



A Qualitative Content Analysis of How Vulnerable EU-Citizens Are Portrayed in Swedish Media

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Received: 09 December 2021 **Accepted:** 26 February 2022 **Published:** 30 March 2022

Abstract: *On 30 April 2004 The Eu Directive 2004/38/Ec Entered into Force and Defined Eu-citizens' right to free movement within the European Union. This directive gives EU-citizens the right to move freely between member states in up to three months. In order to reside for a longer period, the EU-citizens must comply to a certain set of rules and qualifications. They must either be employed, registered as students or possess enough economic capital so that neither themselves nor their family risk being a burden on the social assistance system of the host member state. The directive sets up a legal framework where individuals not qualifying are theoretically experiencing their movement somewhat restricted. Furthermore, the people not qualifying within the directive's requirements are at risk of being depicted as unwanted EU-citizens in political discourses. In this article I examine this phenomenon with a specific focus on the group vulnerable EU-citizens in Sweden and how they are portrayed in Swedish media.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Sweden there are approximately 4700 people classified as vulnerable EU-citizens. It is estimated that the great majority have their origin in Romania and Bulgaria and are of Romani descent. Leave their home countries where they experience racial discrimination and severe poverty and come to Sweden in the hope of an income. In Sweden this group lack serious alternatives of accommodation and are living in acute homelessness. In search of an income many of them end up on the street begging for money. For Sweden this has become a complex phenomenon that has truly challenged the perception of the welfare state and its reach, thus creating an unceasing political debate.

Objectives of Study

The main objective in this article examine how vulnerable EU-citizens are portrayed in Swedish media. It is executed through a qualitative content analysis, analysing 24 editorials published in the country's four major newspapers *Aftonbladet*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Expressen*. The theoretical framework is set up within a separate but intertwined division between *The stranger* and *Social problems*. This framework is based on the intent of this research which is to examine how vulnerable EU-citizens are portrayed and how they are



constructed as strangers through the formulation of social problems and solutions in the editorials.

Primary Objectives

The majority of vulnerable EU-citizens are of Roma descent it is important to use additional empirical sources on Roma history and anti-gypsism in order to understand the context in which this contemporary discussion takes place. Supported by the theoretical framework, this article will demonstrate how the political discourse in Swedish media regarding vulnerable EU-citizens is filled with Roma stereotypes and othering. This group is generally throughout the editorials described as an unwanted and deviant problem in society, which turns them into unwanted *strangers* residing in Sweden.

Secondary Objectives

The narrative here is dominated by vulnerable EU-citizens as either victims or perpetrators of criminal activity. The main implications are that they are associated with an environment of trafficking, illegal settlements and littering. This is problematic because throughout history Roma have been highly associated with crime, and even perceived as naturally prone to criminal behaviour.³⁴ The narrative places criminal characteristics onto the group, reproducing these Roma stereotypes. It creates a threatening image and fear for the presence of the group and thereby reinforces the group's strangeness.

Review of literature

The theoretical framework is divided into two parts. The first part is built upon Georg Simmel's work *The Stranger* and the idea of the stranger as an individual who arrives and stays rather than being a bypassing or totally distinct character. This does not mean that the stranger is to be considered an integral part of a group's inner core. The stranger is instead presumed to possess a certain mobility, *a potential traveller*, and therefore not considered to be bound to the group's most fundamental social norms in the same way its majority members are. According to Vince P. Marotta not all strangers are conceived by the majority in the same manner. The stranger exists socially in a continuum of *strangeness*, that is the relationship between the subjective remoteness and the actual physical presence of the stranger. That is why according to Jeffrey C. Alexander, we must view the stranger as a social type who is subjected to, and whose *strangeness* is constructed through, cultural, social and racial othering.

The stranger is given particular characteristics through stereotypes and depicted as a representative of a group rather than an individual. The more deviant the characteristics, the less of an individual the stranger is thought to be and the greater the risk of being described as a problem or threat to the social order. Using Zygmunt Bauman's two conceptual extremes of strangeness *the tourist* (a wanted mobile cosmopolitan) and *the vagabond* (unwanted and forced into mobility), it allows the analysis to further understand who is considered a wanted and unwanted stranger in the editorials.

The second part of the theoretical framework is based on a relativistic perspective on social problems and the concept of social problems as a product of collective behaviour. Not all



phenomena objectively defined as problems are to be defined as social problems in society. It is first when powerful and influential social institutions, such as mass media, legitimise a problem through a strong discursive competition that a problem becomes a social problem. In a constant competition for space, actors are pressured to use certain strategies for a particular phenomenon to be recognised as a social problem. This is done through *drama*, an emotional, lively and dramatic rhetoric combined with alarming and authoritative language in the purpose of addressing the acuteness of a problem.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The general theme in the editorials analysed is *the begging*, used not only as a concept that includes the act of asking people for financial aid, but rather in the form of a phenomenon. Begging is said to comprise a collection of other concepts such as criminality, littering, vulnerability and social disorder. There is a perceived connotation of begging as something directly connected with vulnerable EU-citizens and that reproduces stereotypes of Roma as destined beggars and not able-bodied individuals. The editorials depict a situation where Roma come to Sweden, bringing not only economic vulnerability but foremost they bring *the begging* across the border.

Data collection

Primary Data:

There are crucial historical stereotypes of anti-gypsism that connects Roma to begging, or vagrancy as it was defined in past Swedish legislation. This has created a racial understanding about the Roma as a people who lack the willpower to take ordinary work and integrate with the rest of society. This is most clearly manifested in Jonatan Lönnqvist's editorial where he writes that the Roma community has a specific cultural preference when it comes to begging and therefore differs from other vulnerable groups in Europe. He writes With this, the author attempts to explain why vulnerable EU-citizens travel to Sweden. He uses othering when depicting Roma as itinerant vagrants not accepting the majority society's social values thus making them culturally divergent.

Secondary Data:

Going deeper into the understanding of begging as a phenomenon, we come across further reproductions of stereotypes and othering. The situation is described by Lena Mellin within a *dramatic* scenery producing an image of danger and urgency:

There are about 300 of [vulnerable EU-citizens'] settlements today and besides the fact that they are a sanitary meltdown it is also a wound to the body of society. No one should have to live this way. Most of the editorials are in line with her description. Some even refer to vulnerable EU-citizens' settlements as hazardous shantytowns, implying that the situation is foreign and that this kind of poverty is already dealt with and no longer occurs in Sweden. The editorials in *Expressen* and *SvD* choose to go even further. They make vulnerable EU-citizens appear uncivilised, disrespectful and irrational. The results of them residing in Sweden threatens Swedish citizens' health and the social order.



3. RESULTS

This article has shown how vulnerable EU-citizens are portrayed in mass media as more or less an unhygienic, criminal and uncivilised threat to the social order, all of which are ingredients in a continuation of the historical narrative of anti-gypsism. In the editorials, vulnerable EU-citizens' strangeness is constructed through these reproductions of Roma stereotypes and othering. This is done using *drama* and, in some cases, even spilling over into *moral panic* describing an urgent unsustainable situation. When instead describing vulnerable EU-citizens as victims, it is not Sweden's responsibility to aid but their home countries'. Ignoring this group as eligible rightsholders within a discourse filled with blatant Roma stereotyping, as shown in this material, leads to severe strangeness which relates to the unwillingness for social interventions regarding this group.

4. REFERENCES

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