Over the last two decades, globalization has resulted in an unprecedented level of migration flows due to the freedom of movement together with social exchange, arising from the improvement of both telecommunications, and, increasingly affordable travel. A striking feature of what has come to be termed the ‘new migration’, fuelled by post-Accession migrant flows, is precisely the dynamic ways in which some arriving migrants, such as the Poles, have capitalised on their transnational associations, via a most efficient ‘exploitation’ of existing/new social networks. On the other hand, such benefits appear to remain beyond the reach of other arriving groups, such as Polish Roma. This paper focuses on the narrativisation of the differing patterns of migratory experience of these two groups arriving to the UK, by utilising relevant elements of materials ([in]formal meetings, public events, focus groups, and interviews), from research projects and other interactions. It examines social, and other forms of capital formation, juxtaposed with their respective relationships’ to the ‘wider world’, and in so doing, illustrates how this enables these groups to occupy various forms of ‘space’, respectively. The ability to negotiate, to develop, as well as maintain their own social, cultural and political spaces can be seen as a measure of how successful such groups’ integration into society have been. However, a caveat needs to be noted here. Levels of success are contingent upon being able to circum-navigate a range of obstacles. Barriers faced by migrants, such as low levels of human capital, and, structural ones such as sedentarist discourses, collectively only serve to entrench further such groups’ experiences of discrimination and xenophobia. Recent indications inform that intolerance towards the ‘Other’ is on the rise across the EU. These are terrains well known to migrants, but more so, to Roma.

Key words: Polish Roma; Polish migrants; multiple discriminations; social capital; citizenship; cultural / political space; integration; boundaries; community and social cohesion
INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on a range of research projects and civil society engagements, in relation to interactions with Polish Roma and Polish migrants. In addition to this, where some of these interactions formed part of the author’s role in reporting throughout the year to an EU statutory body (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA]); on UK-based minority groups, and, their experiences of multiple discriminations. Throughout the various exchanges, it became clear regardless of setting, that these two as different groups, came to understand the migratory process as a series of inequitable experiences, though in differing ways. The reason for casting the heuristic net of Putnam’s social capital (2000; 2007) across so many sources is twofold. Firstly, it is to examine these two groups’ engagement, and their ability to form associational ties with mainstream society; and by extension their access to civil society, as distinct ethnic groups. Secondly, the notion of social capital production is often used synonymously with a ‘socially cohesive’ society, within the framework of current policy and practice, so this too will be examined (Zetter, et al, 2006).

The personal narratives used here, illustrate that although both groups might share a common language, and the freedom to move freely throughout the EU, they are otherwise very different indeed. Through an uneven dispersal of risk and opportunity and depending on their resources, assets, and links to wider community networks, mobility has been a driver for these groups. This is the case for both differential expectations and experiences, of migration to the UK. Nonetheless, mobility is one of the four founding principles of the European Union (EU), and by extension is presumed to provide all new members equitable access to full citizenship rights. It was greatly believed that wide-scale migration would result immediately after EU expansion (2004 and 2007), and this was indeed realised (Jordan & Duvall, 2003), and especially so for UK and Ireland.

Only the UK and Ireland (in addition to Sweden) did not apply restrictions on migrants entering their labour markets. The UK however imposed a last minute amendment to the transitional arrangements, which meant that migrants needed to register for the Workers Registration Scheme [WRS], whilst also introducing specific restrictions such as certain ‘out of work’ income-related welfare benefits. These were to cause persisting confusion and problems for many Polish and other A8 migrants who fell foul of the migratory experience for one reason or another, and spiralled towards poverty and destitution (Homeless Link, 2006; Garapich, 2010). Within just two years of the 2004 accession, social commentators and academics were already recognising the inequitability of the Post-Transitional
Arrangements, particularly where presumed citizenship rights were a central issue (for example, see: Currie, 2007; Anderson, 2006). This unremitting movement of labour added to a social transformation across Europe, within which, a different kind of 21st century migrant seemed to be emerging, and developing a new form of identity, one which was neither fixed nor tied to place, but one which itself was contextually fluidic in nature (Eade, et al, 2006; Trevena, 2009).

EU expansion was a primary driver for many Polish migrants to experience migration. Economic restructuring in Poland, in concert with urban but especially rural rationalisation programmes (in preparation towards EU aquis), all took their toll. Social reforms as privatization and the restructuring of industries resulted in many previously family-managed small farm holdings being no longer economically viable. The changed social welfare programmes created niches of intense poverty amongst the lower socio-economic groups, including Polish Roma. In the case of Polish Roma however, a series of ‘drivers’ dictating their need or desire to migrate, were somewhat earlier than that for Polish migrants. For this group, the changes arising from social reforms in the late 1980’s resulted in an even greater impoverishment across the entire social sphere, notably in education, housing, as well as equitable access to healthcare provision and the labour market. In addition to this, the situational experience of Polish Roma was intertwined with the ever present racialised discourse dictating their daily treatment. A significant example of this is the Mława pogrom, in 1991. A violent mob attacked the Polish Roma in the town of Mława, in response to a ‘hit and run’ accident by a Roma taxi driver. The anger towards the Roma grew, and lasted for 5 days, resulting in some Roma becoming injured, and, with 21 of their houses and 10 apartments being destroyed by the violence and arson attacks. What was significant here was that whilst thousands of Poles looked on, not one of them intervened.

The materials used in this paper, are drawn from three studies where Roma, and/or Polish migrants, and, ‘key experts’ for both groups, were interviewed as a part of the research conducted by the author, for a range of end-users. These are: a UK-wide policy report, on the housing experience of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers, for FRA (Study 1, Staniewicz, 2009). The second one was a 3-site project (Coventry, Dublin, and London), which looked at the equitable participation of Polish migrants in civil society (Study 2, Staniewicz, 2007a). The third one was research on behalf of third sector end-users, and analysed how successfully new communities were able to access front-line advice services (Study 3, Staniewicz & Owen, 2009). Additionally, Roma were also approached and formally invited to being interviewed, via related civil society engagements [CSE]. However, some of the Roma participants whose narratives have been used here, were interviewed by
chance whilst undertaking the research on Polish migrants, with the author taking advantage of the opportunity to have some access to this otherwise hidden group. This underscores their established ‘invisibility’ as a marginalised group, and continued limited presence in public spaces (Liégeois, 1994).

All these respondents, drawn from across the various studies, and, those encountered in civil society engagements, were for the most part not highly skilled. Statistics show that over 60% of the Polish workforce in the UK is located in unskilled jobs (Sumption & Somerville, 2009). Unlike Favell’s ‘Eurostars’, these migrants were not ‘cosmopolitans’, and did not possess high levels of ‘intellectual/international’ capital, (Staniewicz, 2007b, 2010). Such migrants would therefore particularly need to have access to existing or create new community networks in order to aid their integration (Zetter, et al, 2006).

Marginalised groups are often ‘hidden’ from the rest of society, and the Roma unfortunately retain the position of possibly being the most disenfranchised, and dehumanised group in society (FRA, 2009a; Mikulska & Hall, 2009). It is comprehensively documented, that Roma live out their lives both spatially and socially segregated throughout the EU, in the most appalling conditions, with no recourse to state help, and, with very poor life chances as a result (FRA, 2009a; Staniewicz, 2009). These two groups arrived to the UK, in the midst of changing government policy (from multiculturalist to assimilationist), steeped in a traditional setting of controlled and tightly managed migration, imbued with a antagonistic ‘race relations’ discourse predicated on ‘us’ and ‘them’. Migration policy had become a deeply politicised issue (Sales, 2008). For the Polish Roma, this environment was nothing new, as noted earlier many are known to have fled Poland, as a result of austere neo-liberal measures and on-going oppressive racial discrimination (Mirga & Mróz, 1994; Ficowski, 1982, 1989).

A consequence of increased global migration, especially in the past decade, has seen greater ethnic, cultural, and religious plurality in the UK (in sharp contrast to Poland’s demographic makeup), causing tensions between new migrant communities and settles ones. In an attempt to analyse the impacts of these new migrant inflows Identity discourses have been rife, particularly in relation to the meaning of ‘national identity’ and indeed citizenship. At the heart of such discussions, was often to do with provision and management at the local level to promote inter-ethnic cultural dialogue, a known driver facilitating more ‘socially cohesive’ communities (Cantle, 2006) and, to mitigate ethnic tensions (Robinson & Reeve, 2006; Markova & Black, 2007). A series of intense urban ‘riots’ across several locations in Northern England in the summer of 2001, led to a determined
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change in policy, with a need to address the integration of new communities within existing, densely populated and flux-like geo-political landscapes. Some groups were found to be leading ‘parallel’ lives in segregation from one another, amidst high unemployment and social deprivation (Ratcliffe, 2004). Community cohesion (Cantle, 2005) is one such proposed ‘solution’, and continues to be a central plank in UK policy on the governance of ‘difference’ within society. It sets out an agenda via which communities are to come together for the common good, and exist peaceably alongside one another. The production of reciprocal intra-group ‘networking’ is one strand of this (Cantle, 2006).

But, why examine Polish migrants together with Polish Roma, and, their respective adaptation strategies? Well, the answer is at the same time, straightforward, yet complex, thus requiring a bifurcated explanation. Firstly, it is straightforward because in the eyes of EU Accession transitional arrangements, both groups are now theoretically afforded the same citizenship rights, and collective opportunities. Complex, because they might broadly share some phenotypical (White European) attributes, and a common language (Polish); as well as some culturally and socially shared understanding of nuances – daily cultural rituals in certain settings, etc. Additionally, in terms of history, both Poland (Davies, 1981, 1984), and Roma as a people (Ficowski, 1982; Liégeois, 1994, 1995; Pereira-Bastos, 2010; Nowicka, 2003) have (at differing times) long and blood-drenched histories of territorial appropriation, mass murder, and cultural genocide. The similarity abruptly stops there. These two groups face vastly different challenges in today’s world, as ethnic minority groups, depending upon historical specificities constructing their world-views, and, personal circumstances (Staniewicz, 2010).

HISTORICAL SPECIFICITIES AND CONTESTED TERRAINS

In order to understand these different challenges, it is necessary to place the multiple discriminations experienced by such groups (as the Roma), within a wider (racist) historical discourse of progress and emergent nationalistic development. Societies have always formed boundaries, in order to better identify those within, and those viewed as beyond, the perceived community. For many centuries, nomadic groups with differing cultural norms which retained traditional outlooks were a perceived threat to the existing order, by virtue of their difference. MacLaughlin (1998) maintains that such groups were not viewed simply as the ‘Other’ when juxtaposed with settled or sedentary society, but rather, were treated as being in total opposition to them, and therefore a threat to settled society, and what it stood for. Placed at the “hostile” end of the “tradition – modernity
continuum”, such groups were racially discriminated against in a brutal manner across Europe (Ibid: 421). Post-Enlightenment nation-building discourses on the course believed essential for appropriate progress, saw such groups’ rights and social standing pushed to the fringes of society, as their traditional ways were deemed in direct opposition to any such development. Such groups as Roma, Gypsies and Travellers, have always found themselves therefore in other people’s societies and consequently removed from participating in any implicit way (Sobotka, 2003; Acton, 1994a; Nowicka, 2003).

In the same vein, enlightened thinking and the need to categorise society within existing hierarchical constructs, served to legitimise their inferiority, and this was orchestrated by applying quasi-biological beliefs of that time (Acton, 1994a). Social ranking therefore located Gypsies, Travellers, and Roma, as being ‘beyond’ society and sub-human, having more in common with animals (Liégeois, 1994). Nomenclature was governed by their nomadism and transient existence, and popular titles in the publics’ mind were vagabonds, thieves, vagrants, (Bauman, 1995). Such racialised notions remain today across Europe, regardless of whether members from these groups are settled (as is the case in many EUMS) or still mobile. The negative racialised association has remained with the group itself. This notwithstanding, policies transcending state boundaries, predicated upon ‘radical exclusion’ and coerced assimilation, have all too successfully denied all such groups, both a voice and, access to political and social ‘space’ in modern society (Nowicka, 2003).

Their history has over time facilitated to shape a sense of diasporic understanding of their world-view (discussed in greater detail later), for some of these Polish Roma. This ‘sense’ has had a pervasive effect, and colours very much their social interaction and ensuing engagement, with wider society at the individual level (Mikulska & Hall, 2009). Both groups differ widely from each other in terms of discriminatory levels, Roma for instance are socially segregated as a group, and, in terms of the degree of educational and economic success (Greenfields & Smith, 2010). Gendered experiences determine even additional variances within groups, such as internal boundaries. Polish Roma females’ choices are bound by a dogmatic patriarchal system, whereas Polish female migrants’ are not (Helleiner, 2000). These experiences collectively, in conjunction with another crucial intersecting identifier, namely multiple discriminations, aid in furnishing sub-cultural identities, and form the basis of self-identity for these Roma. These contexts therefore determine the groups’ interactions in general.

This delineation, and their understanding of how they are perceived by non-Roma in ‘space’ beyond that which they inhabit, was put succinctly by one of
my respondents (from one of the studies noted earlier) and denotes an acute understanding of his own sense of Roma sub-cultural identity (Waters, 1990) as transcending location of birthplace, namely, Poland, and current domicile, UK. I add it here to emphasise how some Polish Roma position themselves as a ‘collective people’, within the ‘space’ they share with other groups, namely Poles and non-Poles. In effect they inhabit a third space, not here (UK), not there (Poland) but, within their own constructed space as Roma. This is ‘carried’ with them wherever they go.

“We are as different to the Poles we left behind in Poland, as we are different from the English here. You ask who I am: I am Roma, and only that.” [Polish Roma young male: Coventry – CSE]

This serves to underscore the parallel spaces within which Polish Roma co-exist on a daily basis, and further serves to reinforce borders around their own cultural spaces, as Roma (Smith, 1994). Roma are vilified as a people in a real sense globally, and moving from one geographical space to another, rarely affords any more protection against this reoccurring (Acton, 1994a; Nowicka, 2003). One such recent example from Poland is the now infamous Mława pogrom in 1991, as noted previously.

This articulation of ‘self’ also raises an essential point about these Polish Roma and elements of a diasporic consciousness (Khayati, 2008). For clarity, diaspora is used in this paper in relation to Polish Roma, to mean diaspora as a site of consciousness, in that this state of mind comprises an array of places and an awareness of such (Clifford, 1994). It is manifested by a “dual or paradoxical nature”, which is an apposite descriptor for these Polish Roma, in that this duality is constituted negatively by such experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and positively, by the identification with a historical heritage (Vertovec, 1999). Some of the Polish Roma interviewed are therefore seen to be inward-looking. Subsequently, they have developed very ‘dense’ in-group networks, supporting each other with childcare, and other such necessary arrangements. The following excerpts also aid in illustrating this:

“We don’t belong here … I mean, eh, I don’t mean here - in England … eh, I don’t feel I’m British or European … My children tell no one at the school where they are from - it’s easier you see. We are here now a while, but we only mix with Roma. Where to next, we never know … Our life is different. Do you understand that?” [Polish Roma female: Coventry - Study 2]
Another Polish Roma respondent also said:

“Outside is one life, in my house is our real life. It’s hard, so you treasure what little you have […] you can speak at home, because it’s only us. Out there, you can say nothing.” [Polish Roma female: Coventry – Study 3]

Bauman’s ‘vagabond’ in postmodern society and the problems faced might as easily be applied to the Polish Roma utilised here. He notes (1995: 95):

“Wherever the vagabond goes, he is a stranger; he can never be the ‘native’, one with roots with the soil – and not for the lack of trying […]. Entertaining a dream of going native can only end in mutual recrimination and bitterness. It is better for the vagrant, therefore, not to grow too accustomed to one place….”

Polish Roma have, in some ways, more in common with the first generation Poles arriving to the UK after WWII, than post-Accession Polish migrants, not expressly because of their diasporic sense of sub-cultural identity state (Cohen, 1997), but more so because of this state of mind - comprised of a synthesis of the politics of location, their identification of heritage, and, their current ongoing conflicts over a share of ‘public space’ (Khayati, 2008).

Steven Castles (2008) has of course already discussed for a number of years, that the sheer complexity and diversity of migratory experiences, together underpin the difficulties in attempting to theorise on the migration problematic. Castles (2008: 2) notes that migration is located within a very powerful current political discourse, which sees it, “as harmful and dysfunctional – something to be stopped”. Migration therefore, “awakens archaic memories of invasion and displacement” (Ibid.). Castles (2008) also notes one other factor which has become a dominant element in migratory discourse, which is discussed in more detail in relation mainly to the Roma in this paper as an instrument of hegemony, and this is on sedentary bias. This ‘bias’ has a historical basis starting with colonial policies, but underpins most present-day immigration policies, via ‘Manichean’ created landscapes “inhabited by ‘insiders’ (Good) and defended from ‘outsiders’ (Evil)”, (MacLaughlin, 1998).

This stance is supported by the media playing its part in creating xenophobic attitudes towards migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, Roma, etc. (Staniewicz & Reading, 2010; Sales, 2008), and more recently post-accession migrants (Frech, 2008). The sedentarist position, as a structural process from within polity itself is far more aggressive in relation to Roma, Travellers, and Gypsies, where they are effectively forced to accept the privileging of a permanent place for maintaining their distinct form(s) of identity, whether they are nomadic or not (EUMC, 2004).
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This sedentarist ‘bias’ is therefore one of the prevailing inhibitors in allowing such groups a public ‘voice’, and by extension prohibits both the maintenance of cultural ‘space’ and the provision of physical space of choice, needed in order to live in peace.

I have touched on the notion of how the inter-sectionality of an array of discriminatory processes, play a central role in determining EU citizens’ choices in actually gaining a foothold with even engaging with the host community. I have also provided an illustration of how history provides the context within which Roma, and therefore Polish Roma, have come to regulate their interactions with wider society. The remainder of the paper is set out in the following way. The next section, ‘Background and Context’ is itself divided into three areas of discussion. I start off by providing further context by what I mean here by social capital, and note some criticisms of this concept in relation to Roma in particular. I then move on to discussing the role of public representations of these groups (including the role of the media). The last section is on the pathologising of Roma, setting the context for some of the structural impediments particular to this group.

The following section is the main discussion and aims to examine whether and how, social capital is actually being developed. Here, the examination of these two groups, and exemplified by using elements of their personal narratives, is set across two main areas. This division is clearly arbitrary, as there is some overlap within the two themes. The first one looks at how structural processes from within polity itself in a variety of forms (in this context is meant as any representative arm of formal governance - its public face - police, council, banking, schools etc.), are manifest of how both groups engage with the state and its various instruments. As well as the impact of these on boundary formation, as they respond to the pervasive power of the exclusion - of themselves - from engaging in public spaces. This raises the question whether social capital is sufficient in and of itself, in sustaining community development. There is clearly interplay here between the social networks both groups are part of, including the use of virtual social networks and, the kinds of transnational associations in evidence (Ryan, et al, 2008).

All of these studies were predominantly chosen to exemplify the intersectionality of multiple discriminations, and, Roma engagement - or attempts to engage equitably - within the public arena. These are subsequently utilised for the main discussion, in order to invoke the ways in which Polish Roma and Polish migrants mediate between one world and another, as they attempt to access some gain hold in their new surroundings. The closing section will aim to succinctly filter out the more salient points made within the paper.
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Social Capital

Putnam’s concept of social capital is by no means a recent idea, and he brought these concepts once more to the fore in his highly discussed book *Bowling Alone* (2000). Though not without its critics, this has come to be seen as a key element in any endeavour to generate cohesive (and ethnically diverse) neighbourhoods for the foreseeable future. In relation to migrant communities, the production of social capital is really about negotiating entry to the host society and all its structures, as well as addressing how to access limited resources, earmarked for existing (migrant or host) groups. It forms the cornerstone of current government thinking on achieving a more integrated society (Zetter, et al, 2006).

Putnam’s (2000) construct is essentially a relatively straightforward one, and is concerned with the strength of ties between community and group members, and the nature of relationships (individual or collective) with those outside one’s immediate social networks. The lack of such connections has important implications that go beyond the ‘social’. If one lacks effective links to the world outside - for work, housing, or public participatory needs, life options are considerably reduced. So one’s own community in a more fundamental sense becomes central, in that it provides each member with ‘bonding capital’. These intra-community relationships, networks and organisations may provide useful opportunities for work, etc. However, they may also constrain options, for instance, job acquisition and other interactions are less accessible and inward-looking. One solution then is to generate ‘bridging capital’ (forging links and associations outside of the community), a key element of which is to create ‘connectivity’ with community members to the wider locality (Van Hout, 2010). To optimise a person’s aspirations, however, what is required is ‘linking capital’. This expands their ‘socio-cultural landscapes’, allowing access to the wider world. The caveat, however, is that in so doing and resulting in a higher incidence of interethic mix may undermine bonding capital through a weakening of traditional social networks and ethnic ties. The problem of course is that Polish Roma might rely more heavily on bonding capital as it provides trust, solidarity and support (Hout, 2010).

However, this can cultivate exclusivity within insular and socially marginalised groups such as the homeless (Garapich, 2010). In these ways, it can also act as a substitute for the creation of ‘thick trust’ (in-group trust, and manifested in bonding capital) with wider society, by replacing this kind of trust development,
within the group (Putnam, 2000). The converse form of trust is seen as ‘thin trust’, which Putnam ascribes (Ibid.) as being formed with those beyond the group. This works reciprocally, in a circular fashion and it meant to enhance solidarity, social cohesion and connectivity, eventually leading towards inclusion into mainstream society. Trust is central to Putnam’s social capital accumulation and realised social and economic development.

Significant recent changes in Poland’s history, such as economic and political post-communist transition, brought the question of civil society to the fore, and, the need for robust civil societies, including strong civil participation. The consideration of issues of trust therefore, in the Polish context is very interesting theoretically, especially given the findings from several excellent Polish studies, amongst which Janusz Czapiński’s, Diagnoza Społeczna is perhaps the most known. This study found there to be an extreme deficit of social capital among Poles. Its findings are therefore in conflict with Putnam’s criteria, in that despite there being low levels of recorded trust amongst groups in Poland. Poles are nonetheless content, more mobile, and achieving. Furthermore, the project found that Poland does not fulfil any of the criteria needed for a strong civil society, with Poland scoring the lowest level of interpersonal trust in the EU. Polish Roma are seen to rely on in-group faith-based networks for social and other forms of support, which have helped in some small ways to mitigate their ongoing discrimination (Nowicka, 2003; Mirga & Mróz, 1994).

As with most theories therefore, Putman’s concept has drawn criticisms. Broadly, these have been that Putnam had not really explained the relevance of social capital theory within the context of migrant communities and how they develop networks within pre-existing patterns of association (Zetter, et al, 2006). Other concerns are that there is a presumption of a ‘cure-all’ of an ‘idealised community’ sense of intra-ethnic solidarity, with all groups sharing the goal of achieving, for the ‘greater good’. The complex nature of such communities are seemingly overlooked (Portes, 1998), whilst all vying for the same limited resources (Campbell, 2001). There is no doubt, as I shall demonstrate later in the paper, that Putnam’s concept is of great heuristic value in providing insight into how micro-interactions across groups in society, can develop benefits for the greater good in certain settings. However, Putnam overlooked the crucial power dynamic relationship between ethnicity and power, in the context of differentiated access within ethnic groups. Therefore a differentiated approach to social capital accumulation might be better placed, when applying the differing networks’ access, which Polish Roma and Polish migrants respectively have and their relationships with the networks generating the production of social capital (Coleman, 1988).
All this notwithstanding, Putnam has tried to reconcile this with his later work, but warns this too is a ‘work in progress’. Putman now prefers to use a ‘lean and mean’ definition of social capital, namely “social networks, and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness” (2007: 137), and returns to his idea, but now in relation to an increased ethnic mix at the local level. He contends that in response to ever increasing global ethnic diversity, new migrant communities have been seen to overcome ethno-cultural fragmentation via creating new “cross-cutting forms of social solidarity and more encompassing identities” (Ibid.), and provides quantitative data on American societies to address the above claim. In neighbourhoods where ethnic diversity has increased, with a resulting diminishing of public trust, there is an initial ‘stepping back’, or “hunkering down”. Trust is even questioned in relation to someone from one’s own background, and both bonding and bridging capital formation become somewhat decreased. Putman maintains that a key to reversing this, over time, is a building of familiarity, and greater interaction with new immigrants, with a need to strengthen ‘bridging capital’ ties, all across ethnic lines, with the help of which with over time, “wise policies (public and private) can ameliorate that trade-off” (Putnam, 2007: 164). As will later be demonstrated in the case of Polish Roma, having access to information in order to facilitate satisfactory levels of familiarity for social action is in and of itself, a costly route (Coleman, 1998). Over time, Roma everywhere have been unable to galvanise the necessary capital to enable the required amelioration. Strengths generally remain located within Roma-related organisations, as a body dealing with the Outsiders’ world.

Public representation of Poles, Roma (and other migrants)

Mass media in its collective sense, has a significant impact on a range of processes in society such as social, cultural, economic and of course, political. The role of media services have come to be known collectively as information or ‘network societies’ (Van Dijk, 1999), which construct and disseminate shared meanings, including that of the ‘Other’. Some discussion on how the media constructed imagery of Poles before their arrival warrants mentioning here, as it provides added context to the political landscapes within which these ‘social actors’ are having to operate in. Such imagery and rhetoric, again Manicheanesque in nature, was often in the form of a warning to the British populace: ‘of a “huge influx” on its way from the East, that the UK is about to be “swamped” by “shameless spongers” ’. New migrants often attract negative press coverage, and post-WWII Poles were no exception (Zubrzycki, 1956; Sword, et al, 1989; Staniewicz, 2001).

1 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/3673835.stm
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So even before post-Accession Polish migrants arrived, this negative (racialised) view of them became imbued within the national daily lexicon of the British public’s understanding of Poles. This caricaturised notion of ‘the Pole’ as the ‘Other’ in terms of a collective threat to ‘us British’, helps in perpetuating a racialised discourse about the ‘Other’ (McVeigh, 1996). It also serves to further discriminate against Polish Roma, for being viewed’ as both Roma and Polish Roma, by the (racist) British! The relevance of Stuart Hall’s (1981) powerfully written work on constructed media ‘news’, underpinned by a racialised ideology, is therefore all the more valid today, given that we live in an exceedingly media-driven world. He posits that the media was seen to be a main conduit via which ideologically ‘produced’ representations of the social world were visited upon a receptive public audience, and in so doing shape the world for said audiences. It is through such ideologically constructed images (of the Other) that ‘we’ reflexibly [re]construct our own understanding of the ‘social’. The sustained usage of this negative imagery therefore, whether depicted in newspapers or via television / internet mediums (Morris, 2000), serves only to further underpin the hegemonic and racialised construction – of groups such as Polish Roma - by state agencies; and by virtue of it not being condemned with sufficient ferocity by independent commentators. The increased vociferousness of Right Wing extremists’ views given media space is evidence of this. These highly ‘politicised spaces, as visual mediums, have come to embody all Roma as inferior to the British public, and thus they are bordered by it, restricting their ability to navigate beyond the rhetoric into neutral unfettered spaces (Boudreau, 2007).

In stark contrast to this however, and as something of a counterbalance, it needs noting that in the midst of the Mława catastrophe one lone Polish media source, rose to the defence of the Polish Roma. This was Adam Michnik, a famous Polish human rights activist, and the then editor-in-chief of the Gazeta Wyborcza. In an editorial, Michnik apologised to the Polish Roma community in the name of all Poles. He also appealed to all facets of Polish polity, to follow his own public condemnation.

Popular discourses which disparaged and vilified both Polish migrants (Frech, 2008) and Roma (Morris, 2000) since 2004 are by now well documented\(^2\). Contemporary language and media imagery used to describe Roma, is highly

\(^2\) In it, the Zjednoczenie Polskie w Wielkiej Brytanii [ZPWB] accused a national daily newspaper, the Daily Mail, of a continued pejorative representation of Poles via its coverage of migrant issues. http://polishexpress.polacy.co.uk/art,uk_recession_increases_hate_crimes,3499.html
reminiscent of the demonization that these groups suffered centuries ago (MacLaughlin, 1998). In relation to Poles, perhaps the most prominent public retaliation to this was the Federation of Poles in Great Britain [Zjednoczenie Polskie w Wielkiej Brytanii (ZPWB)], which presented the government with a petition to give voice to the growing negative attitudes manifested via attacks - and viewed as hate crimes - on Poles across the UK. This notwithstanding, and what is important to note here, is that public mainstream arenas which address Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other form of hate crimes / racialised incidents, do not tend to include Poles, Roma collectively, and other white groups within their own ‘politically’ discourses, marking out borders of identity in so doing (Fass, 2010). Such ‘excluded’ groups are rarely seen to have a voice in this public and political ‘space’, but occupy ethnically contingent spaces for such discourses. Polish Roma’s efforts to mobilise as a political force have not always been that successful (Sobotka, 2003).

THE PATHOLOGISING OF ROMA - AS STATUS QUO

The Roma are today, Europe’s largest ethnic minority (with a population of about 10 million). They also, significantly, constitute its most marginalised and vulnerable minority. This, as discussed earlier, is their legacy, as a result of the unfolding nature of their ‘criminalisation’ as a group, resulting from their dissimilar outlook and culture to wider society (Nowicka, 2003; FRA, 2009, 2010). Given their history, it is of no surprise that Roma (as well as Gypsies and Travellers), fare worse in comparison to other ethnic groups in terms of health and education, housing access. Life expectancy of Roma men and women is ten years lower than the national average. Absence of reliable information has devastating consequences, leading to conflicting interpretations of the actual magnitude of Roma issues and to distorted representations, especially by the media (as previously noted) and by nationalist political entities (such as Far Right groups), of what is often called the ‘Roma problem’ (Greenfields & Smith, 2010).

The paper has already mentioned sedentarist ideology, and its impact on migratory policies (Castles, 2008), and therefore by extension on all migrant groups whether Polish, or Polish Roma, or indeed Gypsies and/or Travellers (Staniewicz & Reading, 2010). Sustained media-generated, institutional, and public discrimination, as well as successive governments’ aggressive and coercive efforts to assimilate Roma, have led to a dissipation of Roma culture, and other such groups’ traditional family networks (Liégeois & Gheorghe, 1995; Liégeois, 1994). Additionally, the denouncing of Polish Roma by Poles, adds another layer
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of discrimination by virtue of this ‘de-Polonization’. Roma are therefore thrice-penalised in this sense – for being Roma, and, for being a migrant. A further point which was borne out in my discussions with Polish (and other) Roma, and lawyers working on behalf of Roma, is that some (Polish) Roma do feel further discriminated against as a result of the accession process. By this they mean that the ‘political space’ and one which gave them a recognisable ‘voice’ which they felt legitimised their inequitable status - as refugees- prior to accession, was removed in a singular stroke post-Accession. The insidious nature of these highly racialised sendentarist discourses, are effectively assimilatory strategies whose sole aim is cultural genocide (McVeigh, 1997).

MAIN DISCUSSION

Polity

The overall lack of Roma representation in both public and community discourses is very much an established position (McVeigh, 1997; Liégeois & Gheorghe, 1995; Sobotka, 2003). This is particularly significant here because social capital is commonly grounded within social interaction, engagement, and civic levels of interpersonal and institutional trust; and as I have already indicated, Roma are generally not socially equipped to be able to engage effectively at these kinds of specific levels. Discussions informally with Polish Roma in Coventry touched on the subject of their dealings - as Roma - with the police, and other state instruments, and revealed much about the contested terrains they inhabited, and how social networking within new geo-political landscapes was inhibited by their socio-historical self-perceptions (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). What had been the experience of Polish Roma in their interactions with bodies of authority, an emblematic exemplar of dominant hegemony discourse? In their experience such interactions have for the greater part, been negative ones. The following narratives are highly informative.

“It does not matter which one of us [Roma] it is, the police always blames us. If they can’t get hold of one group, they go to another. We all have the same ‘face’ to them. They see only Roma – they don’t see us!”

And:

“They never ask us our opinions about how we want them to deal with people who create problems for us. We are the problem. When I see the policeman coming, I sometimes pretend that I am not at home – they never come for anything good.”” [Polish Roma, female, Coventry – Study 2]
A Roma community representative, who was interviewed for Study 1, informed of the following about how Roma deal with being in the public domain. In relation to how parents, especially mothers and their children passing as non-Roma, when they go to school:

“The children hide their real identity when they go to school.” [Polish Roma representative, female. London – CSE]

Due to the ways in which Roma and their children have been treated over many generations, such statements are not uncommon (Smith, T. 1997), and Roma children routinely try to ‘pass’ as non-Roma whilst at school or other informal associations. Roma children are known to keep personal details (such as real names, contact details for several years, whilst they build up ‘trust’ with outsiders (Staniewicz, 2009).

Discussions with ‘Key Experts’ (Study 1), about Roma and other such groups living in Coventry revealed that whilst other new (whether post-Accession or non-EU) communities would be present at informal information support sessions on education services for them and their children, Roma and Travellers never attended these meetings. Similarly, it was observed by other ‘Key Experts’ (Study 2; Study 3), that Polish mothers were prolific in developing highly intricate informal networks – even transcending language problems - between themselves and selected UK and Irish mothers - to facilitate more control over their new lives and ‘alien’ work routines dictated by either husbands’, partners’, or even their own working lives (albeit part-time). Over time, these arrangements took on a different ‘hue’ for some Dublin-based Polish migrants. ‘Trust’ was built up with out-group contacts, and Polish mothers were invited to network in other (Irish) circles of reciprocity. Putman’s premise is clearly shown to be working in this (Polish migrant) setting.

Another related point here is that research on social capital accumulation shows that women have a greater propensity for creating social relationships, due to being more active in the community setting, resulting in high levels of internal bonding capital, with often the women having accumulated it (Helleiner, 2000; Van Hout, 2010).

These Polish Roma mothers (cited above) do not engage with those informal settings which are well known to facilitate very strong and crucial informal networks of mutual cooperation and reciprocity, such as have been identified within Polish migrants (Ryan, et al, 2008; 2009). A Polish Roma said:
“One day my daughter came home very upset that the other children did not tell her that school activities meant that for some of that day, they were allowed to wear their own clothes.” [Polish Roma, female, Coventry – Study 2]

Had this Polish Roma female been part of a local network, made up of mothers/carers to service the immediate needs of school related issues, and however informal, she would have been informed by it. For whatever reason Roma do not engage – and this is one of the clear similarities noted across all these studies - as a direct result, they effectively remove themselves from (public) spaces where there are opportunities to access information (Coleman, 1988) in order to mobilise, and this becomes an additional disadvantage in social capital formation. Some Polish Roma clearly have a lack of any tangible ties to the wider community. Others experience better networking and support, such as those involved with the Roma Support Group in London. This organization is highly efficient in providing advocacy and other kinds of structural support for (predominantly) Polish Roma, delivered via a range of initiatives.

In stark contrast to the general experience of Polish Roma, is the following. At a conference organised by regional police forces, for Roma, Gypsies and Travellers, members from all these groups were seen to come together and co-exist in shared constructed temporary ‘space’. Boudreau (2007:2593) maintains, “new political spaces result not only from social movement activities (as in the drive for ‘free spaces’), but also in a dynamic interaction between state and civil society actors.”

Here is one such example, highlighted at the aforementioned conference, of the ‘dynamic interaction’ between state and civil society (Roma groups). An initiative by the Sussex Police Force, has developed a Strategy to engage with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller groups, and this is mediated via its Gypsy Traveller Advisory Group [GTAG], which includes Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller individuals plus an overall group representative. This has provided such groups with a political space, as well as a formal – public - representative ‘voice’, of which this kind of ‘capital’ there is currently very, very little. The engagement of a Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller representative within this role, as main point of contact for these various groups, is a driver which has enabled Roma, including Polish Roma (in this geographical setting) to transcend existing boundaries, and have access to a shared space, and cultural space, within which they are able to develop new informal networks, as a result of this new forum (Stevenson, 2003).

3 http://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/
Although this initial point of networking (by strategic invitation of the regional police force’s Equality duty aims), is not in its pure sense an example of what Putnam (2007) means when he cites the importance of developing new cross-cutting forms of social solidarity. However, as a result of this social action and resulting social relations, all of the groups with representation on the GTAG, benefited in this case from ‘information channels’ (Coleman (1988), via which opened access to a range of ‘spaces’ previously denied to them, such as equitable dialogues resulting in improved access to healthcare and education provision.

During discussions with a Polish Roma family, whilst attending another Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller conference, the following was also revealed, when talking about how untenable a current job had become. This male respondent skirted around the issue rather uncomfortably, implying that he was being treated in a derogatory manner, because it was known that he was Roma. At the time of the discussion, this person was working for the local council in London as a support worker, aiding the integration of Roma children within the education system.

“I can’t continue doing my job anymore, it’s become too difficult for me to handle personally. I don’t agree with it, you know – what I witness every day – it’s wrong, but nobody says anything. It’s not just at ----- [name was given, but anonymity preserved], it’s the same everywhere we go.”

He went on to say, in relation to how he was spoken to, as a male:

“I don’t like the way I am treated, because of who I am. I’ve never seen them speak to the others like that…. I won’t do that kind of work again.” [Polish young Roma male, Coventry – CSE]

This lack of trust, and fear of non-Roma (in all the above excerpts), in a world embodied by a discriminatory overview of Roma, only serves to reinforce the boundaries between the Roma world and the other contested terrain, the non-Roma world. The use of ‘them’ and ‘us’, as diametrically opposed serves to confirm the antagonistic relationship here, and once again the Manichean constructs of ‘good v. evil’ are played out. The second excerpt seemed to indicate the respondent’s objection to being treated in a manner which he felt was more appropriate when one spoke with a female, and seemed unhappy to be working in a field where women would generally assume such a role (in the education of children). He felt an acute ‘loss of face’.

The intention of this respondent to remove himself from this quite public ‘space’ diminishes greatly the links and network ties, which his family by extension was
privileged to access. Having access to it therefore crucially also meant *not* having to rely wholly on ethnic or group-based networks (Ryan, et al, 2008). In losing this tie to information to potential networks of support, creates another boundary between these Polish Roma and the outside world (Coleman, 1988). This is all the more significant, as earlier in the discussion, there was an indication of a lack of any real family or transnational links back in Poland (for this family), nor really anyone which they as a family believed were of benefit to them. It is therefore the added value that such associations bring, and the loss is immeasurable. As Coleman (1988:104) notes, “an important form of social capital is the potential for information that adheres in social relations.”

There were many examples of this ‘turning back on society’. I was told time and again, “It’s what we expect, no one listens to us.” [Polish Roma male, Coventry - CSE]. An inevitable consequence of discrimination-driven adversity normalises negative events in the lives of Roma. These are stoically accepted with an enduring fatalism. Across all the studies utilised for this paper, Roma interactions with the police (except for the GTAG example provided above), and other figures of authority, were predominantly negative and adversarial in nature.

I turn now to Polish migrants and their interaction, and, associations with ‘polity’. Polish migrants have for the most part, come to the UK capable of engaging with UK society. Even when faced with that major inhibitor of integration – a lack of adequate language skills – they still managed to optimise their opportunities, in relation to Polish Roma, and mobilise to that effect (Staniewicz, 2010; 2009). This being said however, Poles interviewed in a number of the research studies that these narratives are drawn from, still nonetheless had a series of problems. Some of the Polish migrants see police (via a post-communistic lens), as a natural extension of a ‘coercive’ state, and are wary of them. However, some of this is also because some Poles did not register for WRS, and were, for one reason or another, working in the ‘black economy’, namely not paying any taxes. Polish migrants’ interactive dynamics with the police was on a more equal setting, than that of the Polish Roma, and their dealings more commonplace, rather than contentious. These problems have all been amply documented (Anderson, 2006; Homeless Link, 2006).

What is worthy of noting is that some Polish migrants’ demonstrated a fatalism or resignation to racist taunts in so far as having been victims of racial discrimination (first& second excerpt), but, at the same time, others (no.3) seemed unaware of it (Staniewicz, 2007a). For instance:

“When I worked for Albanians, in Devon in a car wash I experienced abuse; they were laughing that a Poles like me, has no money, no friends, and is dirty
– they were just insulting and for example making me sweep the floor endlessly”
[Young Polish male, London – Study 2]

And, (no.2): “Why expect anything else? We Polish are the newcomers’ here.”
[Young Polish female mother, Dublin – Study 2]

Finally, (No.3):

“That’s [racial] discrimination I thought that was just the way people were treated because they were new. It didn’t bother me – I just ignored them and got on with it. If it got physical, that was different – I wouldn’t put up with it.”

In response to a prompt about what recourse would they take (no.3 said):

“I know where to go for help – I’ve made sure to find things out. I’ve heard a lot of talk about the places to go to when you need help. Some of us are talking to the union representative, and we have joined to show our solidarity. If you like - it’s like a little piece of Solidarnosc here in Ireland” [Polish male, Dublin – Study 2]

This last excerpt is an interesting ‘commentary’ on the racialised notion of the ‘Other’ in Poland. Post-Accession Poles arrived from a country with an exceedingly low ethnic mix, and so are generally speaking, not used to the sheer differences in ethno-cultural demographics they come across in the UK and this comment is a reflection of this (Trevena, 2009; Staniewicz, 2007a, 2007b).

However, what these narratives also inform us of, is that Polish migrants are versatile, forward looking and highly adaptive in all public ‘spaces’; and are willing to exploit new ‘space’ as resource, after identifying such (Burrell, 2010). In the three-site study drawn on here, Polish migrants were seen to be highly innovative in linking up with union representatives and mobilising and successfully appropriating ‘political space’ in this manner, in more than in just an ad hoc way. This served to further legitimise Poles - publicly - as a group, as well as providing ethnic solidarity (Fitzgerald, 2007; 2009). Key Experts [Study 1; Study 2] confirmed that Polish migrants actively sought out all possible frontline advice services (in Coventry and Dublin), and presented even at centres which were set up for other groups, such as asylum seekers and refugees (Staniewicz, 2007a; 2009).

The rise in hate crimes against Poles was noted earlier. A plethora of policy reports covered the impact of the migration at national, regional, and local levels, and despite many finding the positive benefits to the UK from these migratory
waves, such information was juxtaposed with media incited (moral panic) driven campaigns that Poles (and others), were a continued ‘threat’ and danger to community cohesion building in the UK. Once again, the racialised rhetoric about the ‘Other’ seeped in to public discourses on a regular basis in a very divisive manner; challenging the legitimate spaces Poles had (earned) the right to occupy (Bourdeau, 2007). Some Poles’ seemed to ‘miss’ the point about inequitable treatment, which is identified by the use of the word ‘normal’:

“They prefer to take someone who is British, maybe less competent… but they trust this person much more [because he is British]… but I think it’s normal…” [Young Polish male, London – Study 2]

An example of the kinds of racial slurs experienced is:

“I came to Ireland [they had first worked in London] because of the way my wife and I were treated by English people. There are problems here too, but we have our religions in common - at least there is that. No one complains here when we need to go to church - in England, nobody understood about our faith. We are different from the English.” [Polish couple, female & male, Dublin– Study 2]

When asked what kinds of things were said, the response was:

“Eh, they would say, ’you’re here taking our jobs, our food, our houses – you bloody Poles –f--- off from here, you make me sick” [As above]

Another example is:

“You hear a lot of: f… Poles, go back home, you dirt”. [Young Polish male, London – Study 2]

I now wish to move on to the second area under discussion, namely the level of existing tensions and conflict experienced by Polish Roma and Polish migrants, their subsequent interactions with the host communities; and, the impact of this on social capital production (Robinson & Reeve, 2006). I have indicated elsewhere in this paper how Roma are seen to react by removing themselves from the ‘contested spaces’ in which they find themselves when concerned with a possible threat. A good example of this is in the ways in which Polish Roma and Polish migrants exploited advances in electronic technologies since their arrival, but in differing ways. In keeping with their reputation of high adaptability, Polish migrants were aware of the need to ‘keep up’ with technology; for transnational networking – family, friends, tracking potential jobs elsewhere in the EU, or even beyond
(Australia was cited as one such preferred location). However, what is significant here, is that Polish migrants’ adaptability and risk-taking in new settings (Bauman, 1998), is in concert with the flux-like nature of 21st century migration, and these adaptation ‘skills’ if you will, align themselves with where UK society is also heading. The government’s agenda is to move records and services online, in tandem with society’s aspiration to forward the ongoing digital revolution. On the other hand, many Roma, Gypsies and Travellers still operate within a traditional ‘cash economy’, resisting the bank institution, something considered archaic by today’s 24-hour, and ‘give me now’ culture.

Polish migrants are highly active users of the internet, mobile phones etc., and utilize these as a mechanism - quite ruthlessly, for finding jobs – either within the UK, or even further afield in Europe. For instance:

“...I looked for jobs on the internet, and read blogs. This helped me learn about life here. I keep in touch with friends back home in Poland, in Scotland, and London. We look out for each other. If something comes up – you have to be quick – Poles don’t want to wait in case the job goes to another Pole.” [Middle-aged Polish male, Dublin – Study 2]

This notion reflects the new entrepreneurialism spirit that has been identified as one of the markers of the fluidic and flux-like nature of the migratory process (Garapich, 2006; Staniewicz, 2007a, 2007b). To facilitate the arrival of Poles to the UK, a significant array of web-based advice sites and virtual-community organisations (Anna’s Poland), e-newspapers (such as Polish Express), and more formal organisations developed (Poland Street). These were a new and dynamic source of networks from which Polish migrants might draw social capital. More importantly, they were in Polish and English, and reflected the fast moving world and needs of the modern-day migrant, and these have increased the ‘digital activism’ of Polish migrants. London has become an enviable location for serving the Polish community with a range of facilities. Such new virtual networks, linking also the transnational ‘here’ and ‘there’ simultaneously, and are a realisation of several of Vertovec’s (1999) identifiers of the concept. These can therefore be seen as a primary substitute for the need to engage with a community directly in order to enter in to the relational situation for bridging social capital production, which might otherwise require a necessary degree of traditional face-to-face networking for future reciprocity.

\(^4\) Here are but a few: http://www.londynek.net/en/; http://www.activepolish.co.uk/e-about_us.html; http://polishexpress.polacy.co.uk/index.php?str=info&id=29
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The increase in the uptake of these worked in tandem with such websites being funded by UK companies, which swiftly capitalised on targeting Polish migrants with adverts for their goods and services. For Polish migrants, highly adaptive as they are, employing new technologies served to strengthen them both individually, and as a group. Utilising these forms of network support systems as regular support systems has changed the cultural and spatial landscape of need for these migrants (Kerr, 2007). Roma generally resist opportunities to engage with civil society, at the expense of being left behind technologically, even when they as a group might benefit. Non-Roma organizations, such as the Migrant and Refugees Communities Forum [MRCF, London], offer IT workshops for all groups. Over fifty ethnic associations are participating. However, no Roma groups are involved in this educational process.

Research has shown that some Poles have been accused of being singularly self-serving, and disinterested with engaging with the British socially (Garapich, 2006). Ironically, the success of such virtual networks, in being able to conduct transnational associations, has changed the nature of networking and ensuring relationships are maintained both constantly and with an immediacy which transcends notions of ‘here’ and there’, by virtue of facilitating a virtual constant transnational space (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

In conjunction with the free usage of Facebook and other virtual social networking tools, and Skype which allows visual contact with family still in Poland and elsewhere, have now led to the following point. With the ability now to access a range of cultural, social, and political (virtual) ‘spaces’ without borders, may well pre-empt the partial replacement for a number of presumed modes of transnational behaviour.

“I don’t feel that I need to travel to Poland so much now, as before. My parents and I see each other very frequently on the pc ... I can access all the news and other channels I’m used to from home.” [Polish migrant, male Coventry– Study 3]

Roma on the other hand, appear to have had a very mixed experience with social networking sites. Some Roma’s attempts to engage with the wider community in public social virtual space of Facebook, resulted in a virtual assault of abhorrent racial slurs – in some ways more intrusive and damaging, since these are received in assumed safe personal spaces of the home. An initiative mobilised from within the Roma community, created a project, known as SavvyChavvy, from which a social networking site was developed exclusively for the entire Roma community in England, thus allowing them to ‘avoid’ Facebook.
Rather than borderless space, Roma retreat behind their notion of border, virtual or otherwise – as protection – when any form of discrimination is manifested upon them. This is a prime example of Roma developing parallel ‘space’ in preference to negotiating their place within existing social and other space; by embodying a ‘politics of difference’ they have exercised their right to do so (Gutpa & Ferguson, 1992).

I turn to one last example of the contested nature of inter-ethnic interaction between Polish Roma and wider society, before moving on to the concluding section. Throughout this paper, it has become clear that their experience – at the micro level – mirrors that of Roma globally (Acton, 1994a). The inequities which Roma face on a daily basis are already noted here. The following quotes are examples of these kinds of human rights’ abuses, from an interview with a Polish Roma community representative.

“Everywhere, people hate us.”

“They [Polish Roma family] were in their home. Someone threw petrol through the letter-box, and then lit it. They were lucky this time – no one was hurt.” [Polish Roma, female, community representative – RR: no.1]

FINAL THOUGHTS

Within the climate of the government’s attempts to provide a setting for community cohesion to work effectively, in its current form it is known at the ‘Big Society’, the above quote makes very uncomfortable reading, though unfortunately not altogether surprising. It is inevitable that new migrants will exacerbate (existing) tensions in community relations, and increase local demand for a range of services. However, these issues and the resulting ethnic intolerances are an unacceptable explanation.

This paper has illustrated that these Polish Roma and Polish migrants have both had experience of ‘racial’ discrimination. The difference however, lies in how their sense of ‘identity’ within these contested terrains, has helped them to deal with it respectively. Roma respond differently – they redraw, move on, etc - in terms of their public engagement either formally or informally with the wider society. Within the climate of the dominant sedentarist position in concert with the

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5 Big Society is part of the recent UK coalition government’s changes to the legislative programme. The aim is to create a environment that empowers local people and communities, building a big society that will presumably take power away from politicians and give it to people.
stated historical specificity, this is also not altogether unsurprising (MacLaughlin, 1998). These Polish migrants, though also discriminated against, have mobilised and successfully created those very networks Putman purports are there for the taking, and have most productively exploited the opportunities afforded them by migratory process. In some ways, one might say that Polish migrants embody an ideal type of Putnam’s social capital premise, further serving to underscore its validity as a valid construct.

Zygmunt Bauman’s (1998) notion of ‘liquid’ modernity does not bode well for the Polish Roma discussed here. They are not equipped, unlike the Polish migrants, to change their approach on engaging with others ‘without looking back’, and to move on at short notice, without any social cost, beyond these own created boundaries. Polish migrants seem to be more adaptable at swiftly mobilising new networks (also drawing on new technologies such as web ‘blogs’, and social networking sites). The Polish Roma’s inability to create the necessary political spaces – as a group, which would provide them with a legitimate representation in public and community discourses, continues to hinder any realistic chances of equal participation in civil society. They look ‘inwardly’ and rely on deriving their strength generated from in-group bonding, as a form of resource to ‘deal with’ their alien surroundings (Van Hout, 2010).

This paper utilised Putnam’s notion of social capital (2000; 2007) in order to see how well, as a heuristic tool, it fitted in terms of the real lived situational experiences of these two different groups. In how both groups negotiate trying to gain access to shared – public – space, as well as find ownership of group ‘space’, via utilising their existing corpus of capital (human, cultural) and networks, to enable their equitable participation within civil society. Their various experiences clearly needed to be viewed within the context of the intersectionality of multiple discriminations, as well as the changing nature of the geo-political contexts which directly affect their access. For this author, the intersection of multiple discriminations is the crux in determining the differential mix of opportunity and risk for both groups, as they embarked upon their migratory paths. This paper has shown how disparate these two groups’ understandings of reality can be, even though there are broad similarities of experience, and identical ‘rights’. For the Polish Roma, there is not even sufficient out-group community informal networking engagement at the neighbourhood ‘entry’ level, the necessary foundation upon which trust is formed. Polish migrants have efficiently utilised their various opportunities, and as Putman himself noted, social capital is ‘of’ the people and ‘for’ the people and is fundamental to community networks based on reciprocal relations. In their case, this has been realised.
Putnam’s concept does not readily account therefore for the complex nature of new migrations: how groups for whom migration has had a pathogenic effect, such as those who become homeless, or drug dependent (Van Hout, 2010); and how the intersection of elements which only together explain how they are then able to attempt or willing to engage with the wider society. The Polish Roma under discussion here, have quite clearly remained beyond the benefit of social, economic, and political discourses. They entered the migratory arena with a pre-existing position of extreme disadvantage, having had no say in where they are to be located in the construction of nation states. Their identity within this process is as an excluded group. Their every attempt to access space, within the “appropriation and restructuring of political and social space by hegemonic classes”, (MacLaughlin, 1998: 438) is, for the main part as expected, a fruitless exercise. Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of habitus might better serve to explain the experiences of Polish Roma. Habitus theory acknowledges social actions’ carried out over time, and, that such actions are culturally transferred inter-generationally; and all of this (unconscious) interplay is underpinned within social power dynamics between competing groups, at the neighbourhood level. The power dynamics are clear in the case of these Polish Roma.

How a group relates to the rest of society also affects social capital formation, but in a different manner. Strong internal ties, as evinced here in the Polish Roma can be said to weaken this group’s perceived capital, in the eyes of wider society. Polish Roma have been seen to retreat from engaging, and sought in-group support, by forming in-group social spaces, very much as some post-WWII émigré Poles were seen to do (Zubrzycki, 1956). Post-Accession Polish migrants, on the whole, are unencumbered with an inward-looking state of mind. However, under the banner of EU equality, all citizens have a supposed right to live their lives according to their cultural beliefs.

This paper has looked at the ways in which these two groups have been in a position to accumulate social capital for group empowerment and aid in societal integration, as distinctly different ethnic groups. This has been contextualised via their historical, communal, and personal contexts. What is clear is that because of their respective different outlooks, social capital was accrued more efficiently to the needs of one group – namely the Polish migrant, than to the other - Polish Roma. These discussions have also raised the following question, is social capital a sufficient condition for sustainable community development? The answer, quite clearly, is no. Putman noted that over time “wise policies (public and private) can ameliorate that trade-off.” Whereas his concepts align for the most part with the
experience of Polish migrants, they clearly do not hold for some of the Polish Roma discussed here.

Polish migrants have been shown to be in a position in having the choice to ‘opt-out, co-exit, or join in mainstream ‘spaces’, these Roma do not have that luxury. They behave like a diasporic people, retreating, rather than advancing, and live fragmented lives where borders are more determined and more constraining (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Therefore, freedom of movement and social exchange, and fruitfully developing social capital remains beyond their reach, if continued, in such settings.

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