

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments: complexity and tensions

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Overview

- Part 1:
 - A brief history of assessing accommodation needs
 - Challenges
- Part 2:
 - Assessments of accommodation need (GTAAAs) as 'evidence'
 - Reflections on GTAAAs and evidence-based policy

GTAAAs – a short introduction

- **Recognition** of continued/growing lack of appropriate authorised pitch/plot based provision for Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople
- **Failure** of Housing Needs Assessments to identify accommodation needs for these groups
- **Well documented** presence of inequalities, economic inefficiencies, tension, wellbeing – all linked to the lack of accommodation options
- **Top-down acknowledgement** that action was required

GTAAAs – a short introduction

- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments – the provision of evidence - how much accommodation is needed (the shortfall) and where?
 - **2006-2011: compulsion** – every local authority to produce and feed into Regional Spatial Strategies
 - **2011-2012:** revised national planning framework
 - **2012-** : local authorities should produce self-determine 'evidence' of accommodation need (GTAAAs may be part of this) but compulsion to produce GTAAAs was removed
- Present day - many local authorities still choosing to pursue a GTAA approach as part of their evidence base

GTAAAs – components

- Assessment of secondary data (Counts, planning applications, site occupancy etc.)
- Consultations with key informants
- Survey of households (usually face-to-face delivered by community based interviewers)
- Needs assessment model

GTAAAs – head scratching

- Duty to co-operate – how is this best evidenced?
- Assessment of local and historic need – how to assess who is local?
- Cross-boundary movement – narrow lens risks excluding populations
 - E.g. Compounding inequalities in provision
 - E.g. Showpeople movement

Models of evidence-based policy making

- Differing models of the way research can be used in policy making
 - **Linear-rational** – *research drives the policy or provides empirical evidence to help solve an identified policy problem*
 - **Political or tactical** – *research is used selectively to further short-term interests or used as a delaying tactic*
 - **Enlightenment** – *over time research is used to impact on policy in indirect/unpredictable ways*

Stevens (2007)

Models of evidence-based policy making

- A spectrum of issues exist where different approaches are more suitable (Head, 2008)
- Linear-rational model offers greatest research impact due to claims of:
 - Scientific
 - Objective
 - Transparent
- But, is the linear-rational approach too simple for complex issues?

Models of evidence-based policy making

- Linear-rational approach widely seen as inadequate on three levels:
 - **Theoretically** – *doesn't provide a convincing account of the relationship between analysis and policy*
 - **Politically** – *sees ethical and political judgements as technical (value free)*
 - **Practically** – *identification of shortcomings weakens the legitimacy*

Owens et al (2004)
- Generally not a good approach where the problem can be 'framed' differently i.e. politicians Vs community needs

Models of evidence-based policy making

- Linear-rational approach – alive and well
- Approach of choice for most policy orientated research and approach for GTAAs
- General dependency on quantification of what is going on and reliance on ‘objective’ numbers/findings
- This approach thought to provide **technical, objective and robust analysis** – modelled on accepted approach to ‘mainstream’ housing needs assessment

GTAAAs and real-world challenges

- Assessments of accommodation need exist within a challenging social and political context :
 - Administrative tiers – nationally and locally
 - Enduring (largely negative) perceptions of the client group
 - Divergent interests predicated on dichotomy between winning-losing
 - Framing the issue e.g. needs/cohesion Vs deviance

GTAAAs – more challenges

- **Sampling:** lack of information about where people live; access to people; and, (relatively) small sample sizes makes statistical robustness redundant.
- **The survey:** shared understanding around meaning of questions; removal of ambiguity (length of residence, local connection, family composition etc.)
- **Estimating requirements:** aim is to produce a logical evidence-based assessment. In practice informed by findings + researcher judgement

Reflections

- Grounded in the linear-technical model:
 - GTAAs held to an (unrealistic?) high standard by officials, politicians, and community members
 - Often contested and challenging to defend in this context
 - Researchers become pragmatists
- Critiques of GTAAs are valuable (and necessary) but can be damaging

Reflections

- Due to the politicised arena Gypsy and Traveller accommodation not a likely candidate for linear-rational model
- Despite consensus against – perhaps it is the best model to navigate through controversy?
 - More information about the communities
 - More awareness from all quarters about the issues
 - Gypsy and Traveller groups more engaged?
 - Recognised at a national (e.g. CLG, LGA) and local level as an enduring issue

Thank you!

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