Roma community members who are employed as outreach workers and research assistants. It must be noted that MigRom and its parent cluster of research, the Romani Project at the University of Manchester, have been not simply observers but active actors in the development of a Roma strategy in Manchester since its beginning in 2009. Two of the authors of this paper, Leggio and Matras, are involved in this process. The division of labour between the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/>

different authors and the discussion amongst them made it possible to combine practical knowledge with an outsiders' perspective.

The first part of the analysis shows how the Manchester Roma engagement strategies did not stem from need claims voiced by members of this particular Roma community. A discourse opposing the visible presence of Romanian Roma (and false criminalizing discourses) put pressure on the MCC to question whether their approach of 'openness to and equal treatment of migrants' should be applied on Roma. Under the circumstances the city council felt obliged to recognize the presence of Romanian Roma in Gorton South as a 'political issue' and set up the Roma Strategy Group. It is further described how different actors offered expertise in a struggle over the legitimacy to redefine the needs of Roma and the neighbourhood. In the process both the guarantee of access to mainstream institutions and the importance of mediating the relationships between the Roma community and the public institutions, including exceptional controlling measures, were taken on by MCC and its partners. It was flagged that both cultural misrecognition and a lack of community representatives were important thresholds to Roma emancipation. Plans were set up and some non-profit organisations were empowered by the local authorities to mediate these relations. Other actors got or stayed involved through different resources.

Towards the end of 2011 the Roma Strategy was gradually downscaled, as there were sufficient indications that the targets established at the beginning of the experience were being met. At that time cuts in public spending were increasingly hitting local authorities (Lupton et al., 2015).

Mid 2013 Roma needs and corresponding (social work) approaches in Manchester regained political status after MigRom made it part of its activities to subject council minutes and documents about a project of BHA on thresholds to Roma school attendance to the scrutiny of the Roma community and academics. They critiqued this project for framing Roma as 'needy subjects' (Timmer, 2010) in order to secure funding in times of budget cuts. Discussions revolved mainly about the question whether Roma school attendance and safeguarding young girls, who might leave school because of early marriage, should be addressed by social work as a 'Roma problem', related to Roma culture, or not. The discussions show tensions between different strands of Roma engagement in Manchester performed by alliances of actors who both claim expertise (practical

and/or academic) and legitimacy because of their personal and working relationships with members of the Roma community.

The paper describes the different struggles, discourses and arguments in the politics of need interpretation and tries to assess which approaches in Roma engagement come closest to the normative criterion of 'participatory parity' and what is identified in the literature as social innovation. Based on the case study it is argued that innovative models for social inclusion should make it possible that group representatives should scrutinize group specific social work approaches in order to avoid the reproduction of stigmatization and cultural misrecognition and cultural essentialism. This implies capacity building and facilitating exchange.

In the discussion it is argued that the discourse oriented approach of 'politics of need interpretation' provides a welcome contribution to the study of social innovation because and takes into account dimensions of social struggles, (welfare) state reform and social justice which are often overlooked in social innovation literature and practice.

On the level of the case study it is pointed out that the relative good access to social rights (like housing) and the MCC's commitment to include migrant communities should be appreciated as crucial contextual factors for this rather positive case of Roma in engagement. Further comparative case research could deepen our understanding of important context factors and different ways of how institutional context and welfare reform can facilitate or complicate Roma engagement.

From a theoretical point of view the discussion of this case shows that Fraser's analytical tools, developed through the study of feminist politics, should be applied in a nuanced and context sensitive manner. Suggestions are made to make her framework better suited to the study of social innovation in all its diversity.

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