The micro-politics of Traveller accommodation and housing provision: sites of conflict, ambiguous implementation and symbolic policy making

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Abstract:

The provision of social housing and other accommodation for Travellers, such as caravan halting sites, is one of the most intractable, policy challenges in Ireland. Accommodation needs amongst this disadvantaged, nomadic community have remained high for decades. This reflects a persistent but complex 'implementation deficit' as evidenced by local government's failure to meet the accommodation provision targets set by central government and contradictions between the type of accommodation delivered and policy-makers' plans. To illuminate the factors which have shaped these outcomes, this article draws on Matland's (1995) ideas on the influence of conflict and ambiguity on policy implementation. It reveals that, despite unambiguous national policy objectives, policy implementation mechanisms have remained ambiguous. This isn't surprising because Traveller accommodation proposals are often vociferously and successfully opposed by neighbouring residents. This opposition has shaped the scale and nature of the Traveller accommodation policy implementation deficit. This deficit also means that the relatively progressive objectives of Traveller accommodation policy remain largely symbolic.

Key words: Traveller accommodation, nomadism, policy implementation, policy conflict.

Disclaimer: Dr. Anna Visser is currently the Head of Research in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). The views expressed here are on her own and do not purport to represent an official DCEDIY perspective in any way.

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Introduction

The 2016 Census recorded 30,987 residents of the Republic of Ireland who identified as 'White Irish Traveller', 8,717 households which contained at least one Traveller and calculated that Travellers accounted for 0.7 per cent of the total population of the country (Central Statistics Office, various years). However, despite the small size of this community, the provision of housing and other forms of accommodation for Travellers has proved to be one of the most intractable, knotty and also contentious policy challenges in this country since the mid-twentieth century (A. Bhreatnach, 2006a, 2006b; Norris & Winston, 2005).

This intractability is evident in the fact that the number of Travellers who are inadequately accommodated has remained stubbornly high since the first government commission of investigation into the situation of Travellers – the Commission on Itinerancy - commenced work in 1960. It reported that 1,133 Traveller families[2] were living in 'unauthorised' encampments on roadsides, common areas or waste land at this time (Commission on Itinerancy, 1963). When the next government investigation into Traveller accommodation – the Travelling People Review Body - reported in 1983, 1,442 Traveller families were similarly accommodated and this had not changed substantially when a third commission – the Task Force on the Travelling Community - reported in 1995 (when 1,112 Traveller families were living in unofficial encampments) (Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995; Travelling People Review Body, 1983). More recently, an expert group appointed by government in 2019 to review Traveller accommodation provision reported that the numbers of Traveller families living in unauthorised encampments had fallen to 529, but families involuntary sharing accommodation had increased to 933 and the numbers in emergency accommodation for homeless people grown significantly (Joyce, Norton, & Norris, 2019).

The intractability of the Traveller accommodation challenge in part reflects the marked increase in the size of this population which, the aforementioned reports indicate, has expended almost ten-fold since 1960s. However, the history of Traveller accommodation policy suggests that implementation problems have also been an important contributor. Previous research by one of authors revealed a longstanding, significant 'implementation deficit' in this policy field as evidenced by a general failure to meet the accommodation provision targets set by the various commissions which have examined this issue since the 1960s (Norris & Winston, 2005; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). However, this research also flagged the particularly knotty and complex nature of this deficit because the type of Traveller accommodation delivered was often the opposite of what policy makers

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[2]Data on Travellers in Ireland has traditionally been collected for Traveller families (equivalent to households) rather than individuals. Although this has changed in recent years, this convention is followed in this article in order to ensure the data examined are comparable over the long period examined here.

had envisaged and pointed out it could not be explained using the most commonly cited 'implementation variables' (or conditions which are considered necessary for effective implementation) (Schofield, 2001) such as shortcomings in policy design (Goggin, 1990); lack of robust policy evidence base (Sanderson, 2002) and inadequate finance (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984).

This article revisits this previous work on Traveller accommodation policy in Ireland, updates it to include the latest available data but also offers a new analysis of the reasons for particular scale and nature of the implementation deficit evident in this policy field. As the article's title suggests, central to our analysis is the other defining feature of the debate on the provision of accommodation and housing for Travellers – its contentiousness. Due to the centrality of extended family living, and also nomadism to Travellers' cultural identity, access to what is referred to as 'Traveller specific accommodation' – that is accommodation which facilitates these ways of living - has been central to ongoing political debates around the 'assimilation' of Travellers into the culture of the majority, 'settled' population on the one hand and the recognition of Travellers' distinct, nomadic ethnic identity on the other (Bohn Gmelch, 1987; Bohn Gmelch & Gmelch, 1974; McLoughlin, 1994). The provision of Traveller specific accommodation is contentious at local level because responsibility for planning for Traveller housing and accommodation rests with local government, it is also the main provider of this accommodation (due to the widespread disadvantage most Travellers live in social housing which is mainly provided by local government in Ireland) and plans for Traveller accommodation provision has regularly sparked conflict in the neighbourhoods where the provision of Traveller accommodation has been proposed (Fanning, 2012; A. Bhreatnach, 2009; Helleiner, 1993).

The analysis of these issues presented here draws on Matland's (1995) 'Ambiguity-Conflict Model' of policy implementation to explain the particular challenges of implementing Traveller accommodation policy in Ireland and the complex and contradictory nature of the outcomes achieved. This model specifies that policy *conflict* exists when more than one actor sees the policy as central to its interests and there are incongruous views between these actors. Policy *ambiguity* is a way of dealing with conflict. It exists when there poor or contested understanding of the problem and/or of the means of achieving them. Matland (1995) argues that policy implementation is shaped by different combinations of high or low conflict and high or low ambiguity. As already mentioned, we identify high conflict a defining feature of Traveller accommodation policy but suggest that this is accompanied by significant policy ambiguity and the combination of these factors has shaped the weak and contradictory track record of policy implementation.

The analysis of these issues presented here is organised into four further sections. The next section outlines the key features of Matland's (1995) model. This is followed by a discussion of changing understandings of Traveller ethnicity since the mid-20th Century, the factors which shaped these changes and the policy

responses. This is intended to contextualise the remainder of the discussion. The main body of the article examines the challenges associated with the implementation of Traveller accommodation policy, including the scale and nature of implementation deficits, policy ambiguity and policy conflict. The conclusions set out the key findings of the analysis and reflect on their implications for understanding the challenges of accommodating Travellers and Matland's (1995) , analysis of the significance of ambiguity and conflict for policy implementation.

The Ambiguity-Conflict Model of Policy Implementation

Reviewing the literature on policy implementation, Matland (1995) attempts to overcome the dichotomy between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' focused analyses which has riven this field by proposing a new analytical framework which focuses on the significance of ambiguity and conflict for policy implementation. He considers the latter to be inherent to all policies which are relevant to the interests of one actor and about which there are incongruous views. Policy conflict is often linked to incompatibility of values and cannot be solved by adjusting the policy or by providing additional resources. Policy conflict can be reduced by policy ambiguity, because, as Matland (1995, p.158) explains "the clearer goals are the more likely they are to lead to conflict".

For Matland (1995) ambiguity arises from two sources: ambiguity of goals and ambiguity of means. Ambiguity of goals occurs where there is a fragile policy coalition or where there is a poor understanding of the problem. Ambiguity of means occurs when there is a lack of clarity around the most appropriate solutions, particularly in a complex environment. Matland (1995, 159) emphasises the positive role of ambiguity in helping to avoid conflict in decision-making and suggests that, consequently it is inevitable that "… the system routinely produces policies with ambiguous goals and exceedingly ambiguous means".

Using these concepts Matland (1995) devises a four part framework for understanding the dynamics of policy implementation. Figure 1 illustrates how implementation contexts can be characterised by different combinations of high or low conflict and ambiguity and how these combinations result in four possible implementation scenarios. For instance, the scenario of low policy ambiguity and low policy conflict results in 'administrative implementation' whereby the outcomes achieved are influenced by the resources available. Matland (1995) acknowledges that in reality, few implementation processes will fall neatly into one

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Figure 1: Ambiguity-Conflict Model – Policy Implementation Processes.

	Conflict	
	Low	**High**
Low (Ambiguity)	**Administrative Implementation** **Features**: goals are a given and the means for solving problems are known. The policy system is relatively closed to outside influence and there is consistency of approach and outcomes across different settings **Outcomes:** influenced by the resources available and implementation failure is related to lack of resources or technical problem.	**Political Implementation** **Features**: high conflict and low ambiguity occurs in political models of decision making where clearly defined goals are incompatible. For these policies, compliance isn't automatic, especially where resources are controlled by opponents or sceptics of the policy. **Outcomes:** are determined by power which can be used to coerce outcomes or bargain for an outcome.
High (Ambiguity)	**Experimental Implementation** **Features:.** high policy ambiguity means that local actors and resources will determine what happens. Low conflict can means that multiple actors may participate in a policy, and those with the strongest views can shape outcomes **Outcomes**: implementation context will determine outcomes. These depend largely on which actors are active and most involved, which can vary from site-to-site and result in different implementation approaches.	**Symbolic Implementation** **Features:.** High conflict accompanied by policy vagueness. Policy goals often provide little information to a policy designer about how to proceed, yet the symbols are sufficient to create significant opposition before any plans are promulgated. **Outcomes:** almost always tied to implementation failure. The strength of the different policy coalitions involved will determine the extent of this failure.

Source: adapted from Matland (1995) p. 160.

of these quadrants, they are more of a spectrum, rather than a discrete categorisation. Furthermore his approach has attracted criticism, most notably

being primarily descriptive and failing to conceptualise what implementation is, how it occurs and how implementers are likely to behave in the future (Ellis, 2015). However, Matland's (1995) approach offers a useful way to think through the implementation dynamics which are in play for any given policy and it has been employed successfully to explore several particularly knotty implementation problems (eg. Ellis, 2015) and, as the preceding discussion has explained, policy on the housing and accommodation of Travellers has certainly proved to be knotty (Norris & Winston, 2005; Visser, 2018).

Travellers Ethnicity and Policy Responses

The Emergence of Irish Travellers as an Ethnic Group

In common with many marginalised communities, who were unlikely to own property or participate in political or cultural events which were recorded in writing, the history of Irish Travellers is largely undocumented (Ni Shuinéar, 2004; Bhreatnach, 2007). Although there is an accepted wisdom that this community is a distinct (albeit internally diverse) one which is separate from other European nomadic groups such as the Roma, Irish Travellers' origins remain unclear and their identity has long been contested (Mac Greine, 1931). Dominant understandings of this identity among policy makers, researchers and Traveller activists have changed over time which has in turn influenced policy responses to their accommodation and housing needs (Crowley & Kitchin, 2015).

For instance, the Commission on Itinerancy (1963, p. 34) speculated that Travellers were native Irish people who were disposed of their land following the plantations of Ireland and famine and adopted nomadism as a means of economic survival by providing services such as farm labouring and tin smithing to those who remained on the land. With the gradual industrialisation and urbanisation of Ireland and the decline of small-scale farms from the 1950s demand for Travellers' services declined, resulting in widespread abject poverty for the majority.

This understanding of Travellers' origins echoed the views of members the settled community (primarily school teachers) who were interviewed by the Irish Folklore Commission in 1952 in order 'to document aspects of the Tinker [Traveller] way of life "before it is too late"' (Hayes, 2006. p. 31). Furthermore, it was largely endorsed in the mid-1970s by two American anthropologists, Sharon Bohn Gmelch and George Gmelch, who in a series of influential publications, elaborated on the speculations of the Commission on Itinerancy (Gmelch, 1975; Gmelch 1977; Bohn Gmelch and Gmelch, 2014). They also put forward the thesis that while

indigenous to Ireland, Travellers were an ethnic minority on the basis that (1) they were 'biologically self-perpetuating' (2) 'share cultural features and behaviour patterns which distinguish them from settled Irish', 'have a separate field of communication and interaction', and (4) 'identify themselves and are identified by others as separate cultural group' (Gmelch and Gmelch, 1976, p. 226-227).

Debates about the origins of Irish Travellers, and whether or not constitute an ethnic minority rumbled on in social scientific circles through subsequent decades. For example, a further influential contribution came from anthropologist Sinéad Ni Shuinéar (1994, p. 60) who unequivocally claimed that based on Barth's anthropological definition of an ethnic group, Irish Travellers fulfil 'all the objective scientific criteria to qualify as an ethnic group' and that their origins lay in Celtic or pre-Celtic times. However, for historians, the absence of an 'archive' of Traveller history and the difficulty in distinguishing 'Travellers' from the larger body of people tramping the road of Ireland in the nineteenth century, renders such claims difficult to sustain and means that no definitive claim can be made about Traveller origins or ethnicity (A. Bhreatnach, 2006a; C. Bhreatnach, 2006). For instance, Crowley and Kitchin (2015, p. 161-162) argue that: "(t)he analysis with respect to Traveller ethnicity is itself often highly problematic, not least because of an almost total absence of grounded historical research and sustained empirical evidence". Furthermore, they argue that:

> (c)ategorising Travellers as an ethnic group, while empowering some (particularly Traveller 'leaders' and Traveller organisations) can have the effect of stigmatising Travellers and further increasing intolerant attitudes towards Travellers in wider society (Crowley and Kitchin, 2015, p. 163).

Policy Responses to Traveller Ethnicity

From the perspective of the analysis offered here however, the veracity of these different arguments is of less interest than the fact that, following concerted campaigning by Traveller organisations, human rights advocates and some academics, Travellers' status as ethnic group was slowly accepted by the Irish State over a fifty-year period and reflected in the changing objectives of national policy on Traveller accommodation. This process culminated in the formal recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group by the Irish Prime Minister in 2017 (albeit a recognition which is entirely symbolic and not reflected in legislation).

This development in part reflects changes in thinking on the rights of minorities in general. However, it was also driven by the replacement of well-intentioned but sometimes paternalistic advocacy for Travellers by the Catholic Church, charities and other 'concerned citizens' groups in mid-twentieth century (see: Ó Riain, 2000; Murdoch, 2002) and by Traveller-led, grassroots activism from the 1980s onwards (Joyce and Farmer, 1985; Fay and McCabe, 2015). While many of the former advocates worked to highlight poverty among Travellers and support their settlement into standard housing, Traveller-led national organisations (eg. Pavee Point, the National Traveller Women's Forum, Minceir Misli and the Irish Traveller Movement) alongside a multitude of local Traveller groups, instead emphasised Travellers' distinctive ethnic group identity founded on nomadic traditions, a distinct language (called Gammon or Cant) and culture (Mac Laughlin, 1995).

The key policy milestones in the acceptance of Travellers' status as an ethnic group are summarised in Table 1. Government involvement with Travellers was minimal during the early twentieth century, so this list starts with the publication of the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* in 1963 (Commission on Itinerancy, 1963). As mentioned above, the Commission didn't recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic group but rather as an 'itinerant' sub section of the wider Irish population. It proffered "the best definition of 'itinerant' was a person who had no fixed place of abode and habitually wandered from place to place" and suggested that Travellers had adopted this lifestyle primarily for economic reasons and this rationale had become largely redundant by the mid-twentieth century (Commission on Itinerancy, 1963, p. 13, 11). On this basis, the Commission concluded that public policy should logically aim to induce Travellers 'to leave the road and to settle down' and 'assimilate' into the norms of the settled population by moving into mainstream social housing (Commission on Itinerancy, 1963, p. 106). To further 'induce' Travellers to abandon nomadism the Commission suggested that unofficial camping should criminalised.

Table 1: Key Policy Milestones Relating to Traveller Ethnicity and Accommodation and Housing Policy

Date	Policy Measure	Key Provisions Regarding Traveller Ethnicity
1963	Report of the Commission on Itinerancy	Charged with identifying steps to promote Travellers' absorption into the general community.
1966	Housing Act	Enables (but does not require) local authorities to provide accommodation and housing for Travellers
1983	Report of the Travelling People Review Body	Didn't recognise Travellers as an ethnic group but acknowledged that "the concept of absorption is unacceptable" and suggested that "it is better to think in terms of integration between the traveller and the settled community." (1983, p. np)
1988	Housing Act	Requires local authorities to have regard to the needs of Travellers when allocating social housing tenancies and assess Travellers' housing needs every three years.
1995	Report of the Task Force on the Traveller Community	Acknowledged Travellers have a distinct culture which should be supported by public policy but did not recognising them as an ethnic group.
1998	Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act	Provides for the implementation of the Task Force on the Travelling Community's recommendations on housing and accommodation of Travellers.
1991	Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act	Prohibits incitement to hatred on various grounds including membership of the Traveller community.
1998	Employment Equality Act	Amended existing legislation to prohibit discrimination in employment on various grounds including membership of the Traveller community
2000	Equal Status Act	Prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education on various grounds including membership of the Traveller community
2014	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act	Introduces a positive duty on public bodies to have due regard to human rights and equality.

2017	National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy	Emphasises there should be adequate provision of accessible, suitable and culturally appropriate accommodation for Travellers.
2017	Recognition of Travellers' ethnicity	Irish Travellers were formally recognized as an ethnic minority by the Taoiseach at that time, Enda Kenny.
2019	Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation	Sets out recommendations to strengthen the evidence-base for planning for Traveller accommodation provision, implementation of these plans and monitoring outputs.

Source: adapted from Visser (2018).

The 1983 Report of the Travelling People Review Body which also explicitly stated that Travellers are not an ethnic group but it all other respects its analysis of their situation differed radically from the 1963 report. For instance, it argued that 'the concept of absorption is unacceptable, implying as it does the swallowing up of the minority traveller group by the dominant settled community and the subsequent loss of traveller identity' (Travelling People Review Body, 1983, p. 6). Instead, it recommended that "it is better to think in terms of integration between the traveller and the settled community" (ibid.). Notably one of Travelling People Review Body's (1983, p. 2) ten terms of reference was to examine 'the needs of travellers who wish to continue the nomadic way of life', and to facilitate this cohort it recommended that accommodation specifically designed to support Travellers' culture and traditions such as local government provided encampments (called halting sites) and small social housing estates for extended families (called group housing schemes) be provided However, these accommodation options were framed as an individual choice rather than a collective right (Fanning, 2012; Norris & Winston, 2005).

The Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995, p. 80) didn't recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic group, but capitalised the term 'Traveller' and recommend that the "distinct culture and identity of the Traveller community be recognised and taken into account'. Unlike the two commissions which preceded it, the Task Force didn't identify the type of accommodation most appropriate for Travellers. Instead, it argued that both standard housing and Traveller-specific accommodation (both provided mainly by local government) would be required, depending on Traveller needs and preferences. Drawing on extensive research with Travellers it made detailed recommendations regarding the specific number and type of dwellings required and notably it specified that these should include

both long-stay halting sites and a national network of short-stay or "transient" halting sites to facilitate nomadism.

**Implementing Traveller Housing and Accommodation Policy Since the 1960**

The Extent and Nature of Implementation Deficits

Figures 2 below details trends in the different housing tenures and types of accommodation occupied by all Traveller families since the 1960s. Figure 3 outlines trends in the housing and accommodation for Travellers provided or subsidised by government over the same period.

These graphs reveal that the key trends over the past 60 years are firstly a dramatic increase in the absolute number of Traveller households, and secondly, that for the majority of Traveller households, local government came to be the primary provider of their accommodation in a variety of forms. In 1960, local authorities recorded under 1,200 Traveller families living in Ireland, the vast majority of whom lived on unauthorised halting sites, with only 43 resident in standard social housing. By 2019, there were just under 11,000 Traveller households in Ireland, but approximately 80 per cent of these were in accommodation provided directly or indirectly by local government, primarily in either in standard social housing (4,461 households), group housing or official halting sites (each category accommodated some 1,000 households) and, reflecting trends in the wider population in recent needs growing numbers of Travellers (just under 2,000 households) receiving rent subsidies to access private rented housing.

These data do point to a clear and intractable implementation deficit as flagged in the introduction to this article, our previous research on this issue and by numerous other authors because, in absolute terms, the prevalence of acute housing and accommodation need amongst Traveller families has changed little over the last sixty years. In 1960 1,133 Traveller families were living in
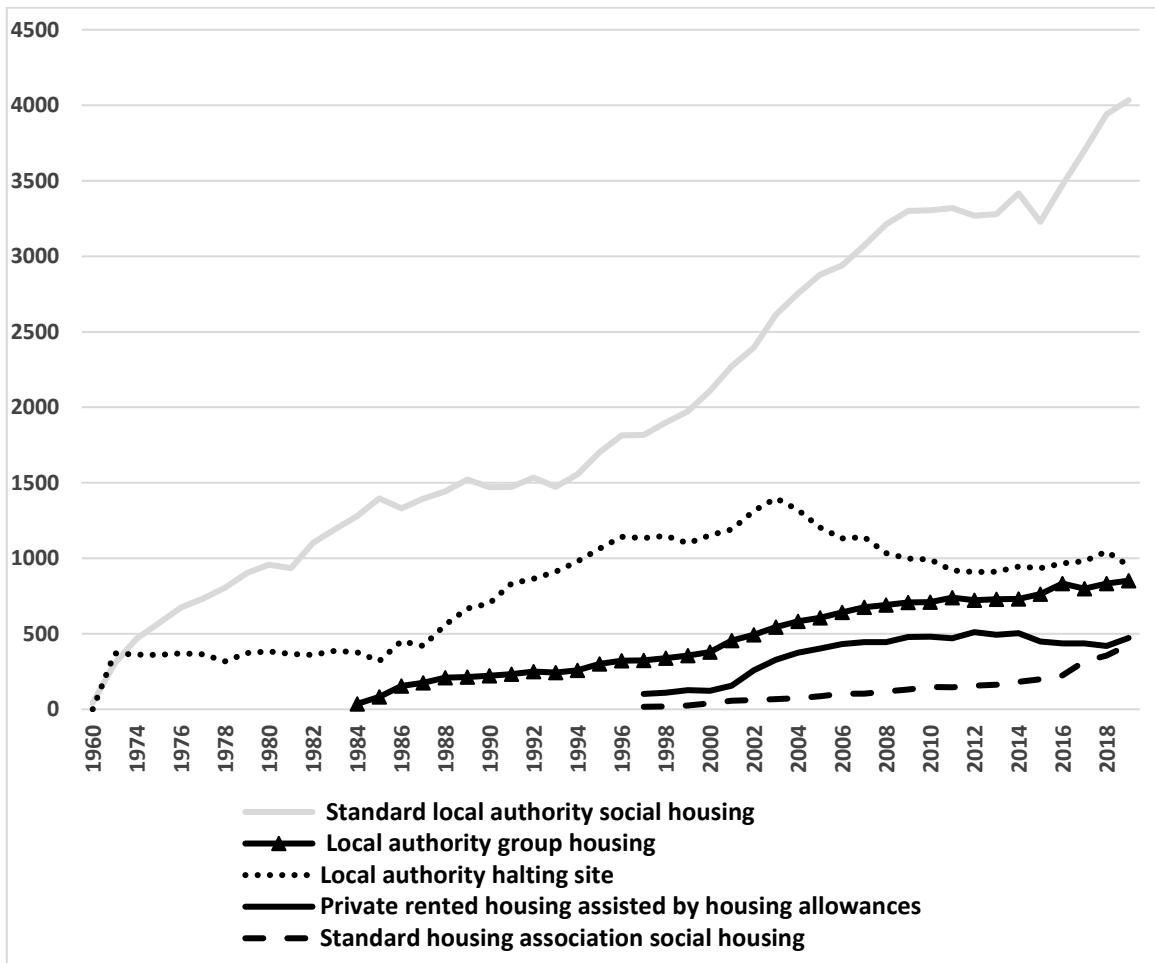
Figure 2: Traveller Families by Accommodation Type, 1960-2019 (N)
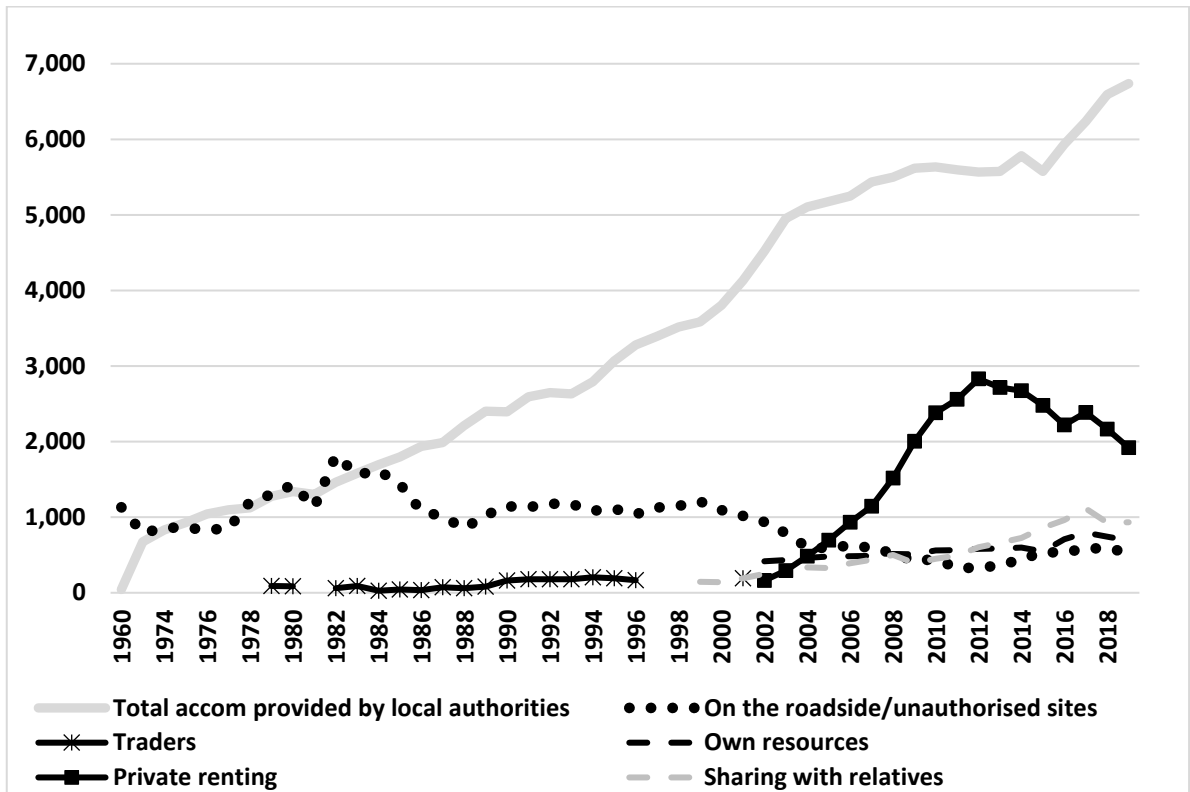
Source: Annual Estimates of Traveller Families published by the Department of Housing. Local Government and Heritage.

Note: data for some categories are not collected for the entire period under review and the meanings of the different categories are not clearly defined in the original data. Traders is a (now obsolete) term which refers to economically active and often very mobile Travellers. It was probably replaced by the category 'own resources' in more recent data but it is not possible to be definite about this.

Figure 3: Government Provided or Subsidized Accommodation for Traveller Families, 1960-2019 (N)

Source: Annual Estimates of Traveller Families published by the Department of Housing. Local Government and Heritage.
Note: the term 'standard housing' refers to conventional houses and apartments.

unauthorised encampments, by 2019 the equivalent figure was 529, but the number of families involuntarily sharing accommodation with relatives had increased to 933, and the number of Traveller households in designated emergency accommodation for those experiencing homelessness had also grown significantly (Joyce et al, 2019).

Although high levels of Traveller accommodation have been provided directly and indirectly by the Irish State since the 1960s, the type of accommodation delivered did not necessarily reflect what policy makers had envisaged. For instance, despite the Commission on Itinerancy's (1963) recommendations that Travellers be moved into standard social housing and that unofficial camping be made illegal, Figure 2 demonstrates that the number of families living in unofficial encampments remained static between 1960 and 1970. Although 859 additional Traveller families moved into standard local authority social housing between these years, the number living on local authority provided halting sites increased from zero to 373 concurrently. Following the publication of the *Report of the Travelling People Review body* in 1983, more success in translating its recommendations into practice was evident (Travelling People Review Body, 1983). As mentioned above, this report recommended that more Traveller specific accommodation be provided and, in the decade after its publication, the number of Traveller families living in both official halting sites and group housing schemes increased (by 525 and 281 respectively) but the numbers in standard social housing increased by just 281. However, the pattern of contradictory policy implementation recommenced following the publication of the Task Force on the Travelling Community report in 1995. Despite its proposal for more halting site provision, the number of Traveller families accommodated on halting sites fell by 128 in the two decades after its publication (see Figure 3). Although the number of families living in group housing schemes expended by 461 concurrently, Figure 3 reveals that the number accommodated in standard social housing increased by 1,725.

Policy Ambiguity

Matland (1995) argues that policy ambiguity – manifested in terms of policy goals and/or the means for operationalising these - is a common response to policy conflict. Although as mentioned above, the goals of Traveller housing accommodation policy have changed significantly since the 1960s, as assimilation has been replaced by multi-culturalism - policy goals have also become less ambiguous concurrently. The Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) specified the number type and location of dwellings required for Travellers in far

more depth than the preceding commissions, for instance. In contrast, the means for implementing Traveller housing and accommodation policy have remained consistently ambiguous in key respects since the 1960s.

One of the recommendations of the Commission on Itinerancy (1963, p.107) was the establishment of central body tasked with promoting 'the rehabilitation and absorption of itinerants', for instance. However, this recommendation was not implemented by the housing minister who decided instead to appoint an advisory committee instead which was set up in 1965 and abolished just five years later (Travelling People Review Body, 1983).

Similarly, a key recommendation of the Travelling People Review Body was the establishment of cross-cutting statutory body to implement its recommendations and promote the welfare of Travellers. This recommendation was not however accepted by government, however, instead a Committee to Monitor the Implementation of Government Policy on Travelling People was established. They presented their first report in 1985 and highlighted their 'concern at the lack of progress generally in providing adequate and suitable accommodation for Travellers. The delay in providing serviced halting sites in particularly disappointing' (Committee to Monitor the Implementation of Government Policy on Travelling People ,1985, p.1). The Committee produced seven reports in all, the last covering 1991. It is not clear why this Committee dissolved, but in 1993 the government established the Task Force on the Travelling Community which reported in 1995.

The Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995, p.124) also recommended that an 'independent statutory body, to be known as the Traveller Accommodation Agency' should be established, to draw up (in consultation with local authorities) and oversee the implementation of 'a national programme for the provision of Traveller specific accommodation'. However, the housing ministry representative on the Task Force disagreed with the recommendation, arguing that it would only delay 'the provision of urgently needed accommodation for Traveller people by creating uncertainty in the responsibility and role of local authorities and by providing a further focus for opposition to halting site locations' (Task Force on the Traveller Community, 1995, p.124).

Following the publication of the Task Force's report in 1995, a plan for its implementation was devised by relevant ministries which recommended that each local authority should be obliged to prepare five-year plans for providing Traveller accommodation in their operational areas and establish Local Traveller

Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACCs) to advise on these plans (Department of the Environment, 1996). In addition, a dedicated Traveller Accommodation Unit should be established in the housing ministry, together with a National Traveller Accommodation Consultive Committee (NTACC) to advise the housing minister on Traveller accommodation policy. These recommendations were subsequently implemented and legally underpinned by the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998. The implementation plan justified these arrangements on the grounds that they were 'more effective way of meeting the accommodation needs of Travellers without the disadvantages of an independent agency' (Department of the Environment, 1996, p. 3).

However, the housing minister also established a Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995, p 36) and its first report noted that while much progress had been made in 'in putting in place the administrative, legislative, and financial framework, for the provision of Traveller accommodation', it suggested that the 'the reality is that one in every four Traveller families are currently living without access to water, toilets and refuse collection' and that '[t]he accommodation situation has disimproved over the past five years'. Its second report, published five-years later remarked rather dolefully that 'The provision of good quality appropriate Traveller accommodation continues to be a challenge.' (Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 2005, p.19).

In 2018 the Housing Minister established a Traveller Accommodation Expert Group to review progress in delivering Traveller accommodation (Joyce et al., 2019). Reporting in July 2019, it identified key gaps in implementation arrangements, particularly the advisory status of LTACCs and the fact that local authorities were under no legal obligation to implement the Traveller Accommodation Programmes produced by the LTACCs every five years. To address this issue the Expert Group recommended that the remit of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee be changed from an advisory one and it should be transformed into a body with legislative powers to enforce policy implementation to be known as the National Traveller Accommodation Authority. In March 2021, a Programme Board with representatives from Traveller organisations and central and local government was established to effect implementation of the Expert Group's recommendations, but at the time of writing the status of this particular recommendation was still unclear.

Thus, a key consistent recommendation from all four statutory commissions of investigation into the accommodation of Travellers set up since the 1960s has been the need to establish a national statutory body to deliver Traveller accommodation. Central government's response to the first three reports, was to establish advisory/monitoring bodies with power to deliver accommodation or enforce delivery. An early sceptic of these developments noted that 'one area of concern that has been identified is the advisory and consultative nature of these bodies' and argued that 'resistance at local level to securing change in the situation of Travellers has proved durable and effective' (Crowley, 1999, p.257). The latter is examined in the next section.

Policy Conflict

Perhaps the most convincing thesis to explain the emergence of the longstanding and ongoing conflict around the housing and accommodation of Travellers is Aoife Breathnach's (2006a) historical analysis which argues that Travellers 'became conspicuous' in the mid-twentieth century due to a series of inter-related socio-economic, spatial and policy changes. Travellers' economic role in the rural economy was undermined in the early-twentieth century by the mechanisation of agriculture and availability of mass-produced goods. This was one of the factors which precipitated the rapid urbanisation of this, previously largely rural, community. In 1960, there were 85 Traveller families enumerated as resident in Dublin, for instance, but had increased to 387 by 1974 (Travelling People Review Body, 1983).

This development coincided with concerted action to the demolish the private rented slums which blighted Ireland's towns and cities and to provide replacement social housing which commenced in the 1930s (Norris, 2016). Travellers had traditionally stayed temporarily in cheap slum accommodation, particularly during the winter, but slum clearance pushed them to land on urban fringes - the same spaces on which local authorities were building social housing for those displaced by the slum clearance programmes (Norris, 2016). As the economic viability of nomadism eroded further over the next few decades and slum clearance continued, these urban Traveller encampments increased in size and number and became permanent rather than transitory. According to Breathnach, A (2006a, p.94) it was the 'increasing visibility of Traveller camps on the fringes of the capital city probably pushed central government to tackle the issue seriously' and establish the Commission on Itinerancy in 1960. Helleiner (1998) documents how these emerging tensions were reflected in the increased number of parliamentary questions tabled by politicians in relation to Travellers during the 1950s and their

changing focus from Travellers camping on farmland to urban Traveller encampments.

The Commission on Itinerancy (1963, p. 106, 108) recommended the establishment of voluntary 'itinerant settlement committees' to facilitate absorbing Traveller households 'into the general community' by making contact and befriending Travellers' and educating the settled community by 'assisting to overcome and antipathy and hostility' between the two groups. This built on the volunteers', particularly Catholic charities, existing work with Travellers. To aid this process the Commission on Itinerancy (1963 p. 108) recommended that social workers be employed by local authorities. By the early 1970s, some 500 Traveller households were aided by these structures to find accommodation, either on serviced sites or in housing, generally, social housing (Bohn Gmelch and Gmelch, 1974).

The high numbers of Travellers who moved into official halting sites in the 1960s and 1970s in part reflects the fact that most itinerant settlement committees thought this would be a good first step towards learning to 'skills' to live in a house. However, particularly in cities, halting sites were provided simply because of limited supply of social housing and opposition to allocating the tenancies which were available to Travellers. The first purpose-built halting site was completed in 1966 in the town of Rathkeale in the West of Ireland, the first site Dublin called Labre Park was built in 1967 (Crowley, 2009).

However, both the provision of local authority halting sites and social housing for Travellers in cities attracted concerted opposition from multiple sources. In Galway City in the West of Ireland for instance, Travellers were accommodated in local authority social housing prior to the 1960s, but as Helleiner (1993, p.188, 189) notes during the 1960s 'initial plans to provide serviced camps faltered in the face of resistance from landowners, while early attempts to house Travellers in public housing estates encountered protests by tenants' and that 'private residents were extremely effective at blocking proposed plans for their neighbourhoods through meetings and small deputations to city council'. Equally Bhreatnach's (2009, p.261) research on Cork City in the 1960s reveals that in a public inquiry into the local authority's plans to provide official halting sites in both social housing and middle-class estates, the legal representative for the residents of the latter argued that because the eventual aim was to move Travellers to social housing estates, official halting sites should logically be located adjacent to them. This and other challenges from middle class residents proved successful and no

official Traveller halting sites were provided in their neighbourhoods of Cork, while the halting sites planned for working class neighbourhoods went ahead.

Although membership of the Itinerant Settlement Committees was largely middle-class, Travellers were unlikely to be settled in their neighbourhoods and this reality was not lost on social housing tenants. Bhreatnach (2006, p.65) suggests that what drove the negative reaction of many social housing tenants was that Travellers reminded them of their recent past, 'before benefits, subsidised housing and compulsory school attendance, the Irish working class and Travellers shared may social and economic characteristics'. However, distributional concerns were also probably influential. In the first half the 1960s, only just over 11,000 social housing units were constructed compared to nearly 40,000 in the first half of the 1950s, which resulted in long waiting lists for access particularly in cities where slum clearance reduced the availability of accommodation for the poor (Norris, 2016). Thus, local authorities and settlement committees were from the beginning were met with concerted opposition, in urban areas in particular.

Outside the cities however, due to population decline and high social housing output in the early twentieth century, demand for social housing was less acute, there appears to have been less opposition to allocating some tenancies to Travellers. Therefore, according to Gmelch (1977b) in towns and villages social housing was the preferred option for accommodating Travellers in the 1960s and 1970s, which may explain the relatively high number who secured tenancies during this period.

There is some evidence that the focus of opposition to accommodation for Travellers has shifted in recent decades and this has shaped the contradictory policy implementation patterns highlighted above. Both the Commission on Itinerancy (1963) and the Travelling People Review Body (1983) reported widespread opposition from social housing tenants to the accommodation of Travellers in their estates. Whereas, the Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) did not consider this issue to be of significant import to mention and Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation reported that proportionately Travellers secured significantly more social housing tenancies between 2006 and 2016 than the settled population (Joyce et al., 2019).

However, Figure 3 suggests that the provision of halting sites has endured as a 'sticky' policy implementation problem, despite a strong policy and legislative support since the mid-1990s. In addition to the refocusing of opposition to Traveller accommodation provision onto halting sites, the Expert Group on

Traveller Accommodation suggests that low halting site output reflects the increased number of mechanisms available to enable opponents its provision via the land use planning system (Joyce et al., 2019). This was traditionally permissive and would have generated few barriers to the construction of halting sites or indeed any form of social housing for most of the twentieth century, but it has been tightened up significantly since the 1980s. The Expert Group suggests that elected local government councillors play a key role as 'veto players' in this system because planning legalisation requires them to authorise plans for halting sites, the purchase of land for this purpose and initiation of construction on this land. Thus, although local authority halting sites are exempt from the requirement to secure planning permission which apply to other forms of construction, the Expert Group identified councillors' regular refusal to give the required authorisation and the extensive public consultation required by law due as key barriers to halting site provision.

2017 research concurred with this view, it concluded that: 'objections from local 'settled' residents and political pressure exerted by elected representatives tend to delay the planning process' for halting sites (RSM, 2017, p. 6). Similarly, McKeown and McGrath's (1996) research in the 1990s found that the public consultation rules required local authorities to manage objections to halting sites over a much longer period than that required by the usual planning permission process. While Scannell's (1995) research on the 1980s and 1990s describes extensive legal actions by residents' associations against plans for halting site provision, which blocked and/or delayed their construction.

Conclusion

Writing in 2005, Norris and Winston concluded that policy on Traveller housing and accommodation had fallen foul of a significant policy 'implementation deficit'. The analysis presented here concurs with this view and demonstrates that this situation has not changed significantly since then. Targets for the provision of housing and accommodation for Travellers have remained consistently unrealised since the 1960s and, together with a marked concurrent increase in size the Traveller population, this has contributed to high levels of acute accommodation need and substandard living conditions among this community.

However, Traveller housing and accommodation policy is not a straightforward case of 'implementation failure'. This is because significant levels of housing and accommodation for Travellers have been provided by local government which has responsibility for its provision, but the specific type of accommodation provided

often contracted the objectives set by national government which is responsible for devising policy on this issue. Furthermore, Traveller housing and accommodation policy is informed by relatively clear legal frameworks and national level policy objectives, healthy central government funding (at least outside the period of austerity) and adequate data for informing policy (though with room for improvement). This suggests many of the factors "are commonly identified in the literature as barriers to effective implementation, are not relevant significant in the case of Irish Traveller accommodation policy" (Norris and Winston, 2005, p. 812).

To illuminate the factors which have shaped these outcomes, the analysis presented here has drawn on Matland's (1995) ideas on the significance of conflict and ambiguity in policy implementation. Despite unambiguous national policy objectives (and therefore minimal "*ambiguity of goals"* in Matland's (1995) parlance), implementation of Traveller housing and accommodation policy has been has been dogged by marked and consistent "*ambiguity of means"* since the 1960s. The latter is the responsibility of local government, but central government has no legal power to enforce implementation should it fail to occur, nor have the LTACCs which were established to advise on local government on accommodating Travellers in the late -1990s.

This ambiguity is not surprising when one considers that proposals for Traveller housing and accommodation provision often generate vociferous opposition from settled residents of the localities where it is proposed. This local opposition is a key reason for the consistent under provision accommodation for Travellers (compared to expanding need) by government since it first became involved in this issue in the 1960s. Crucially, our analysis identifies the changing focus of this conflict regarding Traveller accommodation, in spatial terms but also in terms of different accommodation types, as the key drivers of the specific contradictions between the objectives and outcomes of policy evident at different times. For instance, opposition from the aspirant working classes who had escaped the slums and moved to the new suburban social housing estates impeded the implementation of the Commission on Itinerancy's (1963) plan to settle Travellers in social housing in the 1960s. While in recent decades, opposition to Traveller accommodation provision has focused on halting sites and come from residents of private housing estates who have impeded the provision of this accommodation by pressuring councillors and undertaking legal challenges.

This combination of unambiguous policy goals with ambiguous means may explain by Traveller accommodation policy outcomes don't conform neatly to those

predicted by Matland's (1995) model. He suggests that the combination of high policy ambiguity and high conflict usually results in "symbolic implementation" which is almost always associated with substantive implementation failure (see also: Visser, 2018). Whereas the uneven and contradictory policy outcomes identified in the preceding analysis are more akin his "political implementation" category in "implementation outcomes are decided by power" and is associated with high policy conflict and low ambiguity (Matland, 1995, p. 163).

However, tucked away in a footnote to Matland's (1995) analysis of symbolic implementation is a critical point which sheds light on the reasons why Traveller accommodation policy is relatively unambiguous while the means for implementing have the opposite characteristics. This is that "A considerably richer understanding of the effects of symbols on politics can be produced if policies are defined as symbolic before they have been implemented" (Matland, 1995, p. 168). The ambiguity evident in implementation arrangements may explain why the Irish government was prepared to adopt unambiguous and relatively radical, multicultural objectives for Traveller housing and accommodation policy (Norris and Winston, 2005). Central government policy makers are not responsible for realising these objectives in practice and are aware that they are unlikely to be realised because they have been informed of this by the various government commissions which have examined Traveller accommodation provision since the 1960s. Thus, rather than being an example an example of symbolic policy implementation, Traveller housing and accommodation in Ireland is in fact an instance of symbolic policy making.

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