

Ireland's ethnic minorities want more self-expression in St. Patrick's parades

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Those members of Ireland's ethnic minorities who participated in last year's St Patrick's Day parade in Dublin want to be able to express their own cultures more fully in future events.

The claim has been made by academics from Queen's University Belfast who have been working with colleagues in the University of Limerick and St Andrews in Scotland on a research project into Irish identities.

While the parade participants congratulated the organisers on creating an impressive and inclusive event, many from Ireland's ethnic communities said they would prefer it if they were allowed to express themselves on their own terms, rather than have to adhere to an overarching theme.

Dr Samuel Pehrson, from the Centre for Research in Political Psychology at Queen's, said: "Our research explores how the idea of the St Patrick's Day parades being promoted as a multicultural event, actually shaped the experience of the people taking part.

"We found that people born in Ireland felt experiencing diversity in the parade could make their lives more interesting and enable them to sample something new and exotic.

Equally they could carry on their lives as usual while feeling good about themselves for being 'tolerant'.

"On the other hand, Ireland's new ethnic minorities are on much less

secure ground in taking up their place in public life. We found that while last year's St Patrick's Day parade made strenuous efforts to include a lot of different communities within Ireland, it was less good at providing a place for those different groups to represent themselves on their own terms.

"More broadly, the initial findings from this research are important because they help us all to understand that multiculturalism can be experienced quite differently by different people, according to how secure their inclusion is within the national community."

The next stage in the project, entitled *Embodying Imagined Communities: The Role of Collective Participation in the Transformation of Irish Identities*, will study more systematically whether Irish identities are changed in any way by the experience of taking part in such events.

Dr Pehrson will present the initial research findings at a conference in Belfast next month to mark the launch of Queen's Centre for Research in Political Psychology. The Centre, which is based in the School of Psychology at Queen's, offers an MA in Political Psychology, the only university in the UK and the rest of Europe to do so.

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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