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# LOOKING BACK AT SCOTTISH TRAVELLERS AS NOMADIC ENTREPRENEURS?

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## Biography

Dr Robert Smith is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Entrepreneurship at the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. A graduate of Aberdeen University, he gained his Ph.D from the Robert Gordon University in the Social Construction of Entrepreneurship in 2006. Rob has eclectic research interests for example in social constructionism; semiotics; rural entrepreneurship; criminal entrepreneurship and in family business. His interest in the travelling people of Scotland stems from his interest in entrepreneurship as practiced in a rural context in his native Scotland; and from his friendship with members of the travelling community.

## Abstract

This qualitative paper adopts a historical approach and reports on desk research conducted by the author using a mixture of internet based research backed up by a critical reading of published writings on the travelling people of Scotland. This blend of the old and the new allows the author to take a critical look back through time at a proud entrepreneurial people. Another innovative data source used is that of Traditional Scottish Ballads and songs. The gist of the paper is that travelling people can (and deserve) to be viewed as an entrepreneurial people because epistemologically and ontologically there is congruence between the entrepreneurial traits and entrepreneurial narratives of Travellers and the settled people of their native Scotland.

## Key words

Travelling People, Nomadic entrepreneurship, Indigenous entrepreneurship, Income generation strategies, Gypsies.

## AN INTRODUCTION

Douglas (2006: 1) remarks '*If you keep your eyes and ears open in the Scottish Countryside, you can catch a glimpse of an ancient aboriginal people known in the eighteenth century Highlands as the Luchd Siubhail, literary the travelling people*'. This study which focuses on the related subject areas of subsistence and nomadic entrepreneurship using the case study

methodology looks back at these people as nomadic entrepreneurs. See Smith (2006) for a discussion of subsistence entrepreneurship in a Scottish Fishing Community.

Notwithstanding this, there are few scholarly articles which deal with the issue of entrepreneurship as practiced by Travelling People. An exception is the recent study of James and Southern (2007) who considered Gypsy Travellers as '*original entrepreneurs*' because of their obvious propensity for trading. Incisively, James and Southern (2007) refer to the '*economic nomadism*' of Travelling people a point also appreciated by Morris and Clements (2002). Furthermore, Martin (2002) refers to Travellers as being an enterprising people.

It is significant that the term '*Indigenous Entrepreneurship*' is defined as '*subsistence or other self-employment economic activity by members of an indigenous minority*'. This definition covers the economic activities of the Travelling Peoples of Scotland [1]. In referring to Travelling People it should be remembered that the author is referring to a specific culture, a mentality and a way of life because many Travelling families in Scotland are now designated '*Settled Travellers*' (Morran, 2002). This is crucial because values, habits and attitudes are persistent and are passed down from generation to generation. Moreover, it is pertinent that in Scotland the Travelling fraternity are not legally considered to be members of an ethnic minority and are therefore denied indigenous status. Within the entrepreneurship literature they are an under researched people. Consequentially, this study considers them as an itinerant, nomadic, entrepreneurial people. This distinction is both necessary and important because it is their culture of independence and their collective spirit as a disadvantaged people which makes them entrepreneurial *per-se*. Their entrepreneurial attitude appears to be culture-bound which is all the more surprising because they do not have an enterprise culture as we understand it. This may explain why (unlike other ethnic minorities) they do not produce mainstream entrepreneurs. Indeed, the term entrepreneur is almost alien to their very culture as they consider themselves to be Traders. This is important because the '*Western model of entrepreneurship*' (Dana, 2007) does not have credence in their rapidly diminishing world.

Under the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982, Travelling People are defined as '*persons of nomadic habit of life, whatever their race*'. Estimates for the UK suggest that there may be as much as 120,000 Travellers, including Romani Gypsy families; Irish Travelling families; Scottish Travellers; the Welsh Kave; Circus and Fairground Travellers; New Age Travellers; and the Bargees [2]. Scottish Office estimates suggest that there are currently between 10-15,000 Travellers living in Scotland. A 1992, Scottish Office count estimated that there were 750 to 800 such families containing 3,000 persons. Other sources put the number of Travellers in Scotland as high as 23,000; whilst Kenrick and Clark (1999) suggest that the figure is nearer 7,000 mobile and 8,000 settled in houses. Gentleman and Swift (1971) consider all estimates of the population of Scottish Travellers as inaccurate and misleading. However, it is estimated there are no more than 2,000 Travellers and Gypsies still living '*on the road*' in Scotland. Within the context of a wider society the small numbers of people involved has the propensity to engender an epistemological feeling of belongingness and an ontological sense of being [3]. When considering Scottish Travellers as a racial group it must be remembered that it is not a homogenous entity because it includes many genuine Gypsy Travellers who through birth and / or marriage possess a strong sense of cultural identity, instilled and maintained through extended family, or clan links, language and their distinctive oral culture. There are ideological differences too because Show and Fairground Travellers consider themselves a business community, as opposed to an ethnic group. There is a tradition of being born into this open community. Likewise those who leave the community are not ostracised. There are 500 members of the Scottish section of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.

This paper has five sections, including the introduction. The first section proper discusses issues of methodology and defines the research question. The second narrates the story of the Travelling Peoples of Scotland building up our understanding of their particular culture within the contexts of (a) history; and (b) the self-generation of income. The third section discusses how this relates to our understanding and knowledge of entrepreneurship

theory; whilst the fourth considers what this means in terms of future research. The overarching aim of this study is to develop a culturally-appropriate model of indigenous entrepreneurship which resonates with Travelling People themselves.

## **MAKING A CASE FOR THE METHODOLOGY**

This study addresses the call made by Bill Bygrave (Bygrave, 2007: 47) for entrepreneurship scholars to conduct more case studies to uncover descriptive material crucial to understanding entrepreneurship as an everyday practice. Case Studies permit the construction of a credible research story of the entrepreneurial activity conducted by Travelling People from anecdotes, conversations, books and official reports for the purpose of cross referring this corpus of knowledge to entrepreneurship theory and draw implications from it. The methodology also embeds an activity in the context in which it occurs and in this case within the context of Scotland, its history and its socio-economic heritage.

Much of what we know about Travelling life comes to us from books. There are many factual books on Gypsies such as those by Fraser (1995); Hawes and Perez (1996) and Kenrick and Clark (1999) but there is a dearth of such books on Scottish Travellers. Another literary genre of significance is that of auto-biography and novels. For example, the trilogy of books by Jessie Smith (Smith, 2002, 2003, 2005) tells of her life as a Scottish Traveller with gritty reality. She does not spin an idyllic tale, but instead, describes a life on the margins of a respectable, but bigoted, society which treated them harshly. In the trilogy the halcyon days of her childhood gave way to changing times in which it became harder and harder for her kind to subsist by doing the rounds of seasonal jobs. Jessie Smith tells of how the old ways changed. Whilst such books present a valuable insight into the lives of Travellers frustratingly they tend to gloss over the rich tapestry of self-employment. Trading on her cultural capital as a storyteller Jessie Smith has also published a novel - an epic tale of love, loyalty and honour amongst the Travelling People (Smith, 2006). Another author, Bessie Whyte (Whyte, 2001) provides a similar insight into the lives of the '*Mist People*' as Travellers are known in the county of Angus. In this paper, the author uses such sources to uncover self-employment

practices because obtaining material from academic writings on Romani Studies proved less fruitful. Frustratingly, few articles in the Continuing Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society – (<http://www.gypsylloresociety.org/cultureintro.html>), relate to Scottish Travellers.

From such diverse readings, as discussed above, it is possible to identify key thematics which help us understand such nomads as an entrepreneurial race and make it possible to answer the research question –

*Is it possible to consider the Travelling People of Scotland as entrepreneurs?*

It is worthy of noting that many of the diverse readings which collectively formed the background research to this study were initially located via a trawl of the internet. It is also significant that Kilgour (2007) in this very journal used a similar web based research methodology to research childhood impressions of British Gypsy Life. Another methodological strand to the paper is that the author used the Delphi Methodology by discussing the contents of the paper with members of the Travelling Community who provided invaluable help and assistance, albeit that the final version is obviously that of the authors who takes full responsibility for any perceived inaccuracies which others may read into the text. The help received was invaluable because it cleared up initial inaccuracies and prevented the author from potentially offending other travellers. In particular it helped to highlight and correct cultural misperceptions which resulted from the authors upbringing in rural working class Scotland.

## **PLACING THE ‘TRAVELLING PEOPLES OF SCOTLAND’ IN AN ECONOMIC CONTEXT**

James and Southern (2007: 1) refer to Gypsies and Travellers collectively as being the most marginalised group in contemporary British Society. In the case of Scottish Travellers this is doubly so because of the fact that they are denied indigenous status. To understand these people in an economic context, it is necessary to understand them in a historical context. This further necessitates consideration of the socio-economic context within a changing Scotland making it necessary to delve into both the history and culture of Scotland because Travellers

are a distinctive feature of Scottish life; and because we are studying the remnants of an indigenous way of life, as much as we are studying an indigenous people in real time. Indeed, Douglas (2006: 2) talks of Travellers as embodying ‘*surviving remnants of a very ancient way of life*’.

## **Situating Travellers in historical context**

Wormington *et al* (Undated) suggest that the Scottish Travellers first became identifiable as a people circa 1500 to 1800. As early as the 1500’s Gypsies had a reputation in Scotland as being ‘*Masterful Beggars*’ (MacRitchie, 1894). For Wormington *et al* these people were comprised of itinerant Scottish ‘*Craft Workers*’. Indeed, Douglas (2006: 1) claims that the *Luchd Suibhail* were originally itinerant ‘Tin Smiths’ and metal workers for the ancient clans and forged weapons and ornate Celtic jewellery. The association of travellers with the ancient craft of the tinsmith gives rise to the fact that in Scotland many people refer to them as ‘Tinkers’ or ‘Tinks’. It is a derivation that travelers did not seek.

*Tinker: – ‘An itinerant pedlar or trader, frequently living in a tent, caravan etc, and dealing in small metal wares, brushes, baskets etc, some being descendents of disposed Highland peasantry, some of mixed gipsy descent’*

(Robinson, 1985 – Concise Scots Dictionary).

Gmelch (1975), remarks that such Tradesmen had to be itinerant. This economic positioning of Travellers as craftsmen does not fully take into account the disintegration of the socio-economic order that was Clan life in Highland Society. The resultant forced in-migration of a dispossessed population explains why many Scottish Travellers bear Clan surnames such as Robertson, Stewart, McPhee, McPhail, MacDonald, Cameron, Macmillan, Drummond, Townsley, Reid and so forth. It is hardly surprising that Travellers of Highland extraction thus played a significant part in the creation of Scotland's culture and society, not to mention its economy for centuries. So much so that Travellers are now regarded by some historians as the custodians of Highland heritage because of the essential role they played in the preservation of traditional Gaelic culture, traditions, folklore, songs and sayings. However, it must be stressed that all Travelling People are not descended from Tinsmiths and that to designate

them all as 'Tinkers' is factually inaccurate. Nevertheless, to Settled Scots all Travellers have become mis-designated as such.

Some of the dispossessed Clans people who did not gravitate towards Scotland's Industrial belt and assimilate into the urban proletariat became cattle drovers or smugglers. Others took to the road and in time merged with the *Luchd Suibhail*, forming a classless band living a simple, traditional existence, wandering from village to village living in primitive bow-tents in encampments in woods, on verges and wasteland. Douglas (2006: 4) stresses that as the need for weaponry gave way to more mundane wares, Travellers turned to make more useful artifacts like baskets, kettles, bowls, flagons, pans, strainers, horn spoons, besoms, scrubbers clothes pegs and to doing seasonal farm work to survive. Like other pariah and nomadic peoples the key idiom is of survival and survive they did. The wares described above were in demand with the *country hantle* [Traveller speak for settled folks]. On their travels the men engaged in horse-dealing and pearl-fishing as well as undertaking seasonal farm work such as *tattie* [potato] and *berry* [strawberries and Raspberries] picking in the fields of Perthshire, or working in the daffodil fields of Angus. Other Travellers took up employment as tin-smiths, hawkers, entertainers, buskers, salesmen and news-bringers, whilst the women engaged in hawking wares, trinkets and clothes pegs around the houses. It was a seasonal migration in search of economic survival. Indeed, Teat (1996) poetically refers to the Travelling People and Pearl fishers of Scotland as '*The Summer Walkers*'.

During this time many Travellers developed an affinity to agriculture and were a regular feature at Horse Fairs such as Peter Fair near Buckie and Aikey Brae near Old Deer. Wormington *et al* (Undated) stress that Travelling occupations historically included fruit picking, totting (collecting scrap), hawking activities such as selling carpets, laying tarmac, roofing, doing landscape gardening as well as selling or repairing second hand cars. Greenfields (2006) add the professions of market trading and tree surgery to this list, whilst Johnson and Willers (2004) link Travelling Peoples to self-employment *per-se*. Consequentially, Travellers became renowned as '*Jacks of all Trades*' but masters of none. Scottish Travellers suffered from the rapid decline in the demand for horse stock following

the First World War and were forced to rely on secondary enterprises such as basket-making. In Travelling circles self-employment is very much tied to the notion of rurality and it is significant that many of them supplemented their incomes in the time honoured tradition of poaching salmon, deer and rabbits for the pot.

Being raised in the Travelling Community meant being raised in a Patriarchal society in which the *Gadgie* [Gypsy slang for man] was master of his household. Masculine doxa, and therefore what it is to be a man, was thus deeply ingrained in their psyche. Providing for one's family and possessing the ability to fight bare knuckle became key traits ingrained within the characters of Travelling Men who were often fiery tempered and quarrelsome hard men by nature. Paradoxically, the life style produced a significant number of strong Matriarchs who held their families together. It is of note that although the father is the head of the household women and children play a significant part in the economic activities of their families. Primarily these families were itinerant traders and dealers who made enough money to subsist and pursue a cherished life style of their own choosing.

In former times Travellers were regarded by most Scots as a 'race apart', familiar strangers if you like, easily recognised by their dress and custom as the women wore black shawls and headscarfs and the men sported earrings and gold jewellery, particularly heavy gold rings [4]. Now, as a genre they are not so easily recognised Douglas (2006: 2) - particularly because many traditional families stopped traveling in the 1950's and settled in villages across Scotland, whilst others took up semi-permanent occupation on unofficial camp sites. The tented communities gave way to mobile caravans and those with a specific trade entered identifiable occupations thus metalworkers entered the scrap metal business whilst horse-dealers diversified into haulage. Those that became settled often took up a trade as stone masons or builders labourers, whilst others went to sea. In time many assimilated into the working classes.

Historically, in the rural society of Scotland there were different levels of society. In a rural context at the top of the class pyramid were the Farmers who were a distinct breed set apart from the itinerant Farm Servants. Farmers and the Merchant classes formed an uneasy

Douglas (2006: 2) notes that these 'Townies' had a harder attitude towards Travellers than did country folk. In days gone by Farm Servants led an often nomadic life style changing jobs every six months at feeing markets such as Aikey Brae where they rubbed shoulders and drank with Travellers. However, in the rigid social hierarchy, to marry into a Travelling family was seen as the ultimate disgrace. This is evidenced in the popular Bothy ballad '*Bogey's Bonnie Bell*' where the daughter of a Farmer was forced to marry a *Tinker Cheil* [These are Scots words for Traveller and man] because she bore a child out of wedlock. Bell was fated to accompany him in perpetuity as '*he hawked his pans and ladles*' around the countryside. This discrimination was deep rooted despite the fact that the majority of the rural population also lived just above the poverty line.

Nevertheless, social intercourse between the Travellers and the settled farming community was not unheard of. For example, Cameron (1986: 71) talks of ploughmen laddies [young men] passing the time of day by admiring a '*comely tink*' as they passed by the fields. Indeed, attraction transcends the boundaries of discrimination. Thus, Travellers drank in the same pubs as farm workers where their money had the same spending power as the locals. At certain times of the year Travelling men tended to be more flush with money than their farming counterparts and could spend more freely than those from farmtouns [large Farms]. Also, Travellers were not tied to monotonous work routines and could thus drink freely and go on a drinking spree for days on end. In short, they had the freedom of mind and spirit to roam where they pleased, and do what they pleased. This is succinctly articulated in the words of a popular Scottish ballad '*The Gypsy Rover*' which describes them as '*Lords of the free land all over*'. To continue in this rich vein of Scottish literary heritage there is an old Scots saying – '*We're a' Jock Thompson's bairns*' – meaning that ultimately we are all human beings and thus equal. Although this sentiment is echoed in the words of the famous song by Scotland's National Poet Robbie Burns entitled '*A mans a man*' the sentiment was not always readily extended to Travellers.

Cameron (1986: 54) in trying to get close to the seasonal work patterns of farming narrates that the men of the old farmtouns '*stood close to nature*'. And so it was with the Travelling Community, but unlike the poor farming folk Travellers were not tied to the land but free to roam wide. The need to travel in search of work was not solely the prerogative of Travellers but was part of wider socio-economic canvass as evidenced by Cameron (1986: 99) who talks of the economic practice of droves of Highland shearing girls in their thousands flocking south for the annual harvest. This was also a common feature in fishing communities. A cultural motif of economic nomadism amongst Scots *per se* thus begins to emerge.

Beneath the Traveller, in the socio-economic pecking order was the lonely figure of the Tramp. These men were homeless, down and outs who tramped the length and breadth of Scotland on their own usually sleeping rough in barns and sheds [5]. Over time the figure of the Tramp became conflated with that of the Hawker as evidenced in the Scots song '*Tramps and Hawkers*'. The unspoken discrimination against Travellers by the Scottish people is all the more surprising given their attachment to the lone romantic figure of the Travelling Man in the form of the Scottish stereotype of the '*Gaberlunzie man*' revered in song and story. In medieval Scotland, these men were licensed beggars and beadsmen, who would pray for the souls of others for a fee. The word 'gaberlunzie' has its origins in the French words 'gaban', referring to a sleeved, hooded cloak, and 'laine', meaning 'wool'. Thus Gaberlunzie Men wore a distinctive cloak of blue. They were regarded as shrewd traders. This nomadic motif is further cemented by the fact that itinerant Scots Traders were famed for their trading prowess. During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century over 50,000 Scots migrated to the Low Countries of Holland and Denmark, spreading outwards to Sweden, to Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and Russia. These men earned a living as mercenaries becoming renowned for their courage as fighting men who formed the backbone of many foreign armies. When not engaged in warfare, they took to traveling the roads of Europe with a broadsword strapped to their back, accompanied by a pack horse laden with wares earning a reputation as canny [shrewd] traders feared by the indigenous merchant classes of Europe for their mercantile agility. This

phenomenon is well recorded by historians (see Harper, 1988, 2003). These examples illustrate a Scottish cultural affinity to nomadism and trading.

## **Identifying key themes in ‘Travelling’ culture**

The Travelling people of Scotland undoubtedly have a distinctive culture which is now being documented by individual folklorists and institutions such as the Elphinstone Institute at Aberdeen University. An understanding of Gypsy Culture is also helpful in understanding Travelling People, *per-se*. In many ways, being itinerant people the cultures of Scottish Travellers and Gypsies are similar. Indeed, perhaps due to ignorance of their heritage the term Traveller itself has become interchangeable with the terms Gypsy and Romany in Contemporary Scottish Society. Even in America, Irish and Scottish Travellers are recognized as a distinct nomadic group with their own cultural, linguistic, and historical tradition. Despite sharing points of commonality each nomadic group maintains social distance from the others differing in terms of social organization: forms of marriage, internal politics and social control. This is exacerbated by an ideology of separating the pure from impure or Gypsy from non-Gypsy a peculiar form of reverse discrimination. From readings of the literature on Scottish Travellers and on Gypsies the following shared key themes emerged –

- Persecution and discrimination;
- Language as a cultural barrier and marker of difference;
- Storytelling and performative ability;
- Blighted educational opportunity;
- Religious Belief;
- Ideology, doxa and work ethics; and
- The values systems of Travelling people.

### **Persecution and discrimination:**

In keeping with the experience of other Indigenous people’s the Travellers of Scotland are a marginalized and persecuted people. Indeed, Wormington *et al* (Undated) identify persecution

and discrimination as a key thematic in narratives of travelling peoples. Mayall (2004) regards Gypsy identity to be socially constructed by both insider and outsider groups. This is also evident in such self explanatory popular ballad - '*Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves*' in which the title was a familiar warning cry to those who lived settled lifestyles. Indeed, the stereotype of the Gypsy as a thief has currency in many countries. In the 1990's in Britain the popular adult comic the '*Viz*' ran a serial comic strip with the scurrilous title of - '*Thieving Gypsy Bastards*'. The purpose of this section is merely to reiterate that discrimination is rife.

Setting political correctness aside there are Travelling Families who are incorrigible thieves and have been so for generations. Such families tend to specialize in the theft of caravans, trailers, plant and mobile homes. Others become knockers - itinerant handymen / bogus workers who prey on the helpless, the gullible and the infirm. These families developed a system of signs chalked on walls whereby members of this Criminal Travelling Fraternity mark out a victim as being a gullible mark worth revisiting. Such information is now a saleable commodity in their criminal circles testament to the existence of an alternative entrepreneurial economy. Such criminal families are not representative of true Travellers.

Moreover, the peripatetic lifestyle of Travellers bring them into conflict with the settled communities and the law in respect of the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865 and the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 which prohibits camping without permission on private land or verge sides. A common complaint of settled communities is the litter and detritus left by many Travellers at their encampments and at the roadside. This clash of cultures is inevitable because they have been raised in a different cultural aesthetics. This sense of discrimination and injustice also is evident in the sentiment contained in a popular ballad '*Donnie McPhail*' where one of the lines narrates a sad tale - '*There's nae much joy for a wee' Gadje boy when the other bairns ken yer a Tink. So you learn how to fight for the things that are right, or get tramped on the rest o' yer days*' [6].

Discrimination and prejudice often come in the form of insults and verbal taunts. Thus Irish and Scottish Travellers are often referred to as *Tinkers* or *Tinks* and sometimes *Hawkers* because historically they were regarded as traveling Tinkers or Pedlars who hawked

their goods around the doors. In the Gaelic language Travellers of Highland extraction were known as the *Ceardannan* (craftsmen) or *Black Tinkers*. In a wider British context the terms *Gypsy*, *Gypo*, *Pikey* and *Tinke* are all now regarded as racist insults and taunts but at one time were more freely used. However, some Travellers adopt these insults as an identity marker of pride. However, Douglas (2006: 12 and 189) rejects the self-pitying notion of Travellers as '*tragic pilgrims of the mist*' and warns against concentrating solely upon the idea of Travellers being a separate caste of persecuted people which she considers to be an over romanticized vision. Ideologically, Travellers regarded themselves as better men than settled gadgies because they earned their income by selling their goods and services to the country folk.

#### **Language as a cultural barrier and marker of difference:**

Language and dialect also acts as marker of cultural difference. Scottish Travellers speak a language known as the '*Cant*' which is a known to few outsiders. Scottish Travellers of Highland extraction, speak a variant form of language known as '*Beurla-regaird*' which is a mixture of Gaelic and Travelling patois. Beurla Regaird, literally translated means – the language of the metal workers. Irish Travellers speak a distinctive language known as '*Shelta*' or '*Beurla gun seur*' [guessed spelling], whilst the Gypsy Roma speak a distinctive language known as '*Romani*'.

These languages make them a peculiar and exploitable form of social capital because to understand it usually signifies belonging. This is a particular facet of their culture which they can use to good effect because it makes them almost a secretive society and thus genuine fraternity. Knowledge of '*Cant*' words can therefore be used as a form of socio-cultural capital and by extension it can be used for commercial or pecuniary gain. It also has the effect of creating a deep bond of trust between Travellers who as a general rule will not inform against their own kind or tell outsiders their secrets, even if they disapprove of the actions of their kind. Like the Romani dialect used by Gypsies, Travellers use the Cant to keep their business secret from strangers and outsiders. Such communities become closed to strangers

and in particular to any authority figure but particularly the Police and Council Officials. Travellers are wary of strangers and are often concerned about being misrepresented. Indeed, McColl and Seeger (1986) caused a stir in the Travelling Community with the publication of their book - *'Doomsday in the Afternoon'*, about the Stewart family of Blairgowrie. Members of that family who contributed to the book were censured because they were considered to have given away Travelling secrets. This is of particular interest in relation to academic researchers because of the difficulty they face in gaining research access [7].

### **Storytelling and performative ability:**

Another particular facet of Travelling Culture is that of its storied nature and in particular their affinity to storytelling and music. This performative aspect of culture became a way of life and the memoirs of Travellers are full of accounts about ceilidhs [music and dance] around the camp fire. According to Braid (1999) their "*stories are not just for entertainment*" but are a way of life and a method of passing on wisdom, values and specific life skills, a point confirmed by Douglas (2006: 25) who also points out that stories can act as sense-making and coping mechanisms. Also, (Douglas, 2006: 92) argues that such stories act as road maps of achievement. Moreover, Braid (1997) suggests that Travelling People actively construct their identities through narrative and the perpetuation of folklore. This has its roots in both history and demography. For example, Jacobs (1894) suggested that Gypsies diffused folk-tales by means as colporteurs. This is significant because in the days prior to the spread of newspapers Gypsies and Travellers were a useful source of newsworthy topics, gossip and stories and for this they were valued. Entrepreneurship can be explained as a process of *'Taking between'*.

Jacobs (1894) collected 160 Gypsy folk tales common to Britain. Another folklorist - Leland (1891) narrates that the nomadic Romany Gypsies originated in India during the Middle Ages and migrated and worked their way across Europe working and in doing so spread particular story types, plots and motifs through many countries and trade routes. This

may help explain the congruence of stories and folkloristic tale types across national boundaries.

Moreover, Leland highlighted the long Travelling tradition of magic and shamanistic practices against the *Gorgios* - (non-Gypsies). In particular, Leland discusses the use of the '*Great Secret*', a magic trick in which all of your money disappears. However, as is often the case writers and collectors of lore such as Leland and Jacobs often unintentionally romanticize Gypsy lore. However, of interest in relation to this study Leland characterized them as being survivors in a hostile world. Leland (1874) collected proverbs referring to gypsies as well as documenting Rommani Gudli (Gypsy Stories or fables); Rómani folk-tales; Gypsy lying tales; Gypsy slang words and phrases in common usage in England. Leland regarded Scottish Tinker Stories as a genre of folk tales in their own right and of interest is the passing reference by Douglas (2006: 149) some Travellers tales as being '*Tales of Trickery*'.

To bring this circuitous dialogue back to the purpose of the study – the relevance of storytelling to the entrepreneurial propensity of Travelling People is that they develop an ability to talk and be persuasive with potential customers which is a useful trait / skill in commerce. Cameron (1986: 25) talks of the spell cast by a '*Travellers Tale*'. Indeed, it is a common warning amongst Travellers to beware the storyteller because their promises often outstrip their ability to deliver upon them. Nevertheless, Douglas (2006: 96) remarks that many Travellers made a living singing, performing and story telling as evidenced by the Scots Son '*Glasgow Dan – The Music Man*'. Dan was an itinerant singer who toured the land with his melodeon singing songs and making music of his country. All he sought in payment was a dram and a bed for the night. These examples are clear evidence of the use of social capital to '*create and extract value from the environment*' which is one definition of entrepreneurship (Anderson, 1995).

**Blighted educational opportunity:**

A lack of formal education and blighted educational opportunity also plays a significant part in the accounts of many Travellers. Thus illiteracy rates are high in Travelling Communities and one would thus suspect that dyslexia may also be present. This is significant in relation to the possession of enhanced visio-spatial cognitive capabilities which often comes with dyslexic orientation. However, blighted education often brings with it the development of street wise demeanor and a level of cunning synonymous with the ability to think on one's own feet and count under pressure. Many Travellers have an uncanny knack of accurately guessing weights and measures. It also prevents Travellers from engaging in formal economies in which literacy is essential.

**Religious belief:**

Also of particular interest is the cultural marker of religious belief. According to Douglas (2006: 144) for Travellers religion is very much a private matter. Many Travellers feel alienated from the orthodoxy of the Presbyterian state religion in Scotland because formerly they felt discriminated against. Others are of the Catholic or Gypsy Pentecostal faiths. Not being settled they do not have an opportunity to regularly attend churches. In writings of Travelling Cultures there is an emphasis on superstition and fortune telling. This cultural legacy imbues Travellers with a sense of mystique which they can and do exploit as a social capital.

**Ideology, doxa and work ethics:**

An understanding of the ideology, doxa and work ethic of Travellers is essential in understanding them as nomadic entrepreneurs. Firstly, Douglas (2006: 182) talks of the Travellers '*fear of outsiders*' - particularly those in authority such as Police Officers and Council Officials. This mistrust of authority is common in indigenous cultures and communities. In the case of the Travellers this manifests itself as a rejection of *Scaldie* values Douglas (2006: 190). A *Scaldie* is any person who lives in a house and works at a job. This equates to a rejection of bourgeoisie values. Also, Douglas (2006: 164) alludes to the fact that traditionally Travellers owned very little and do not keep many possessions perhaps because

they fear that they will be accused of having stolen them. More pragmatically, mobility dictates that possessions are kept to a minimum. Douglas (2006: 66) stresses the importance of making a living as being part of being a man and in this respect Travelling men possess many skills but do as a rule differentiate between work and play (Douglas, 2006: 66). They will work when they have to and stop when they have earned sufficient money for their needs. Thus - luck, chance and serendipity play a part because Travellers are ambivalent and tend to '*make the best of things*' (Douglas, 2006: 124). Yet in talking of Travelling culture one must take cognisance of settled Travellers (Morran, 2002). Douglas (2006: 6) talks of the gradual assimilation of settled Travellers into society and that '*the more prosperous and pretentious among them are ready to deny their traveller origins*' and to reject traditional ways. This denial of heritage is in keeping with the experience of other enterprising peoples who seek to put a legacy as a pariah people behind them.

#### **The value systems of Travelling people:**

Travellers appear to possess many traits and qualities which influence their value systems. For instance - Douglas (2006: 1, 4 and 18) describes Traveller traits such as ingenuity, quick-wittedness, resourcefulness, versatility and improvisation. Further more, Douglas (1987) refers to the quality of being '*Traveller Brained*'. Nevertheless, negative descriptors such as being backward, drop outs, liars and thieves also proliferate (Douglas 2006: 1). Travellers live in a values based society in which values such as justice, fidelity, morality, courtesy and friendliness are very significant only when practiced within the bounds of their own communities. No discussion of the value systems of Travellers would be complete without mention of culturally revered traits of independence and pride. These two (proto-entrepreneurial) traits go hand in hand and in a hostile world are essential for economic survival. A belief in one's self-efficacy and value as a breadwinner are essential qualities for Travelling Men. Finally, Douglas (2006: 149) makes reference to Travellers as being '*born risk takers*' which by logical extension increases their propensity to be seen as entrepreneurial.

Having discussed facets of Travelling Culture at an abstract level it is helpful to place them in the context of self-employment in the everyday lives of Travellers. It is significant that Douglas (2006: 170) points out that in the ‘Cant’ there is no words relating to abstract ideas. This is important because entrepreneurship is an abstract idea.

## **ALIGNING THEMES WITH ENTREPRENEURSHIP THEORY**

The purpose of these observations is to take stock of the above selected reading of the Travelling peoples and to make sense of them in the context of entrepreneurship *per-se*. The author has had many conversations with Travellers over the years and has developed an appreciation of their entrepreneurial propensity. The latter is not always immediately discernible. Prior to conducting this research the author was under the misperception that like the Jews, Gypsies (and derivative nomadic peoples) were famed for their entrepreneurial propensity and was surprised at the dearth of academic literature available upon which to base this argument. However, see, Valenzuela (2001) for a discussion of itinerant workers possessing entrepreneurial attitude. This section also seeks to answer the research question – *Is it possible to view the Travelling People of Scotland as entrepreneurs?*

### **Viewing Travellers as Entrepreneurs**

The social construction of the Gypsy / Traveller is therefore an impoverished one based on negative constructs. Indeed, it is of significance that Travellers are not socially constructed as entrepreneurs in the exhaustive work of Mayall (2004) on Gypsy Identities. An internet search using the key words Gypsy and Entrepreneur brings up numerous newspaper articles from across Europe highlighting the entrepreneurial propensity of Gypsies as a people. These articles highlight the difficulties faced by nomadic peoples in obtaining finance, overcoming discrimination, in being taken seriously and so on. These mirror the frustrations faced by female entrepreneurs (Wright *et al*, 2007). The appearance of these newspaper articles is heartening because in time the social construction of the Traveller as an entrepreneur may gain the credence they so richly deserve.

It is surprising that Scottish Travellers have not traditionally made more of their obvious entrepreneurial heritage and like Fairground Travellers consider themselves a business community. Travellers could make more of their 'Craftsman Status'. At present Travelling families are in competition with each other and with the public perception of them as cowboy operators. There is scope for a 'Travelling Co-operative' or 'Guild of Travelling Entrepreneurs' to act as a point of contact between them and customers. Traditionally, Travellers were entrepreneurs because they identified and created niche markets for products in demand by their countrymen. They took natural commodities and made besoms out of broom, wove baskets out of reeds and whittled clothes pegs out of wood – making something of value from nothing. Travellers, are hard workers – one man of Travelling extraction known to the author is still performing the back breaking work of collecting buckies [a type of sea food] at the age of 75. A common theme in the stories and biographies of Travellers is that they live by their wits. Indeed, making money and generating income streams is central to their identity and sense of being. Living by one's wits is a common theme in entrepreneur stories and although Travellers did not use the term entrepreneur themselves the ability of a Travelling Man to do a deal earned him respect in his community. Also many Travellers present themselves as likeable rogues – another point of convergence with entrepreneurial narrative.

There is also clear evidence of networking ability which is a key theme in entrepreneurship studies. Travellers have an advantage in developing networking skills because they travel widely and make many contacts. They thus are able to identify opportunities and match them to buyers. This is a key entrepreneurial aptitude. Such contacts and networks are jealously guarded secrets and perhaps rightly so. However, an appreciation of networking as a transferable entrepreneurial life skill may not be common knowledge. Also, because Travellers have traditionally been forced to engage in the black and grey economies basic business skills such as book keeping, accounting and management skills are often lacking. This links into literacy issues. Moreover, because they conduct off the books

business they tend not to plough money back into maintaining their businesses. These cultural factors are not insurmountable.

Moreover, Traveller economies tend to be income focused rather than career focused a fact exacerbated by the inability of many Travellers to access training. Warrington and Peck (2005) discuss some of the problems encountering nomadic enterprise in section 6 of their incisive report which contains a wealth of information for those interested in economic nomadism. Some of the key points identified are from the studies of Weber (1996) - that the extensive skill base of Travellers goes largely unrecognized; and Niner (2003) - that local authority regulations ban Travellers from conducting business or enterprise from their caravans. This last point places them in a dilemma because to earn money they have to break laws, rules or regulations and points to the ignorance of society to Travelling ways. All the economic activities described above can be unified under the rubric of Nomadic Entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, Travellers can legitimately be regarded as entrepreneurs because they possess what Morrison (1999: 68) refers to as basic traders instinct which is an essential element of entrepreneurial ability and identity. Finally, for Byrne (1996) entrepreneurship provides a key way forward for nomadic entrepreneurial peoples. Knitting together these abstract themes into a cohesive narrative is an essential first step because for any model of nomadic entrepreneurship to have significance to Travellers it must be constructed as narrative encasement and narrated in story.

## **A Model for Narrating Stories of Travelling People**

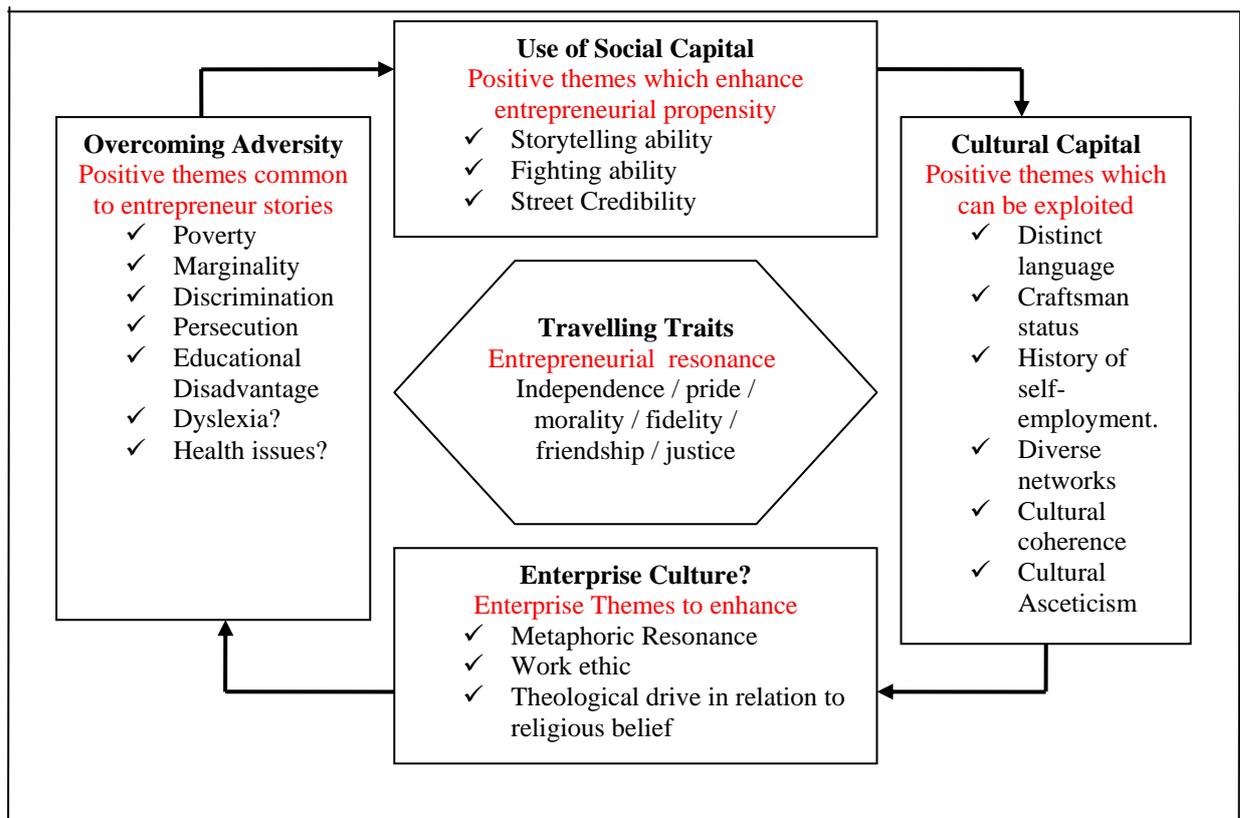
From an analysis of material presented above, it became apparent that the stories of Travelling people possess many of the antecedents of typical entrepreneur stories. Thus we have several key themes common to both. See Figure 1 – A Model for Narrating Stories of Travelling People as Entrepreneur Stories. The common themes are divided up into the following themes:-

- Personal Traits / characteristics

- Antecedents of entrepreneur stories
- Social Capital
- Cultural Capital
- Enterprise culture

**Figure i –**

**A Model for Narrating Stories of Travelling People with Entrepreneur Stories.**



The personal traits and values used to describe Travellers resonate with those used to describe entrepreneurs. This point is worth developing in Travelling narratives because of the obvious links between Trading Identity with Entrepreneurial Identity. Also, Travelling and Entrepreneur stories share common storylines of overcoming adversity. Similarly in relation to the use of social and cultural capital it would be possible to emphasise these elements as effective storylines in entrepreneur stories because of their history of self-employment, their networking prowess and cultural coherence. Travellers definitely possess a distinctive

culturally bound ascetic drive. Despite the resonance of entrepreneurial metaphors such as ‘likeable rogue’ and ‘wheeler-dealers’ within Travelling stories and a discernable work ethic, Travellers do not have an identifiable enterprise culture *per-se*. Also missing is an explanation of their theological drive in relation to their religion, ideology and doxa. It is noticeable that like many other marginalised and indigenous communities, some Travellers possess an ethos of dual morality. This may be a throwback to their peasant roots a fact identifiable by historians such as Richard Pipes (Pipes, 1974) who examined Russian Peasants and although he ascribed them entrepreneurial status he noted that historically they suffered from an insider – outsider dichotomy in that they treated members of their own community with respect but adopted a more predatory outlook in their dealings with outsiders. This ethos dictated that it was acceptable and admirable to cheat outsiders. Although negative perceptions are difficult to change it is possible to do so. Telling different stories is one starting point!

### **Entrepreneurship as ‘Nobility of Purpose’**

Wormington *et al* (Undated) note that all Travelling peoples have historically traveled to make a living. Therefore, like other indigenous people’s such as the Alaska Natives; the Inuit of Canada and Greenland; the Sami people of Scandinavia and Russia’s Kola Peninsula; the Komi people of Russia; the Nenets; and the Ainu - the Travellers of Scotland possess a *Nobility of Purpose*. This phrase is not an exaggerated or romanticized term because the quality comes with having a recognisable place on the economic scale of a host community as well as engendering a sense of belongingness. Being a man of independent mind in charge of the destiny of one’s family was central to the masculine doxa of such peoples. Where the Travelling People of Scotland differ from the other indigenous peoples listed above is that unlike the other people’s Travellers do not live on the margins of their society but very much as a part of it. The ‘othered’ indigenous peoples all live in remote inaccessible communities where they can still participate in a nomadic existence as hunters. On the other hand, Scottish Travellers of necessity had to turn to other forms of predatory commerce to eek out an existence. The problem with the notion of nobility of purpose is that when societal changes

remove a Peoples purpose for existing then it is in danger of removing their very reason for existing. This study is of relevance to all nomadic peoples irrespective of nationality because the plight of the Scottish Travellers will be theirs if they do not learn valuable lessons from history.

To answer the research question – *Is it possible to view the Travelling People of Scotland as entrepreneurs?* – it is within certain limited contexts. Firstly, there is a degree of congruence between the elements from which stories of Travelling People and entrepreneur stories are made up from. Thus in narrative it is possible. In time, the settled people of Scotland may well look back and appreciate the entrepreneurial nature of their Travelling People.

## **SOME POINTERS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Modern lifestyles conspire to make it increasingly difficult for Travellers to continue their nomadic lifestyle. However, they are a versatile people and will no doubt adapt to changing circumstances. The author knows of Travelling Bands which now have Polish Gypsies working with them. Kenrick and Clark (1999) highlight the symbiotic relationship between the Travelling People and the settled community who form their customer base, albeit it is a wary relationship. It is evident that in recent years, despite the growing awareness of secular Societies in relation to discrimination and political correctness when considered in conjunction with social issues such as the mechanization of farming; the emergence of Eastern European migrant workers and so forth that Scottish Travellers have suffered from a loss of status. They are no longer bringers of news or necessities because time has surpassed them. Others can perform their traditional trades cheaper than them. There is no longer the need for horse dealers, traders and itinerant workers. In relation to initiatives concerning the employment of ‘Travelling’ peoples, the Scottish Executive could do better than to initiate a campaign similar to Ireland’s successful ‘TRAILER’ initiative. This stands for ‘*Traveller & Roma Action for Implementation of Legal & Equality Rights*’. Consequentially, Kearns (1974)

refers to the Irish Tinkers as an itinerant population in transition. The problem lies in creating a positive future for such an extraordinary people who are notoriously resistant to the ideology of bourgeoisie enterprise culture and men in suits telling them what to do. Nevertheless, there is considerable scope for realigning the enterprise cultures of both communities and for training courses to bridge the gap with inspirational stories and skill specific training courses forming part of the campaign to restore a nobility of purpose to Travellers everywhere.

There is also a need for further research to be conducted by academics and practitioners alike into the income generating activities and self-employment strategies of Travelling people. There is a pressing need for ethnographies, case studies, longitudinal studies, historical studies, as well as an anthology of stories about Travelling people who are considered successful role models in Travelling Communities. It is essential that such studies are grounded in entrepreneurship theory and discourse because nostalgic and romanticized notions of a lost way of life will not put food on the table or clothes on the backs of children of future generations of nomadic peoples – they will not instill a glint in the eye of a nomad but will alas ultimately induce sadness, melancholy and despair.

## FOOTNOTES

[1] The author's interest in subsistence entrepreneurship stems from research into peasant entrepreneurship. His interest in the 'Travelling Community' arose from personal experiences having been raised in a farming environment which brought him into contact with 'Travellers' and from friendships with members of the 'Travelling' fraternity over the years.

[2] This case study does not concern itself with New Age Travellers or Bargees.

[3] The precise origins of Scotlands 'Travelling' people are unknown but genetically and historically they are believed by many historians to be linked to Scandinavian Lapps. This is of interest because it hints at an epistemological and ontological heterogeneity between nomadic peoples.

[4] The author can still recall his Grandmother discriminating against men who wore earrings on account of them looking like Gypsies.

[5] The author has memories of his father inviting 'Tramps' into the house. The author's father spoke a smattering of the 'Cant' and being superstitious considered it bad luck to refuse the hand of hospitality to those who were down on their luck. The Tramp was given a hearty meal and a 'dram' in front of the fireside. This kindness was repaid by swapping stories well into the night. Likewise, the author's mother was also superstitious similarly treated Travellers with respect and always bought their wares.

[6] The word Gadgie is Cant for a 'man'.

[7] Very few entrepreneurship researchers have interviewed 'Travelling People' as potential 'entrepreneurial' respondents. One exception to this is Professor Alistair Anderson who interviewed a 'Traveller' during his Ph.D research. As is often the case with marginal examples the more interesting and unorthodox material is often left out of the final draft.

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## **BALLADS AND SONGS**

- '*A Mans a Man*' – Robert Burns.
- '*Bogies Bonny Bell*' - Trad. Arr. Gaberlunzie Music.
- '*Donnie McPhail*' – Trad. Arr. Gaberlunzie Music.
- '*Glasgow Dan The Music Man*' - Trad. Arr. Gaberlunzie Music.
- '*Gypsy Rover*' - Trad. Arr. Gaberlunzie Music.
- '*Gypsies Tramps and Thieves*' – Trad Arr.
- '*The Gaberlunzie Man*' - Trad. Arr. Gaberlunzie Music
- '*Tramps and Hawkers*' - Trad. Arr.