
This is the **accepted version** of the journal article:

Serradell Pumareda, Olga; Sordè i Martí, Teresa; Munté Pascual, Ariadna.
«From research to policy : Roma participation through communicative organiza-
tion». *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 17 Núm. 3 (2011), p. 256-266. 11 pàg. DOI
10.1177/1077800410397804

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/289036>

under the terms of the  license

From research to policy: Roma participation through communicative organization

Ariadna Munté¹, Olga Serradell² and Teresa Sordé²

Abstract

For centuries, Roma people's social exclusion has been reinforced through research that has legitimized stereotypes rather than helping to overcome them. This has led Roma people to refuse to participate in the kind of research that has contributed to discrimination against them. Here we describe how the critical communicative methodology, used in the European Framework Programme, provides Roma people with the opportunity to participate in research at the highest possible level. In particular, the communicative organization of research allows them to contribute directly as members of the research teams, working groups, and advisory committees. This article focuses on the advisory committee as a mechanism used to guarantee that Roma people can be directly involved in decision-making, since this model has been transferred from research to policy.

Keywords: Roma; Social exclusion; Communicative Organization; Dialogue; Advisory Committee.

¹ University Ram3n Lull, Barcelona, Spain

² Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Corresponding Author:

Ariadna Munt3. Pere Tarres Faculty of Social Education and Social Work, Ram3n Lull University; Santal3, 37, 08021. Barcelona, Spain; Tel: +34 93 4152551; Email: Amuntep@peretarres.org

Introduction

With neither a territory of their own nor any claim on one, the Roma are the most important ethnic minority in Europe. Their determination to share territories with other peoples sometimes leads to conflict, because nation-states still play such powerful roles in determining policies that affect their daily lives. The Roma have traditionally been excluded from the decision-making processes in nearly, if not all, social domains, including politics and education. This fact has reinforced the stereotypes and negative images that have continued to exclude the majority of Roma from everyday social situations throughout Europe. This experience of exclusion is especially strong in the case of research: for centuries, studies in the social sciences have legitimized these negative images instead of helping counteract them. As a result, many of the Roma now refuse to be involved in the kind of research that further excludes them from the larger society.

This article is divided into five sections. We begin with an in-depth discussion of the Romani refusal to engage in research that leads to their social exclusion and then argue that the Critical Communicative Methodology (CCM) enables them to participate directly in research that is organized using a communicative approach. Researchers using this approach create spaces that facilitate dialogue, and therefore allow those who are the focus of the research to participate throughout the entire process. Amongst these spaces, the Advisory Committee (AC) stands out. We argue that the AC is especially useful for analyzing the communities which have traditionally been excluded from the rest of society.

The CCM includes a range of organizational strategies that make it possible to include Roma experiences and knowledge. This approach has led to significant progress

at both scientific and political levels. In the field of science, we will observe how projects from the European Framework Programme, particularly WORKALÓⁱ (CREA, 2001-2004) carried out using the CCM, have allowed the voices and reflections of Roma people to reach the European Commission, but also the Spanish and Catalan institutional fields. In this project, researchers have facilitated continuous interaction between representatives of Romani communities and the knowledge of the scientific community. Today European politicians understand that they must consider the voices of those affected by political decisions, and they have adopted various measures to guarantee that this happens. However in the area of political implementation we will also see how specific measures are being implemented in order to overcome the historical inequality Roma people have faced, based on the CCM. Using the findings from the WORKALÓ project, we point out the ways in which the communicative approach to organizing a research study has been transmitted from the research itself to a policy level. Specific government programmes, including the Catalan *Pla Integral del Poble Gitano* [Integral Plan for the Roma Population], have their own ACs.

Why do the Roma not like exclusionary research?

Romani organizations thoroughly reject research studies that do not lead to successful and inclusive social policies. Although researchers have accumulated knowledge through such studies, it has rarely been used to identify strategies that could prevent discrimination; instead, it has often been used to reinforce existing negative stereotypes of the Roma. For example, Cavalli-Sforza and Cavalli-Sforza (1994) analyzed genetic diversity around the world and the causes of racism towards particular social groups. They argue that because the Roma have not been able to continue with their traditional source of employment as entertainers, they have turned to prostitution, begging, and

theft. Further, these authors believe, society cannot expect to do anything but repudiate members of a group that has been always living as social parasites. Studies conducted from this perspective cannot possibly inform policies that overcome the social exclusion of the Roma, but the contrary. Thus, many Roma refuse to participate in any kind of data collection procedure that does not recognize their subjectivity (Vargas & Gómez, 2003). However, when asking Roma people themselves about their situation of exclusion from a communicative perspective, reflections and analyses of great depth can be observed, such as the one below made by a Roma man interviewed during research for the WORKALÓ project (CREA, 2001-2004). The reflection of this man, worker in the service sector and with primary education, highlights the need to combat the perpetuation of racism against Roma people endorsed by researchers such as those we have just mentioned:

When they see me like this, dark-skinned, then in many places they mistrust me, and maybe talk behind my back. But there are many places where [they say] “someone came...” or “just now someone like you came and I bought him/her...”. That person does not see me as a person, as an individual, but treat me as part of a group, as a whole community, and I am a person. (Antonio)

Other researchers have studied non-Roma people and then tried to transfer those findings to the Roma. Policies based on this kind of research have naturally failed: they assume that the Roma want to live as social outcasts and in poor conditions because doing so has traditionally been part of their culture. Such research reinforces relativist positioning; that is, it tries to maintain the supposedly “authentic” Romani identity by focusing on how non-Romani institutions like schools, universities, and firms cannot

support it appropriately. In contrast to such pseudo-scientific reflections, when what guides the research is egalitarian dialogue between Roma people and researchers, then the results point in another direction. This is because Roma people clearly see education, access to information and knowledge as a tool to overcome inequalities, as explained by WORKALÓ project this Roma man, without studies and older than 55 years old that managed their own business: “However much is known, there is always more. The person who knows how to operate a computer is guaranteed for life. Today, as you already know, computers are needed for everything” (Miguel).

In fact, the distance which can be created between reality and that exclusionary research is such that it manages to make vindications such as those related to education invisible. As can be noted in the quote below, carried out by a Roma man who never attend the school and worked selling in the street while WORKALÓ project was going on, this goes beyond the individual opinions of certain Roma people, since it is the overall battle of the Roma movement in Spain and also in Europe: “All the Romaní associations in Spain fight for this, for Roma people to be able to study and study and study” (Juan). The CCM sets out mechanisms such as the AC which facilitates a direct connection between the reality of the Roma movement and their reflections, debates, analyses and real vindications, such as the one described below by José, one of the Roma involved in WORKALÓ project:

We have these ethics: education is first; with elder people or children we are well-mannered. We are parents and we take care of our children, we are not step-parents. We always want to be parents and provide them with the best that we can. Education comes first for the Roma. (José)

Ian Hancock (1988) resists this trend among non-Roma who study the Roma and hold the attitude that the Roma “must be kept in a time capsule if we are to remain as real gypsies—illiterate, nomadic and primitive, the way Himmler wanted us” (p. 14). Rose (1983) reflects the same concern: “some scholars today are attempting to legitimize our forced illiteracy by declaring that it is a part of our cultural identity” (p. 23). These two scholars are reflecting a genuine concern as many non-Roma researchers insist on preserving what they consider to be an intrinsic part of the Romani culture ignoring the depth and authenticity of their knowledge, cultural values, their interests and needs. This type of research contributes to the reproduction of the stereotypes that are generated by mainstream culture with regards to the Romaní community, and the result has usually continued social exclusion.

Cortiade and Duka (1994) denounce some academics for having released statements “which were quite official under the Third Reich in Germany and contributed to the extermination of at least 500,000 Romanis”; recently such statements are appearing again “in so-called scientific articles in various European countries” (p. 31). Again, the Roma community has radically rejected such pseudo-scientific knowledge because it has help maintain their exclusion from mainstream society. European Romani communities are tired of being studied without seeing any improvement in their situation. As told by this Roma woman younger than 19 years old, and without schooling, what often happens is as follows:

The journalists came and interviewed people, but they came to say...That is, they didn't come to ask about education or the Romaní culture. They only came to see someone play guitar or see if someone would start singing. And it was a Romaní person who told them "What's happening,

do you think that all we know around here is how to sing and dance?"

But, why would a Romani person have to start...? It was a meeting.

Afterwards, of course we had a party, but it was a meeting for...we spoke about education and that sort of thing. (Rosa)

Thus, some exclusionary researchers have dismissed the importance of having Romani voices participate in the research process. These researchers see themselves as the unique creators of knowledge and the Roma as the objects who simply participate in surveys and discussion groups and provide the information that only the academics know how to interpret. In fact, one of the criticisms levelled at them by Roma people precisely focuses on the lack of knowledge, on the ignorance which still exists today in relation to the Roma community and the values it promotes. Like a Roma man explain to us during the fieldwork of the WORKALÓ project, "there is a lot of ignorance about us. Things that for us are very normal, daily life things for us are for others perhaps...oh!, they are surprised, they are really amazed..." (Ricardo). As a consequence of this, furthermore, many Roma increasingly reject opportunities to be the object of research.

At the other extreme, some researchers claim that they are adopting a perspective in which the Roma are not merely the objects of study, but in fact they do not do so, and simply make their own interpretations of the data they have gathered without any kind of dialogue. Many Roma also reject this approach because they do not need researchers to speak for them (Touraine, Wieviorka, & Flecha, 2004). What they ask from researchers is what they do not have: access to the knowledge accumulated by the scientific community. That was Lucia's complain, a Roma woman with elementary schooling, when we interviewed her in WORKALÓ project: "We are studies, we are

used as guinea pigs, we are useful for them [the researchers], for that, for their reports” (Lucía).

Based on a dialogic combination which is such that it values and connects scientific knowledge with the contributions of the Roma community, actions can occur which reduce the inequalities faced by the Roma population. This process forms part of the basis of the CCM out of which specific proposals arise which can guide European transnational policies, for example, in order to recognise all the atrocities committed throughout history against the Roma population. Ángel, a Roma man involved in WORKALÓ project, claimed:

To make the countries in the European Union acknowledge the damage they have done to the Romani community through their policies, because there is no acknowledgement like that given to the Jews, if it is not given to Romani people then this damage will last forever, so there is still work to be done in general, in order to recognise this persecution. Spain has eliminated the language, they have separated families so that they are not in groups, we know the Spanish policies. In France it is different, there Romani camps were persecuted and exterminated through hunger and sickness during the Second World War. In Germany it was Nazism, in Belgium it was something else, in Sweden it was the same, they sterilised the women, in Sweden they sent them to psychiatric hospitals. A transnational policy is needed to overcome these situations of inequality. (Ángel)

An increasing number of Romani representatives ask for a continuous dialogue between their own voices and the established scientific knowledge. When this happens, the researcher brings into the dialogue his or her expertise and knowledge about the developments taking place in the scientific community, which often contrast with what the Roma community members themselves are thinking and experiencing. The quote below is from a Roma woman involved in one of the focus groups carried out in WORKALÓ project with two Roma men with elementary education and three other women who, although they had secondary education and university degrees, they were working without contract. Their thinking contrasts with relativist ideas which placed educational institutions in opposition to the supposed “authentic” Roma culture. However, this Roma woman clearly defends the need to go more in-depth into learning and connect it with intercultural knowledge in order to improve coexistence in today’s multicultural societies:

Since today’s society is more and more like this [multicultural], we should acquire more knowledge when dealing with one another, within the education that currently teaches us certain material in some subjects or simply knowing about the cultures there are in Spain, the ones that we work with, perhaps even just norms for coexistence. (Rocío)

Researchers using the CCM seek to move beyond the exclusionary approaches. Romani associations have seen the possibility of participating in a kind of research that takes their voices into account and provides political and social recommendations that help them move into mainstream society. While the voices of vulnerable groups have traditionally been excluded from research, the CCM, through a communicative organization of the research, relies on the direct and active participation of the people

whose experience is being studied, and does so throughout the entire research process.

Little of the earlier research about the Roma involved close interaction between the contributions of the scientific community and the subjects' voices. Studies have generally included plenty of each element, but rarely did they interact with one another.

The Communicative Organization of Research

Research provides access to new knowledge, especially for social groups that have traditionally been subordinated and excluded from the academic world. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) argue that research makes it possible to know "the other" by choosing the most appropriate discourses and ways of representing one another. This process involves many risks, challenges and problems that need to be addressed, as we argue here in the case of the Roma. The CCM has taken up this important challenge, by proposing and implementing a communicative organization of research.

The communicative approach to organizing a research study draws on the premise that every single person has the capacity to communicate and interact with other people, because language and action are universal abilities (Chomsky, 1988; Habermas, 1981). Moreover, all people are social actors; that is, they have the capacity to transform their situation using dialogue. Within this perspective, the communicative organization of research encourages researchers to create spaces where people can reflect and engage in dialogue. Whether this communication takes the form of meetings, seminars, or virtual or face-to-face conferences, the point is that in these spaces members of the target group, such as the Roma or school dropouts participate with the researchers on equal terms. That arrangement ensures that they can discuss, add to, and even change the researchers' interpretations; as a result they produce much more reliable findings than the researchers would get by themselves. Egalitarian dialogue

between researchers and people being researched can completely change the image established based on exclusionary perspectives which strengthen the stereotypes there are about them. This especially occurs when Roma people are the collective being studied.

On the other hand, when the people being studied help to analyze the information, new elements appear that would not be seen, let alone identified, in the traditional analytic methods that are based exclusively on the researcher's perspective. Roma culture is not against or incompatible with education, however this idea has influenced the way in which Roma are treated at educational institutions. This is how Lucia's experience illustrates that, a Roma woman involved in the focus groups carried out in WORKALÓ project:

When I was studying (...) we were in a group which was almost entirely non Romi with only two Roma people, another girl and myself. I wouldn't go to class, I felt low, I felt horrible, every day...I would be on the verge of tears. "I am not going...", and they would say "why won't you come?", "because I feel low, they know how to do this and I don't know how to explain it"...On top of that they put me into an extra learning class alone, and I felt even worse. The other's would go out for a break or for coffee, and I had to stay so they could explain these things to me, well, I felt awful. (Lucía)

Various complementary strategies have been developed as part of the communicative way of organizing research. One of the most important has been including Roma people on research teams, as it is vital to make such teams more diverse, to improve the quality of research (Denzin & Giardina, 2007). For communities

that have traditionally been excluded from research, like the Roma, it is particularly relevant to have their representatives on the team (Vargas & Gómez, 2003; Touraine, Wieviorka & Flecha, 2004). An additional strategy to guarantee that the voices of such groups are included is developing working groups to support various aspects of the research process. These flexible groups can respond to the needs of each project by engaging in specific tasks; for example, groups can be created to discuss a study's theoretical foundations or to contribute to the data collection and analysis. Both strategies do not guarantee the overcoming of bias but they contribute to move towards it, as well as to obtain higher quality results, which are thus likely to have more impact and be of more use in the community.

Gómez and Flecha (2004) have already shown how the quality of the scientific work improves when researchers include the voices of groups that have traditionally been excluded from that domain. In other words, researchers find that using the communicative strategy to organize their work greatly facilitates their research process. The communicative organization of research is, to borrow Merton's (1993) term, a methodology "standing on the shoulders of giants". In fact, it is a clear example of how research can be organized to break down what Habermas (1984) calls the relevant methodological gap between researchers and the subjects of research. This approach is also based on the recognition of different types of knowledge. Knowledge is the result of a multidirectional dialogue among all the individuals involved in a given situation or phenomenon being analyzed. Given this understanding, the communicative organization guarantees that the voices of the people who will be most affected by the new knowledge—i.e., its final users—are included not only during the data collection and data analysis but throughout the research process, from beginning to the end. This

makes it possible to begin the study based on their real needs and to better prevent researcher bias. This will accentuate the results of the research, but also its social and political impact, since that will depend on the measures taken going beyond mere welfarism, and respond to the needs stated by Roma people themselves, as Antonio argues:

Many things should be done. In the first place, policies should be changed. Policies are created from a non Roma perspective, and when is the question is asked, for instance, about the needs that there are, the needs that you have, for example, you know what they are. Roma people know what the needs are in the Romani community. Therefore, the policies that are made are not created based on thinking of the needs of the Roma but based on thinking what they want for the Roma. (Antonio)

Further, knowledge that is produced through dialogue is deeper and more connected to the real world than knowledge that results merely from the researchers' interpretation of the reality; in making such interpretations the researchers may draw too much on their own background, and on their own social representations, which can sometimes be distorted by social stereotypes. Along these lines, Beck (in Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1995) describes a process he calls demonopolizing expert knowledge. The more people who participate in the entire research process, and the more diverse they are, the more relevant the research findings will be for the community involved. Therefore, when actors from different contexts (academia, community groups, government and politicians, business, etc.) interact, they multiply the knowledge and reduce the bias; these dialogic spaces include all the voices, so the researchers' point of view does not overly influence the results.

The voice of the most excluded among the excluded: the Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee (AC) includes representatives of the social group who will be most affected by the research outcomes, also called the end-users. Particularly for studies that focus on social justice, the AC can address exclusion by including those end-users who have been most excluded in the past. In a study focused on the Roma, an AC might include Roma who represent the typical lives of the majority of Roma. If a study is conducted on the exclusion faced by literacy learners, it would be necessary to have literacy learners in the committee. If an educator represents them on the AC, their contribution would be totally different from that of an illiterate person (Lebrón & Padrós, 2008). Likewise, the AC for a study on people with a disability should include people with that disability, not their parents or professionals working with them. For a study analyzing the vicious cycle of social inequality in a given neighborhood, the AC should be composed of people who live there, not of professionals who work there eight hours a day and then leave. And so on.

Though all these people might have valuable experiences and knowledge about these situations, they are not ideal AC members. We want to hear directly from people who have experienced social exclusion. Including representatives of such groups as participants in a study gives them opportunities to express their voices, opinions, and experiences and have them considered as the group creates new knowledge. Whether they represent associations or participate as individuals, they contribute with their own analyses and interpretations of the situation. For example, one Roma woman participating in WORKALÓ project expressed the need to take the importance of family into account in the Roma culture, in such a way that people who work with Roma people should do so based on this knowledge and from this perspective: “The social

worker needs to look at the whole family, people do not work from an overall standpoint and it is important to work from an overall standpoint” (María).

Furthermore, each research project can establish the kind of profiles it needs on its AC. For example, the BRUDILA CALLÍ study (CREA, 2000-2003) focused on identifying strategies to help Romani girls make the transition from elementary to secondary school. Two advisory councils were created to ensure that Romani women and girls would participate throughout the entire research process. The first was an Advisory Committee of Roma girls; they helped formulate the initial hypothesis and research questions and design the data collection tools. These girls, a combination of dropouts and students, were also actively involved in selecting the study participants and in analyzing the data. Then, a second AC was formed, made up of Roma mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and other women who were the girls’ guardians. Roma women participated in this organization, members of associations such as the Drom Kotar Mestipen. The name of this organization means “road to freedom” in Romany, the Roma language, and being able to rely on their contributions broke away from the ethnocentric perspective which often promotes the idea of Roma women being passive and submissive. In contrast to this, Roma women are playing a key role in the progress of the Roma community. In recent years they have become agents of social and educational change for their community based on the objective of overcoming the exclusion which their population faces and manage to achieve more egalitarian relationships, without losing their identity. In order to achieve this, they participate in debates in associations, conferences, seminars, and other spaces in which they vindicate their voices being included into decision-making processes:

Romaní women, we are fighting, fighting for our reality to become visible, so that both non-Romaní women and men can see what we are

able to do and how we do it. We want our needs to be taken into account, as well as what we want and how we want it to happen. ⁱⁱ (Drom Kotar Mestipen, 2001)

Romani women participating in the AC in BRUDILA CALLÍ brought their own experiences of being dropouts themselves and of having supported—with more or less success—these girls in continuing in school. These women reviewed the findings, especially the final recommendations, to ensure they were socially relevant and useful.

How were these girls and women contacted and invited to participate? Various strategies are used to select AC members. It is always helpful to work closely with social movements, grassroots organizations, and other associations that have contact with the potential end-users or operate in the neighborhoods and other spaces where the research is conducted (Puigvert & Valls, 2005). These connections were not made ad hoc to give the researchers access to these sites and people; in many cases the researchers were already participating regularly in groups and events in these spaces. Thus they were hardly foreigners to these people's context or their problems. Often, this kind of regular involvement made the contact easier.

An example of this is found in the Sixth Framework Programme funded INCLUD-ED project (CREA, 2006-2011), aimed at identifying social and educational strategies that contribute to overcome social and educational exclusion. When the team started to work on the proposal, researchers already had access to these dialogic spaces, and that contact ensured that the research objectives were closer to the people's experiences in school failure and therefore relevant. Once the project was funded by the European Commission, a concrete strategy developed, and together the project partners proposed a process for selecting candidates. The INCLUD-ED consortium consists of

15 international research teams, all of whom have different levels of involvement with social movements. A call for candidates was launched, and all 70 researchers were invited to look for candidates in their countries. The goal was to create the most diverse team possible, in terms of age, gender, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, geography, and so on. The consortium emphasized being as internationally representative as possible. The finalists were those candidates who got more votes because the partners considered that they best fit the established criteria. They then created an agreement of collaboration, which stated that their participation was to benefit the group they represent, and was not oriented towards their personal interests. At this point, they are actively participating in developing the research.

The INCLUD-ED project developed three main criteria to select AC members. First, each candidate had to represent one of the vulnerable groups identified in the project: migrants, cultural minorities, youth, women, and people with disabilities. Second, they had to already be participating in one or more organizations that work to overcome the inequalities facing the given group. This criterion made it more likely that members would know a great deal about the barriers and challenges facing their group. Third, candidates should not hold a university degree. This criterion ensured that candidates had faced the same barriers and challenges as those who are most excluded within their group. Not having a university degree was only a proxy for that kind of exclusion. This criterion was particularly important to directly incorporate the voices of the most excluded, and not rely on intermediaries or representatives. Thus, the fact that someone has no university degree does not guarantee that they would better represent or serve the interests of their group, but it helps to include the voices of the most excluded.

In each case, once the AC has been created, arrangements are made for members to work with the research team, contributing their own views to enrich the project's

findings and conclusions. They might challenge what the research team has found. They might add to it or totally contradict it. The goal of the AC meetings is to discuss the relevance and meaning of what the researchers have found, based on the experience and perspectives of those who are actively involved in the given situation. The main function of the AC is to give voice to those who are usually excluded from discussions situations; thus they become critical agents. They must also ensure that the study's results and proposed recommendations are aligned with the needs of the end-users. In order to do these tasks, the AC members meet during the various phases of the project to hear what the researchers are finding. Members of the research team also attend these meetings, to present results or questions to discuss. The knowledge which is generated in these meetings is not only the result of the inclusion of the voices of the collectives being studied, but rather the way in which they participate in this creation of scientific knowledge process. The key lies in the position of equality taken on by researchers and those being researched in the dialogue process. Contributions are valued based on arguments and not on the position of power or the post held by the people making them. The AC members also work with others involved in the study, including politicians, stakeholders, and researchers. Egalitarian dialogue is also promoted in these meetings in such a way that this collaboration coordinates actions between the policy level and the level of social practice, to ensure that the study is useful and has the greatest possible potential to solve the problems it is addressing.

From Research to Policy: The WORKALÓ project

The Roma are unemployed at rates higher than the European average, and the jobs they do find tend to be low-skilled and precarious (OSCE, 2000; ERRC, 2007; European Commission, 2004). Additionally, traditional jobs such as traveling sales are vanishing

in the current economy, endangering the survival of many Romani families. The ability of the Roma to participate in the labor market is directly related to their ability to participate in the wider society and to be active citizens. Therefore, assuring that they have adequate employment opportunities has become an issue that Europe must address urgently if it is to construct a socially cohesive society. In response to this need, the WORKALÓ project (CREA, 2000-2004) was established as a part of the European Union's Fifth Framework Programme. The project aimed to identify the reasons why the Roma are excluded from the labor market and to find new ways to create job opportunities and help individuals become more employable. It analyzed the skills that the Roma have developed in general and identified how these skills can help them enter the labor market and become more involved with the larger society. ⁱⁱⁱ

When the project began, the lack of political recognition of the cultural specificity of the Roma population in Europe was a fact that was strongly criticized by the Roma participants:

I really hope that the recognition of Roma people is achieved in the 21st Century, because when the Roma can legally be called a Romaní group or population, I am convinced that then all the obstacles that are now preventing us from getting out of this situation of exclusion and marginalisation, in terms of identity, housing, employment, etc. will then be removed. (Joaquín).

Five years later, the Roma community had been institutionally recognised by the Catalan Parliament (2001), the Spanish Government (Spanish Congress 2005) and also the European Parliament (European Parliament 2005). Specifically, in the final WORKALÓ conference, held in the European Parliament headquarters in Brussels,

representatives from Spain and from the European Parliament made their political commitment to the recognition of the Roma population public. The CCM played a key role in obtaining such a significant social and political impact. Amongst other reasons because this project had its own AC, that operated from the very beginning, but also because many of the researchers were deeply involved in the Roma rights movement. This involvement shaped the innovative approach to the issue of job opportunities for the Roma: instead of focusing on what this group lacks, the project focused on analyzing what the Roma can contribute to the European information society. Therefore all the major hypotheses and the research design were developed in dialogue with the members of the AC. This AC also included members of other groups facing similar problems. It was decided that a dialogue among a diverse constituency, including but not exclusively the Roma, would greatly benefit the project. The AC consisted of representatives from a Roma association, the Roma Women's Association, the Group of Studies on the Arabic and Islamic World, and the Federation of Cultural and Educative Associations of Adults.

The final conference organized in the European Parliament was attended by major stakeholders from the Roma community and members of the Euro chamber. Unlike previous projects, this one made a point of having its major conclusions presented by a combination of university researchers and Romani representatives. The Roma speaking at the European Parliament were not invited just for that occasion; they had been actively involved throughout the entire research process. They were in continuous dialogue with the researchers, and all parties said that the process enriched both the existing body of scientific knowledge and the views that the held Roma about

themselves. The researchers alone would have not been able to create proposals that had such a strong policy impact.

The Roma community has spent years forcefully questioning those policies saying “they are working based on the pieces, not based on the whole overview” –in Aurora’s words, a Roma woman involved in WORKALÓ project. Despite attempting to reduce the inequalities which this population faces, those policies have not led to effective results helping to overcoming their social exclusion. Roma people like Jesús, a self-employed worker who never before attended school when he was interviewed for the WORKALÓ project, see these actions as attempts to resolve their problems “from outside“ the reality in their lives and they express this as follows:

Because of this politicians do not want full integration in the best sense of the word. Because nowadays, they always send you to the Welfare Services if there are any problems. If it’s an educational problem, go to the welfare services. If it’s a work-related problem, go to the welfare services. (Jesús)

But nor would the Roma by themselves have been able to achieve such progress for their own people. The close and ongoing collaboration between the two parties was a crucial change, compared to previous research in the field of Romani Studies. All the policy makers who attended the final WORKALÓ Conference were impressed at this unusual dialogue and committed to following up with particular actions to implement the suggested recommendations. In April 2005, a politician who had been at the conference presented a resolution to the European Parliament (2005) that included the study’s main conclusions; it passed unanimously. This was only the first of a series of resolutions that serve as the foundation for what is now considered the European

political strategy for the Roma. There is now recognition of the need to address not only the ways that the Roma are excluded from European society, but also the fact that they often cannot participate in the political domain. In Spain this has already begun, the Roma State Council was created as a direct result of the recognition of the Roma population by the Spanish Congress of Deputies (2005) which is an advisory body within the Ministry of Immigration and Work. Among its various tasks, this Council proposes measures to promote Roma people, provides advice on plans related to their development, and produces timely reports on issues that concern them. Its members are a mixture of administration representatives, and representatives of Romani nationwide associations and federations. These representatives serve for four years, and then are renewed through a public announcement.

The institutional recognition of the Roma population generates an essential framework in order to develop policies which provide an effective response to the needs and demands of Roma people. However, in order to find out what these demands are, it is necessary to work continuously in conjunction with Roma people, along the lines set out by the CCM. Thus for example, although one of the most significant vindications of the Roma association movement is the right to know about the history of the Roma population and its origins, taking this vindication into the political arena and implementing it will largely depend on scientific research, which must guide the policies aimed at the Roma population, and manage to echo as claimed by this Roma man without schooling, involved in WORKALÓ project:

There should be the same (...) type of equality for Roma people, they should have the same opportunities that a Muslim or Indian child has, putting it differently, he or she should be able to know about his or her

origins and know who she or he is, and where he or she comes from.

(Javier)

The European Parliament passed other resolutions emphasizing the importance of having the Roma participate in developing policy, specifically policies aimed at them. The recommendation to develop a European Strategy for the Roma (European Parliament, 2008) highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Roma can participate effectively in making the decisions that affect the lives and well-being of Roma communities. In another resolution, the European Parliament (2006) particularly emphasizes the participation of Roma women, urging member states to guarantee that they are fully involved in preparing, planning, and implementing all policies. Similarly, the Council of the European Union (2009) adopted resolutions on including the Roma in policy-making. All this activity is based on the idea that when Roma representatives and associations support policies, those policies will have more impact on the community. Thus, ten common basic principles on Roma inclusion were established; one is that the Roma people and civil society should participate actively in designing, implementing, and evaluating policy.

The experiences outlined above exemplify the move from discourse to action: the use of communicative organization has now been transferred successfully from research to policy-making. Among others, European, Spanish and Catalan governmental bodies have created their own advisory councils to promote the inclusion of Romani representatives in policy-making. In 2004, the Council of Europe created the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), a consultative body involved in developing all the activities aimed at Roma. It focuses on offering the Roma ways to participate in and influence decision-making processes on issues concerning them, openly and officially,

through a special relationship with the Council of Europe. The idea was to create a representative organization of all the Roma and Travellers living in Europe, through their own state and international organizations, one that is also an autonomous body, independent of governments and inter-governmental organizations, with the status of a non-governmental organization.

In November 2001, the Catalan Parliament officially recognized the Roma as a cultural minority and noted their contributions to Catalonia (Catalan Parliament, 2001). To improve their situation, the Parliament commissioned a study to describe various aspects of their situation; a member of the WORKALÓ team was designated as principal investigator of the study (Sánchez Aroca et al., 2005). This study was conducted following the CCM, and counted on strong participation by the Roma from its very beginning. The team was composed of Roma and non-Roma researchers, some with academic qualifications and some without. It also included an Advisory Committee that played important roles at various stages from designing the survey sample to developing all the policy recommendations. This was the first large study on the Roma carried out in Catalonia, and it followed the theoretical and methodological foundations of the WORKALÓ project. Its results served as the basis for developing the political program: the Integral Plan of the Roma people in Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2006).

When the Integral Plan was adopted it was organized following the communicative approach; its two executive organizations are the Interdepartmental Commission and the Plan's own Advisory Committee. The AC members are a diverse group of Roma individuals and representatives of Romani organizations; some are people without academic qualifications or living in very precarious conditions.

Representatives of the Catalan government and various experts also attend the AC. Through this political measure the Catalan government clearly took the step from research to policy. In this way the institutional recognition obtained as the result of communicative research is linked to an implementation process for specific actions against inequality, developed in the following areas: Social Action, Justice, Health, Information and Communication Technologies, Culture, Education, Labor, Women, and Housing. Also, this comprehensive intervention is based on the principle of the equality of difference, provided by authors such as Flecha (2000) and vindications made by Roma people based on arguments such as this, provided by Roma participants in the WORKALÓ project:

Rom people who integrate into non-Romani society have to have basic knowledge in order to understand it. Non-Romani people must also be thoughtful and understand Romani society since we are also a people.
(Carlos)

The equality of difference entails the right to be different and to be equally valued. In order to do so it is fundamental to ensure processes involving dialogue and the inclusion of the voices of Roma people, as well as respect and reciprocal knowledge. This is the reason behind the importance of working groups based on the CCM created to carry out the various actions involved in the Integral Plan for Roma People. Thus, in addition to the AC, the plan has also developed nine working groups, one for each area; members of the government departments, members of Roma organizations, and Roma individuals can sign up and participate. These working groups decide how to carry out the actions foreseen in the Plan; they define the detailed implementation process. Over the period of 2005-2008, for example, 91 activities were promoted. Given the plan's

philosophy and the orientation of the communicative strategy for organizing research, the plan's coordinating team is diverse (including Roma) and guarantees that Roma voices are included through these working groups. For the first time, lay Roma have participated in a political plan of this scale.

The Integral Plan reflects the real contributions that the communicative organization approach can make in the political sphere. Far from being a mere declaration of intentions, this Plan is leading a diverse group of people to work collectively to develop specific measures. This plan, along with studies using the CCM, such as WORKALÓ, is helping the Roma overcome their resistance to participating in research. More important, it is helping to address the inequalities that continue to affect them.

Final remarks

As we have discussed here, the creation of opportunities for the Roma to engage actively in research has changed both the attitudes that some Roma hold towards research and the ways their participation has been tackled in various domains, especially in politics. The communicative organization of research provides the opportunity to create spaces that allow all parties to better understand the social reality of the Roma; it also responds to the methodological challenge of including the voices of groups that have traditionally been left out of science. It helps to bridge the existing gap between the academy, the policy makers, and minority cultural groups. And it encourages all research teams to be as diverse as possible and to create opportunities for researchers to engage in discussion with those who will be affected by the research. Some social groups, like the Roma, do require a special effort and emphasis in order to compensate for the centuries when they were totally invisible to the scientific community. A

strategy like the AC not only makes it possible to reverse this invisibility; it also contrasts the voices of the subjects with the contributions of the international scientific community. Thus, the findings of each study can be improved upon, expanded, changed, or rejected, through the force of the participants' arguments. It is through this dialogue, through the force of the arguments presented, that better and more relevant research outcomes are obtained.

Throughout this article we have showed how the AC has been transferred from research to policy. This process has resulted in many consultative bodies—at the European, Spanish and Catalan level—that satisfy the problem of Roma representation in the short term, but researchers still need to learn how the Roma can participate as much as other social groups in the societies where they live. An example we have discussed is the WORKALÓ project, which had multiple impacts at the European, Spanish, and Catalan level. The creation of the AC at the political level mirrors the research strategies that were developed to include the Roma voices that had been silenced for centuries. It is our responsibility to keep moving forward, developing ways to guarantee the quality of our research findings by overcoming the historical discrimination that unfortunately is still very present in both politics and research. If qualitative research intends to contribute to social justice, it must tackle these challenges and innovate by finding ways to be as inclusive and dialogic as possible. The AC is only one of many possible ways to move towards this goal.

Notes

ⁱ The quotes which appear throughout the article are from the Roma people who participated in the WORKALÓ communicative research project, a RTD project from the 5th European Commission Framework Programme (CREA, 2001-2004).

ⁱⁱ Drom Kotar Mestipen, I Seminar on Barcelona Romis in the 21st Century. November 30th, 2001. Barcelona: Barcelona Science Park.

ⁱⁱⁱ The research team conducted qualitative field work across the five participating countries: France, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom. All the data was collected using communicative strategies: 42 daily life stories, 13 discussion groups, and five observations in different workplaces.

References

Beck, U., Giddens, A., & Lash, S. (1995). *Reflexive modernization. Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cavalli- Sforza, F., & Cavalli-Sforza, L. (1995). *The great human diasporas: The history of diversity and evolution*. New York: Addison-Wesley.

Catalan Parliament. (2001). *Resolució 1046/VI del Parlament de Catalunya, sobre el reconeixement de la identitat del poble gitano i del valor de la seva cultura [Resolution 1046/VI of the Catalan Parliament on the Recognition of the Identity of the Roma Population and of the Value of their Culture]*.

Chomsky, N. (1988). *Language and politics*. New York: Black Rose Books.

Cortiade, M., & Duka, J. (1994). International Romani Union in Action. *Roma, 41*, 28-41.

Council of the European Union. (2009). *Council conclusions on inclusion of the roma. 2947th employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs council meeting*. Luxembourg: Council of the European Union.

CREA (2000-2003). *BRUDILA CALLÍ. Las mujeres contra la exclusión social. Superación del absentismo y fracaso escolar de las niñas y adolescentes gitanas* [BRUDILA CALLÍ. *Women against social exclusion: overcoming the truancy and school failure of Roma girls and adolescents*]. Plan Nacional I+D. Instituto de la Mujer / Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales [National R+D Plan. Institute for Women / Ministry for Work and Social Affairs].

CREA (2001-2004). *WORKALÓ. The creation of new occupational patterns for cultural minorities: The gypsy case* FP5, European Commission RTD.

CREA (2006-2011). *INCLUD-ED. Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education. 6th Framework Programme. Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-based Society. CIT4-CT-2006-028603. Directorate-General for Research, European Commission.*

Denzin, N. K., & Giardina, M. D. (2007). *Ethical futures in qualitative research: Decolonizing the politics of knowledge*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). Introduction. critical methodologies and indigenous inquiry. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln & L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies* (pp. 1-20). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.

European Commission - Employment and social affairs. (2004). *The situation of Roma in an enlarged European Union. Fundamental rights and anti-discrimination*. Luxemburg: Office for Official Publications of European Communities.

European Parliament. (2005). *European Parliament resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union*. Brussels: European Parliament.

European Parliament. (2006). *Report on the situation of Roma women in the European Union. 200572164 (INI)*. Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Brussels: European Parliament.

European Parliament. (2008). *Motion for a Resolution. European Parliament Resolution on a European Strategy on the Roma. B6-0053/2008*. Brussels: European Parliament.

European Roma Rights Center. (2007). *The glass box: Exclusion of Roma from employment*. Hungary: European Commission; Open Society Institute. Retrieved June 3, 2010, from <http://www.errc.org/db/02/14/m00000214.pdf>

Flecha, R. (2000). *Sharing Words: Theory and Practice of Dialogic learning*. Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Generalitat de Catalunya [Catalan Government]. (2006). *Pla integral del poble gitano a catalunya [Integral Plan for the Roma people in Catalonia]*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Benestar i Família.

Gómez, J., & Flecha, R. (2004). *Participatory paradigms: Researching 'with' rather than 'on'*. In B. Crossan, J. Gallacher & M. Osborne (Eds.), *Researching widening access: Issues and approaches in an international context* (pp. 129-140). London: Routledge.

Habermas, J. (1981). *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 1. Reasons and the Rationalization of Society* and *Volume 2. Lifeworld and System: A critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action. Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press (p.o. 1981).

Hancock, I. (1988). Reunification and the role of international Romani union. *Roma*, (29), 9-19.

Lebrón, A., & Padrós, M. (2008). El protagonismo de las personas participantes y el apoyo desde la investigación en el movimiento de educación democrática de personas adultas [*The protagonism of the participants and support from research for the democratic adult education movement*] *Revista Electrónica de Educación y Formación Continua de Adultos*, 2(1), 135-147.

Merton, R. K. (1993). *On the shoulders of giants*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2000). *Report on the situation of the Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area*. The Hague: OSCE.

Puigvert, L., & Valls, R. (2005). Dialogic learning in popular education movements in Spain. In J. Crowther, V. Galloway & I. Martin (Eds.), *Popular Education: Engaging the academy international perspectives* (pp. 88-100). Leicester, England: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

Rose, R. (1983). Sinti and Roma in Germany. *Roma*, 7(2), 21-24.

Sánchez-Aroca, M., Giménez-Valentí, M., Blasco-Valero, R., Fernández-Ruíz, M., Sánchez-Felguera, C., Serentill-López, S., et al. (2005). *Estudi de la població gitana a Catalunya [Study of Roma population in Catalonia]*. Barcelona: Fundació Pere Tarrés, Departament de Benestar Social i Família, Generalitat de Catalunya.

Spanish Congress. (2005). *Proposición no de ley relativa al reconocimiento de los derechos del pueblo gitano 162/000320*. [White Paper on the recognition of the rights of the Roma population]. Madrid: Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Retrieved June 2, 2010, from http://movil.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L8/CONG/DS/PL/PL_114.PDF

Touraine, A., Wieviorka, M., & Flecha, R. (Eds.). (2004). *Conocimiento e identidad. voces de grupos culturales en la investigación social [Knowledge and Identity: Voices of cultural groups in Social Research]*. Barcelona: El Roure.

Vargas, J., & Gómez, J. (2003). Why Roma do not like mainstream schools: Voices of a people without territory. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(4), 559-590.

Bios

Ariadna Munté is a lecturer at Ramon Llull University in Barcelona. A sociologist and social worker, she has worked for over 10 years with Roma people and other vulnerable groups, combining her work with research in social sciences. She has participated in various RTD projects and is currently a member of the *DROM-IN* project on the immigrant Roma community.

Olga Serradell, PhD, is currently a postdoctoral researcher for GEDIME (Study Group on Immigration and Ethnic Minorities) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

Between 2006 and 2008 she was a postdoctoral researcher for CADIS (Center for Sociological Analysis and Intervention) in the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris; her supervisor was Michel Wieviorka. Her work is linked to projects that study strategies to overcome the inequalities facing vulnerable groups, specifically ethnic minority women.

Teresa Sordé, holds a Doctorate from Harvard University, and is a Ramon y Cajal Researcher for GEDIME (Study Group on Immigration and Ethnic Minorities) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Most of her work has dealt specifically with strategies to overcome discrimination against migrants and cultural minorities. Her research interests are cultural studies, in particular on Roma. She is the leader of one of the projects within the *INCLUD-ED, Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion from education in Europe* project, funded by the 6th European Union Research Framework Programme.