

**Outside in Dublin: Travellers, Society and the State 1963 -
1985**

Dr Úna Crowley

Ph. 00353872683805

Email: una.m.crowley@nuim.ie

**Office of the Vice-President and Department of Geography
Riverstown Lodge
National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Co Kildare**

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Introduction

This paper examines accommodation policies and spatialized practices designed to rehabilitate, assimilate and integrate Irish Travellers (Ireland's indigenous nomadic population) into mainstream society. With a specific focus on Dublin, the study covers the period from the commencement of the National Settlement Programme in 1964 until the mid 1980s when the depth of division between the settled community and Travellers reached crisis point and was expressed in outbursts of intercommunal violence in neighbourhoods throughout Dublin. I have chosen to concentrate on this particular period as it was a critical time in Travellers' history and the accommodation policies and programmes developed during this time continue to have profound consequences for Travellers right up to the present day. It was during this period that widely held negative perceptions of Travellers were validated and cemented in research and policy¹, legitimising behaviour towards Travellers that has ranged from shunning to verbal and physical violence; from territorial exclusion and evictions to vigilante attacks.

Taking Dublin as a case study the paper brings to light key characteristics of Traveller/State and Traveller/settled society relations during this period - a lack of an integrated policy on Traveller accommodation between central and local government; ambivalence and resistance to settlement from local authority officials, from settled society and from Travellers themselves. The case example illustrates the disordered, contested, contingent ways that policy and practice unfold, and that attributing blame for failings in the process or execution is not a simple task. In other words, it is hypothesized

that the National Settlement Programme was a process that set out largely with ‘good intentions’², but which unravelled in practice to an extent that led to a revanchist backlash.

The first section outlines the cultural, intellectual and political context in which settlement policies were first conceptualized and produced. The second section focuses on policy response, Traveller/settled conflict and resistance from Travellers to settlement over these two decades, and the difference between the idealised hopes of discourse and the material realities of lived lives. The final section provides a discussion on why this ostensibly well-intended scheme to improve the living conditions and quality of life of Travellers went so tragically awry.

Background

The years immediately preceding the launch of the National Settlement Programme in 1964 was a time of great trauma, upheaval and uncertainty in Irish economic, social and cultural life. Feelings of anxiety and disillusionment gradually intensified as the post revolutionary State failed to fulfil its promises and many social problems not only remained unsolved but in fact got worse. Poverty was endemic and levels of emigration and unemployment rose steadily. The number of people involved in agriculture began to fall dramatically (declining by 50% between 1946 and 1960). Ireland’s overall growth performance in the 1950s was the worst in Europe and confidence about the viability of the economy reached an all time low. Nevertheless, the period was also marked by an important transition in Ireland’s economic and social development. The anti-intellectual conservatism of the previous decades began to change and the new

climate was epitomised in a series of reports on economic and social matters published by the National Economic and Social Council (a government appointed advisory body). In 1959 the government began to implement measures designed to stimulate Ireland's seriously stagnating economy, dismantle economic protection and encourage free trade and foreign investment (Chubb, 23).

In parallel with the migration patterns of members of mainstream rural population at this time, Travellers³ began to abandon rural Ireland for towns and cities in Ireland and abroad (while the population of Ireland was declining due to emigration (more than 500,000 emigrated between 1945 and 1961), out migration from rural areas increased Dublin's population by 10% between 1951 and 1966) (Lee, 169). The number of Traveller families living in Dublin rose from less than ten in 1952 to forty-six (418 individuals) in 1960. Although Travellers remained a tiny proportion of the overall population of Dublin, encampments tended to be larger in the capital than in any other part of the country. Located mainly on the margin of the city, in the band where suburban housing meets agricultural land, encampments were highly visible and often squalid.

The arrival of Travellers in a district invariably provoked an immediate and hostile reaction from the local settled population. Travellers were seen by many as social pariahs, as uncivilised, dirty and diseased, leaving a trail of filth and rubbish wherever they went. Their presence was considered to lower the tone of a neighbourhood and have a negative impact on house prices⁴. Politicians and members of the business community viewed Traveller encampments around the city as an embarrassment and a hindrance to progress and modernisation⁵.

By 1960, complaints about Travellers obstructing roads, destroying property, despoiling land and upsetting tourists had grown so much that the Minister for Justice decided to establish a special Commission on Itinerancy⁶ to investigate the problems caused by Travellers. The terms of reference given to members of the Commission were to ‘consider what steps might be taken to provide opportunities for a better way of life for itinerants; to promote their absorption into the general community; pending such absorption, to reduce to a minimum the disadvantages to themselves and to the community resulting from their itinerant habits’. Reporting in 1963, the Commission on Itinerancy (COI) marked the first systematic attempt by the Irish government to settle Travellers and was a key influence in the development of statutory and voluntary responses to Travellers. It provided a radically new framework for the management of Travellers. Its ultimate goal of settlement and spatial fixity has remained the cornerstone of government policy towards Travellers ever since⁷.

Members of the committee were appointed from the judiciary, Garda, health and education authorities, farming community, charitable organisations and the Church. Individuals were selected ‘...on the basis of [their] known interest in, and specialised knowledge of, some particular aspect of the itinerant problem’ and the government considered itself ‘...fortunate in having such a well balanced Commission’ (COI, 111). It was emphasised that the committee members would ‘...require all tenacity of purpose and a very great deal of patience to accomplish [their] mission’ (111). There was no Traveller representative involved in the Commission.

The Commission’s main recommendation concerned the provision of accommodation (principally housing) for Travellers. Where Travellers refused standard

housing, or in cases where there was insufficient housing available, the Commission recommended that subsidies should be introduced to enable local authorities provide serviced camping sites. However, the ‘...provision of these sites should only be the first step of stabilisation’ in a programme aimed at their eventual assimilation (COI, 11). Halting sites were to include facilities for keeping horses, storage areas for scrap collection and sanitation facilities. The Commission also recommended that these temporary halting sites be situated close to urban areas, to hospitals, churches, schools and shopping areas to aid assimilation, avoid isolation and the creation of a separate community (COI, 54, 55).

The Report, however, did not include detailed recommendations on the levels of accommodation to be provided; ‘rather it recommended that building programmes should reflect the number and preferences of local Travellers’ (Norris and Winston, 805). It did however, suggest that unauthorised camping by Travellers near official halting sites be made an offence subject to stringent penalties, including imprisonment. The assumption was that the ‘problem’ of Travellers could be solved by encouraging them to give up their nomadic lifestyle and to assimilate in to settled society by moving into standard houses (COI, 106)⁸.

Policy response: Local Authorities

In August 1964 Central Government issued a policy statement in response to the recommendations made in the Report. It set out a number of measures it planned to undertake immediately, including introduction of a state subsidy to local authorities for provision of housing, serviced halting sites and caravans to tent dwelling families⁹. The statement also included a commitment to more vigorous law enforcement for illegal

encampments and initiatives in respect of health services, social work, education, social welfare, training and employment.

The implementation of the accommodation/settlement programme was delegated to local government. In the Dublin area, it was proposed that accommodation be provided on a co-ordinated basis by the three local authorities – Dublin County Council, Dublin Corporation and Dún Laoghaire Borough Corporation. There were however, no statutory changes introduced and no deadlines for completion of the settlement programme - an omission that would prove crucial to the way the programme operated¹⁰.

The Commission also recommended the establishment of voluntary Itinerant Settlement Committees to aid settlement and provide basic facilities for Travellers and ‘to bridge the gap between the itinerant family and the settled community’ (COI, 107-108). In 1965 the first Itinerant Settlement Committee was formed in Dublin¹¹. The immediate aims of the committee were to assist in measures to promote Travellers’ rehabilitation, resettlement and absorption into the settled community, to persuade members of the settled community to accept Travellers and (working with the local authorities), to provide basic facilities and serviced campsites including ‘tigíns’ (small huts).

The contradictions of placing responsibility for the settlement of a nomadic group in the hands of territorially defined local authorities became apparent almost immediately (Rottman *et al.*). Despite the availability of substantial subsidies from central government towards the provision of housing and halting sites and the relatively small size of Traveller population, there were greater incentives for local authorities to minimise the number of Travellers living in their jurisdiction. Travellers contributed little or nothing to local

authority revenues; instead they created a need for more and more costly services (ibid). As a Dublin County Council official argued: ‘They [the County Council] were being asked to provide services for people who were not worth a damn to them’ (*The Irish Times*, 10 November, 1964). In addition, many officials felt that provision of accommodation, particularly serviced halting sites, would result in an influx of Travellers into the area - ‘if we provide sites will attract all the itinerants in the country – particularly if we are the first to supply them’ (Local Councillor, *The Irish Times*, 10 November 1964).

This coupled with the hostile reactions of many in the settled community to almost all proposed sites resulted in many officials in Dublin County Council and Corporation (like local authorities around the country) paying lip service to the settlement programme. Attempts to find suitable sites for Travellers were, for the most part, half-hearted. When the Dublin Itinerant Settlement Committee met with Dublin County officials in 1965, ‘they were informed that 12 sites had been proposed, but that all had been abandoned owing to public opposition’ (Breathnach, 137).

Four years after the publication of the Report of the Commission on Itinerancy, Dublin Corporation (with the help of the Dublin Itinerant Settlement Committee) provided the first formal Traveller-specific accommodation in 1967. Located in Ballyfermot, Labre Park (named after the patron Saint for beggars) was built on a former dump. It could accommodate up to 40 families. Construction on a second site began in 1969 in Avila Park, Finglas and twenty families had moved in by 1972. However, by this time the Traveller population in Dublin had increased considerably and the provision of accommodation for Travellers in the Dublin area was completely inadequate. By 1973

there were three hundred and thirteen families in Dublin, one fifth of the entire Traveller population.

In the late 1970s further sites were built in Dublin, including Coolock (Cara park), Rathfarnham (St Frances Park, Holylands), Clondalkin (St Oliver's Park), and Ballymun (Poppintree). According to available Dublin local authority figures approximately eighty families were accommodated in standard housing and 216 families accommodated on serviced and unserviced temporary sites between 1964-1979 (Dáil Debates, vol. 303, 22 April, 1980). These figures, however, were acknowledged by a number of sources to be very unreliable. For example, Ennis (1984) argued that Dublin Corporation inflated its housing statistics and used the labels 'trader' and 'transient' in order to exclude some Travellers from its site provisions and housing programme. Rottman *et al.* reported that Dublin County Council had failed to provide complete information on Travellers living within its catchment area for the 1981 Census and that 'consistently less information [was] available on families in County Dublin than in other jurisdictions' (102). A report commissioned by Saint Vincent de Paul (SVP) in 1979 stated that Dublin local authority figures failed to take into account the number of families that had left permanent housing or the number of tígins that were unoccupied. *The Irish Times* reported that Dublin County Council reneged on its agreement to build twelve halting sites (*The Irish Times*, 2 June 1982, 4 June 1982).

The serviced 'temporary' sites provided by the local authorities were very often overcrowded, squalid, and with very limited facilities. The unserviced sites were primitive, lacking water supply, sanitation and refuse collection. In 1978 there were at least one hundred and ninety eight families living on the roadside, twelve under canvas and five in shacks (SVP)¹².

Fully aware of the squalid and impoverished conditions in which many Travellers lived, and despite the advice of and protests from central government, Dublin local authorities continued to put more energy into summoning, evicting, harassing Travellers (including those families awaiting accommodation) than into site or housing provision. In the Dáil the Minister for the Environment (Mr Barrett) declared: ‘They [local authorities] are under continuous pressure from me to end this scandal.... I will continue to pressurise them [local authorities] to deal with the problem until it is eliminated from our society’ (vol. 317, 29 November, 1979)¹³.

Although there was no legislation that specifically related to Travellers and their nomadic way of life, Dublin County Council, Dublin Corporation and (like local authorities throughout the country) increasingly resorted to using Part 1V of the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act, 1948, to counter Travellers’ presence, move them out of their jurisdictions and frustrate their way of life. The Act enabled local authorities to make bye-laws regulating the use of temporary dwellings and the use of land for camping in their district and in particular provide for the prevention of destruction to the amenities of a locality by reason of dirt, scrap, litter or noise from the temporary dwelling and for the prevention of nuisance. Temporary dwellings could be destroyed if they were considered to be a danger to public health or interfere with traffic. Penalties for illegal encampments varied from fines, confiscation of dwellings and imprisonment. The Sanitary Services Act of 1948 had extended well beyond sanitary supervision and although it did not explicitly relate to Travellers, ‘A least one sanitary authority employs an official whose function is to keep itinerants in the area on the move’ (COI, 53). According to Gmelch (1985) by 1976, Traveller evictions around Dublin were so frequent that a social worker¹⁴ with the

Dublin Council for Travelling People (the new name for the Itinerant Settlement Committee) sought legal advice and discovered that Dublin Corporation was using illegal means to evict Travellers. The social worker involved informed some Dublin Travellers and at the next eviction, they in turn informed the Garda. ‘The eviction was called off but the responsible social worker was banned by the Corporation from working on Traveller sites’ (308).

Once on the move an unofficial ‘boulder policy’ (the practice of placing large boulders on, or digging ditches around, vacated sites) was used to ensure Travellers could not return to a site. This all contributed to the shrinking of the social and geographic space within which Travellers traditionally moved leading to concentrations of Travellers on any available sites.

By 1980 the provision of accommodation had tapered off dramatically. Mairín de Burca in *Hibernia* magazine reported that:

Dublin Co. Council’s record for housing itinerants or providing sites for their caravans is abysmal. Only recently a planned new halting site was abandoned after agitation by the residents at Clonsilla and there are no immediate plans for sites anywhere else. Recently there were mass evictions at Darndale/Priorswood and nearly 40 families were removed out to Blanchardstown and left in a field without water or sanitation (4 September 1980: 2).

In 1980 a Traveller, Rosella McDonald obtained a Supreme Court injunction to prevent Dublin County Council from evicting her and her family from their encampment at the junction of Wellington Lane and Templeogue Road unless they provided alternative accommodation. Ironically, however, this decision was to prove counter-productive.

Caught now between irate residents' groups and the spirit, if not the letter, of the law they [local authorities] have taken the decision to do nothing. They will neither provide sufficient accommodation or remove the offending encampments. Perhaps they are relying on the escalation of local feeling to force the families out (Mairín de Burca, *Hibernia Magazine*, 4 September 1980: 2).

In 1983 Dick Spring, Minister for the Environment, stated that there were '400 families on the roadside in Dublin County' (*Dáil Debates* vol. 340, 8 March 1983). 57% of Traveller families in Dublin lacked piped water, 62% lacked toilet facilities and 71% had no electricity. Travellers' life expectancy remained extremely low and their death rate was much higher than that of the settled community. Only 5.5% of Travellers were over the age of 50 compared to 23.5% among the settled population. Infant and child mortality remained extremely high. By 1984 there were more Travellers living on the side of the road than at any time since the National Settlement Programme began (Rottman *et al.* 28, 52-54). Rottman *et al.* concluded that:

...the circumstances of the Irish Travelling people are intolerable. No humane or decent society, once made aware of such circumstances, could permit them to persist (54).

Settled society resistance

In Dublin resistance to Traveller accommodation was fierce. This opposition negated or at the very least held back for months and sometimes years Dublin County Council and Corporation site plans. In 1969 *Nusight* (a monthly current affairs magazine) reported that:

Since the publication of the Report [COI 1963] the instances of victimisation by local residents has doubled. In the Dublin area friction with itinerants has become not only more frequent but more organised. Before the popularity of the cause prejudice existed but not on a highly conscious level. Then when the Report was

issued itinerants became a direct threat to property values. This fear, which the proximity of itinerants brings to the hearts of the middle class, resulted in the highly organised anti-tinker campaign in Stillorgan two years ago and in the bigger Griffith Avenue area this year when all election candidates were pressurised in a disgraceful manner...The Itinerant Settlement Committee found only ignorance six years ago, now they find conscious prejudice... (November, 35).

In the years and decades, which followed, there were objections to almost all proposals to provide sites. Groups mobilised in response to the real or possible presence of Travellers where normally individuals would be acquiescent in local affairs. Many in the settled community refused to have any unnecessary social contact with Travellers, closing ranks against them and stigmatising them generally as a people of lesser human value.

They should all be sterilised and the kids taken up on the motorway and thrown under the lorries (Reader's letter, *Irish Press*, 22 May, 1978: 9).

Attempts to locate halting sites near residential areas were resisted, as were many attempts at housing Travellers in estates. At times this resistance extended to direct intimidation and harassment of individual Traveller families¹⁵.

In 1983 the Travelling People Review Body¹⁶ noted:

Many of the families are being moved constantly. Methods employed to move them have varied from forcible eviction by local residents to the digging of trenches around them, the erection of earthworks and the dumping of rubbish around their caravans on a regular basis. Many families are so intimidated by these actions or by the repeated threats of 'officials' or residents, that they do not wait for formal eviction but often move themselves to some other patch of wasteland, from which they will be yet again forced to move (50).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s most Travellers were unable to continue with their traditional occupations (for example, scrap collecting, trading) with the result that an overwhelming majority had become dependant on social welfare. This in turn added weight to the COI's appraisal of Traveller lifestyle as one based on poverty and in need of

rehabilitation and increased anti-Traveller feeling amongst the settled community. In the early 1980s the depth of division between Travellers and the settled community reached crisis point and was expressed in outbursts of intercommunal intimidation and violence¹⁷. Residents in areas as diverse as Foxrock, Finglas, Carrickmines, Blanchardstown, Clondalkin, Leopardstown, Ballyfermot, Sandyford, and Tallaght held protests objecting to the presence of Travellers.

Possibly, the most dramatic of the conflicts was in the rapidly developing suburb of Tallaght. In 1982 Dublin County Council tried to open the new Tallaght by-pass, home to over 100 Traveller families, without offering the Travellers camped on it any alternative sites. With nowhere to go many Travellers refused to leave, leading to ever increasing tension in the area. Hundreds of local residents, actively supported by local and national politicians, marched to the by-pass and went to the caravans and ordered the Travellers to leave (Gmelch, 174). Again, most of the Traveller families refused to go. In October 1983, five Traveller families received an injunction to stop the evictions. Over the next two years repeated protests by local communities took the form of marches, vigilante attacks on Traveller camps, picketing of local government offices and rent strikes aimed at moving Travellers on. Further fuelling tensions, the media consistently and increasingly constructed Travellers as exploiters, as criminals, as a negation of health, of discipline, of civilisation¹⁸. The majority of Travellers remained on the by-pass until they were finally moved by the council onto temporary sites in fields nearby. As the evictions got under way militant local residents placed blockades and set up road blocks to stop Travellers setting up elsewhere. According to one Senator, large sections of the Garda stood by, watched and did nothing (Seanad Éireann, Brendan Ryan vol 109, Nov 6, 1985; *Irish Times* 26 June 1984).

In the Dáil, Mr Taylor¹⁹ reported:

It is no secret, and it has been reported in the media that in the past few weeks thousands of people-and I mean literally thousands of people-have been blockading the Tallaght by-pass and other arterial roads in Tallaght, sealing it off from traffic on three occasions each week at peak times. In addition to that, there have been other angry demonstrations and the mood in Tallaght, to say the least, is ugly and dangerous (Dáil Debates vol. 351, 20 June, 1984).

In the Seanad, Senator Robinson²⁰ stated:

The first thing that strikes anyone driving around the Tallaght area or the people who live in Tallaght is the barricades, the barrels and the watches which have sprung up at the entrances to estates. Five roads have either been completely blocked off, or blocked off in such a manner that you can only enter or leave if you are allowed to do so by the people who are manning the barricades. What is evident there is a breakdown of the rule of law and that power and command have been taken over by self- appointed residents in the various estates (Seanad Debates vol. 104, 28 June, 1984)

Ironically, it would seem that Travellers were not only despised because they were always on the move but also that they might stay and contaminate sedentary society's social and geographical space.

Traveller Resistance

Permanent settlement was alien and destructive to the traditional Traveller way of life and many Travellers, particularly through their nomadism, struggled to avoid it. Travellers chose some aspects of the programmes and policies and rejected others. For example, many left houses and halting sites after short periods. Most showed little interest in integrating into local communities, gaining regular employment and Traveller children's school attendance remained extremely low. Others merely used housing as a means to continue their nomadic lifestyle and culture, seeing it as a base rather than permanent home.

Many families resisted the imposition of restrictions on public space access and continued to transgress and resist the established codes – legal, social and geographical – of Irish sedentary society. Refusing to alter their social and spatial behaviour, Travellers continued to trespass, to perform anti-social behaviour (or what was considered to be anti-social by sedentary society – for example begging, collecting scrap, keeping horses on sites and so on), and to undertake black market trade. Travellers became increasingly conversant with the law in regard to where they could encamp and how long the process of getting eviction orders would take. As soon as the eviction order came they would then move on to another area where the legal process of eviction would begin all over again.

In the late 1970's and early 80's renewed local authority eviction policies and harassment of Travellers provided Travellers with a strong impetus to organise and the local authority policy of concentrating Travellers in particular areas gave them the logistical ability to do so.²¹

Following the Supreme Court ruling in the Rosella McDonald case in 1980 (referred to in the previous section), a large number of Traveller families moved on to the unopened Tallaght bypass and nearby land intended for a new town centre and hospital. Following a violent anti-Traveller protest in 1982 a Committee for the Rights of Travellers was formed. This Committee which, included members of both settled and Traveller communities, was successful in organising demonstrations and protest marches, and keeping the media informed of evictions and harassment.

Two years later the committee changed its name to Mincéir Misli (and became a Traveller only organisation) which organised protest marches, lobbied the media and spoke at resident committee meetings in Dublin city and county. The Committee's main aim was to advance the case for Traveller ethnicity and expose the mistreatment of Travellers. However, Mincéir Misli was unable to access State funding to carry out its work. In addition, almost all its members were illiterate which made it extremely difficult for them to function effectively. The group broke up in 1984 leaving a vacuum in Traveller resistance once again²². Travellers' resistance to social straitjacketing did however, prevent this monotonic scheme of centralised rationality from being realised.

Discussion

The Report on the Commission on Itinerancy (1963) was seen by many as a progressive, humanitarian attempt to reform, settle and rehabilitate Travellers and in the end produce a better, more egalitarian society (the settlement programme was fully endorsed by the state, the Catholic Church, charitable and voluntary organisations). It was however, a naïve ‘Whiggish’ view of progress, and a failure to see key elements of the reform process as highly problematic. State policies and programmes emanating from the report were framed by a culturally specific agenda (geared towards sedentary living, the dissolution of social boundaries and the removal of features possessed by Travellers as a group that would overtly distinguish them from the majority), which then defined the proper parameters of political action and the institutional framework appropriate to those limits. The Traveller ‘problem’, and its solution, was taken as a given with no alternative. However, as Miller and Rose (1990: 11) argue there is often a huge difference between the discourses underlying programmes and the actual mechanisms of a programme. ‘The solutions for one programme have a propensity to be problems for another and ‘reality’ always escapes the theories that inform programmes and the ambitions that underpin them’.

The settlement programme in Dublin was largely doomed from the outset for a number of reasons. First, the process did not take place in a political or social vacuum. As acknowledged by the Commission, Travellers have long been objects of contemptuous stereotyping and stigmatisation. As a consequence, the media, local authorities and sedentary society in general were not engaging with the Traveller subject in the here and now but were in fact responding to, and building upon discourses and stereotypes mobilised in the past (for example, references to Travellers’ criminality, to filth and dirt, primitive behaviour); discourses and stereotypes they were largely unable to move beyond. Indeed, the Commission itself clearly responded to and was prejudiced by these discourses and stereotypes and choose to ignore elements of its own evidence – including evidence that Travellers were not uniformly poor and that in many instances nomadism remained a viable way of making a living for many families (see COI, 79-82). The Traveller Community planned for in this Report was an abstract one; standardised and

uniform in its needs. Seen as a homogenous community they were constructed as a social problem – illiterate, anti-social, diseased, unhygienic and with a predisposition to petty crime. Any visible signs of cultural distinctiveness were at best viewed as a throwback to more primitive times.

Second, the arrival of Travellers in unprecedented numbers coincided with an acute shortage of local authority and affordable housing in the capital. 26% of dwellings in Dublin County and City were in a substandard condition and the number of new houses built in proportion to the population was the worst in Europe (with the exception of Portugal) (Power, 199). An estimated 13,000 new houses were required annually in Dublin in the early 1960s, double the number being built (Ferriter). Dublin local authorities were in the process of relocating a large proportion of slum dwelling inner city working class families to outer suburbs. It was, for the most part, in these new working class suburbs that local authorities attempted to house and provide sites for Travellers. As Bannon notes ‘the decision by the local authority to build massive one class estates on the outskirts of the city, initially to house people from the city centre’ resulted in a situation where two of the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society ‘were placed in conflict over the same rather meagre resources’ (Bannon, 101 cited in Rottman, 65)

Travellers were viewed by many Dubliners as spongers and parasites and attempts to provide them with housing merely served to increase feelings of hostility and outrage. Travellers were perceived as outsiders, taking resources from decent people. As one local councillor put it: the ‘Minister would provide subsidies for itinerants, but none for our own people who are being evicted every other day of the week’ (*The Irish Times* 10 November, 1964). Even where councillors were neutral or even favourable, many felt unable to cope with pressures against accommodation policies from a hostile sedentary population. Conflicts of priority together with the absence of any statutory obligations to provide accommodation or deadlines for completion of the programme allowed local authorities to move slowly in the provision of accommodation and at times wilfully obstruct its implementation.

Third, the hostile reaction of the settled community to proposed halting sites or housing of Travellers and Dublin Corporation's and County Council's policy of blocking unapproved sites meant that Travellers who wished to continue travelling and those on accommodation waiting lists were increasingly forced on to urban wasteland, leading to dense concentrations in appalling conditions. Contrary to the recommendations of the COI, many approved sites banned economic activity of any kind, were isolated and badly maintained. This made it extremely difficult for Traveller families to carve a niche for themselves in the urban economy. Their location also hindered social interaction between the two communities and without mixing there could be no integration or assimilation.

Forth, the reaction of Travellers to the settlement programme indicates that many were sceptical of the State's intentions and the ability of sedentary society to become inclusive given the deep-rooted negative attitudes and systematic discrimination. Throughout the period Travellers continually challenged the restrictions demanded of them by a modernising Ireland and increasingly bureaucratic society. Very quickly Travellers became conversant with the law in regard to where they could encamp and how long the process of getting prohibition orders would take. As soon as the order came they would then move on to another area where the legal process of eviction would begin all over again. Others simply took what they could from what was offered, refusing housing or leaving houses and halting sites to travel in the summer. Travellers were and are not a homogeneous group and although not all Travellers wanted to continue to live in caravans or to remain nomadic, many clearly did.

Conclusion

Far from leading to a break with the power laden ideology of Travellers as deviants, pathological, degenerate and static, lacking any possibility for self improvement (they were given an opportunity which they snubbed) the failure of the Settlement Programme ended up contributing to its further development, dispersal and indeed institutionalisation. Today nomadism remains a defining feature of state/Traveller tensions and although the language has changed into one of inclusion and respect for diversity,

identity and culture, the solution remains the same – the transformation of Travellers’ lifestyle and inclusion in a system that refuses to recognise difference. Since the crisis in the 1980s numerous Acts have been ratified and designed to regulate Traveller lives and delimit their spatial mobility with respect to housing, trespass, use of roads, ownership and control of animals, destruction to property, anti-social behaviour and trading²³. The effect has been to make many of the spaces central to the maintenance of Traveller culture legally ‘unenterable’ (Garner, 146). Travellers who wish to remain nomadic and those awaiting accommodation from local authorities are left with two choices — they can either move and make themselves liable to another trespass charge in another place, or they can stay where they are, with the possible consequence of being evicted, fined, made homeless or imprisoned.

Although Travellers are still not accepted as a legitimate part of Irish society by many, they are nevertheless an established part of Irish life and show little sign of disappearing. Travellers are determined to retain their own culture and lifestyle choices. Today, Traveller advocacy groups (including the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) and Pavee Point) have done much in recent years to redress the devaluation of Travellers culture by both the settled community and Travellers themselves. The fact that these discourses, policies and programmes have not resulted in the end of nomadism and permanent settlement and assimilation of the Travelling Community should not however, blind us to the fact that it did, at the very least, damage many of the earlier structures of Travellers’ spatial and economic traditions.

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¹ Many studies during this period were framed within modernisation theory and the ‘sub-culture of poverty’ thesis. Viewing Travellers as outsiders in the social system, many authors focused on Travellers personality defects, utilising the concepts of disaffiliation and under-socialisation. Typical examples include McCarthy, (1972) Gmelch., (1975) Gmelch. (1985).

2 This is not to deny that in reality, national level objectives are not necessarily translated into practise locally. Many officials and some of those charged with implementing the process may have been motivated by political self-interest, interests of sedentary local residents or anti-Traveller sentiment.

3 Up until the 1960s Travellers were primarily a rural population, their encampments were usually small (two to three families) and dispersed amongst the settled community throughout the countryside. Although not always welcome, Travellers filled fundamental niches in the rural economy and worked in a variety of jobs including seasonal agricultural work, tinsmiths, peddling, horse trading, chimney cleaning.

4 See for example, *The Irish Times* 5 September 1959, *The Irish Times* 25 March 1960, *The Irish Times* 27 April 1960, *The Irish Times* 2 May 1960.

5 See for example, *The Irish Times* 2 March 1959; *The Irish Times* 22 April 1959; *The Irish Times* 5 September 1959; *The Irish Times* 8 September 1959; *The Irish Times* 18 September 1959, *The Irish Times* 10 May 1960; Dáil Debates - Burke 13 July 1955: 738; Captain Giles 11 July, 1956: 684-5; Cogan 11 July, 1956: 677; Manley, 7 May, 1957: 765-766, Russell, 15 April, 1958: 163; Ryan, 24 March, 1960: 180.

6 The term itinerant, which was associated with vagrancy and deviancy, was regularly used in official government documentation to describe Travellers until the 1980s. The 1983 Report of the Travelling People Review Body was the first official government report to use the word Travellers instead of itinerant.

7 Although the first state accommodation for Travellers was provided under the Housing Act 1931 there was no explicit government policy in relation to Travellers or Traveller Accommodation until the publication of Report of the Commission on Itinerancy in 1963.

⁸ While this paper is primarily concerned with accommodation policies and programmes, it should be noted that the Commission’s recommendations also included various remedial educational programmes, skills training, parenting, health and hygiene training for adults once settled. See Crowley, U. Liberal Rule through Non-liberal Means: the attempted settlement of Irish Travellers (1955-1975), *Irish Geography*, 38 (2) (2005): 128-150 and Breathnach, A Becoming Conspicuous: Irish Travellers, Society and the State 1922-70. Dublin: University College Dublin, 2006.

9 Until 1975 a subsidy of 50% was made available to local authorities through the housing programme or for the provision of fully serviced halting sites. After 1975 the subsidy for halting sites increased to 100%. A 50% subsidy was available to local authorities to provide caravans to Travellers living in tents. Financial aid was also made available to voluntary groups (settlement committees) for employing social workers and other goods and services.

10 It was not until the enactment of the 1998 Traveller Accommodation Act that local authorities were first obliged to prepare and adopt (five year) Traveller accommodation programmes.

¹¹ This committee was founded by Victor Bewley (member of the family which owned Bewley’s café in Dublin), Fr Thomas Fehily and Lady Wicklow (a Labour Party Senator and a leading campaigner on housing and social issues). Archbishop John Charles McQuaid was patron of the committee (cited in Breathnach, 190). It is important to note however, that while voluntary settlement committees received some State funding they had no say in policy formation.

12 See also Dáil Debates vol. 313, 1 May 1979, vol. 317, 29 Nov 1979 The marked rise in the number of Travellers was due to reduced emigration, higher marriage and reproduction rates.

¹³For other examples see Dáil Debates - Molloy vol. 248 2 July 1970, Fitzgerald vol. 260 4 May 1972.

14 From 1969 on a subsidy of 50% was contributed by central government to the salaries of social workers employed by local authorities to work with Travellers.

15 See for example *The Irish Times* 3 May 1979; *The Irish Times* 1 December, 1981.

16 This Report represented a shift in policy thinking towards Travellers. Concepts such as assimilation and rehabilitation were no longer viewed as acceptable – integration was now the goal.. The term 'itinerant', which was associated with vagrancy and deviancy, was replaced with 'Traveller', which showed some recognition of a distinct identity. Prejudice and hostility towards Travellers were acknowledged as issues.

17 *The Irish Times* 1 December, 1981, *The Irish Times* 3 May 1979, *The Irish Times* 14 May, 1982. *The Irish Times* 20 May 1982, *The Irish Times* May 27 1982, *The Irish Times*, 14 December 1982.

18 News articles covering the events include: 'Hatred and Fear rage in Tallaght' (*The Irish Times*, 30 June, 1984); 'Tallaght has had Enough of Itinerants' (*The Irish Times*, 20 May 1982); 'Untidy camp a Flashpoint for Confrontation', (*The Irish Times*, 21 April 1983).

19 Mervin Taylor was TD for Dublin South West – the area in which the protests were taking place.

20 Senator Mary Robinson was a human rights lawyer and future President of Ireland. She was also instrumental in achieving the 1980 Supreme Court ruling referred to earlier.

21 see Gmelch Gmelch, S. and G. Gmelch (1976) "The emergence of an ethnic group: the Irish tinker", *Anthropological Quarterly*, 49, 225-38. for more on this.

22 <http://struggle.ws/rbr/travrbr2.html>

23 Including the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992; Local Government Act 1994; Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act; Casual Trading Act 1995; Control of Horses Act (1998); Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act (1998).; Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002 (makes trespass a crime rather than a civil matter).