SciencesPo
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES
AND COMPARATIVE POLITICS

R-HOME

Roma Discrimination and Housing Deprivation in European cities

Project R-HOME
Roma: Housing, Opportunities, Mobilisation and Empowerment

Co-funded by
the European Union

Roma

- Roma, beyond poverty
- Internal and external categorization
- The relevance of stigmatisation, hate and discriminatory behaviour
- A counterpoint on integration

One research question (and a normative one too)

What is governed and what is not governed for Roma housing in cities?

Also a normative question: what works and what is not working?

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housing conditions, **housing discrimination**, and **policies instruments**

- We studied in France the metropolitan area of Paris, in Italy the metropolitan area of Milan, in Spain the metropolitan area of Barcelona, in Hungary the cities of Gyöngyös and Miskolc, in Romania two municipalities in the historical region of Transylvania, in Singeorgiu de Mures (Mures County) and in Sfântu Gheorghe (Covasna County), in the Orko neighbourhood.

Method

A comparison of 5 contexts.

A survey of existing data

A balanced role of interviews towards policy-makers

A major role of focus groups with executives in administration and private agencies (2 for each city)

The point of view of the concerned (20 interviews in each Country, many informal conversations).

Very strong limits of exisisting qualitative research based on single case studies

The extremely poorly built environment

In Romania, a 70-year-old woman living in Târgu Mureș resides with her husband in one little room without water nor gas in the house. They don't have a kitchen or a bathroom. They do their washing in a bowl, bringing water from an external public pump. In that little room, they depend on burning wood for cooking and heating. In Cotuș (Romania) as well, an individual we interviewed has no bath or kitchen in their house. M., 47 years old, lives with her husband and the three children in a Roma settlement in Őrkö, in a one-room apartment without water. Their electricity is provided by the neighbour. In Sângeorgiu de Mureș, we talked with a 60 years-old woman who was currently living with her younger sister and her sister's little son. They all live in one room together, without a kitchen or bathroom, using wood for cooking and for heating. Although they have electricity in their house, they lack running water or gas. When this woman was young, she used to live in a flat with 4 rooms and 2 bathrooms and a kitchen. However, her parents were forced to sell the flat because they couldn't pay the bills. After selling the house they bought this one-room home, where their children currently live.

Housing and health

- Near Târgu Mureș, in Sângeorgiu de Mureș, a 30-year-old woman we interviewed bought her one-room house with her husband with the subsidy she received after giving birth to her first child. In her childhood, she had everything in her parents' house: a room, a kitchen, a bathroom. In her current situation, she has three children and is obliged to live with them in a tiny little space. When she or her husband need to wash themselves, they ask their children to go play outside, in the street. They don't have water in their house, so they need to bring water from the public pump, boil the water and then wash from a bowl. The family cannot extend their single-room house, because there is no space nearby.

- Not having a bathroom or running water has massive consequences on health and wellbeing, which provided an extremely vulnerable basis at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Sângeorgiu de Mureș the interviewed family's poor living conditions did affect the health of their children. Before building an indoor bathroom, they had an outdoor toilet which was shared with the neighbours. Due to the poor hygienic conditions of this shared toilet, their daughter got several infections. In many shantytowns in France and Italy, there are no chemical toilets, or any minimal utility provided by the state or local authorities. The situation is the same in squatted warehouses in France, Italy and Spain. In some Romanian and Hungarian small towns, and in villages, many houses have no sewage, or a good deal of households share the same bathroom. A common use of the bathroom among a multitude of families raises continuous fights and micro-conflicts.

Most of the policy are on housing, not a lot more

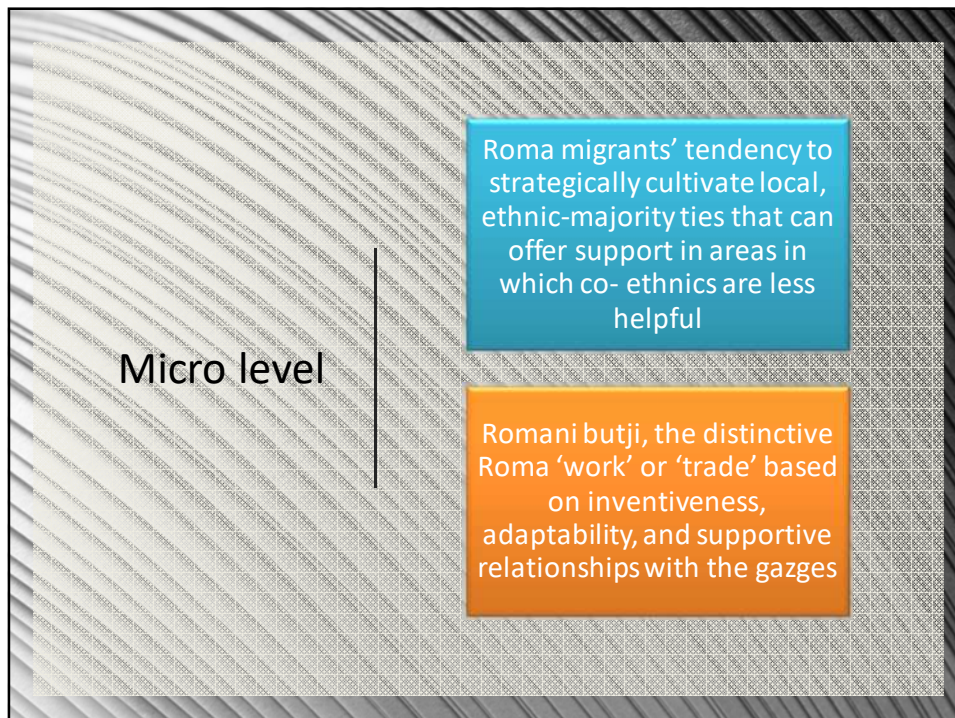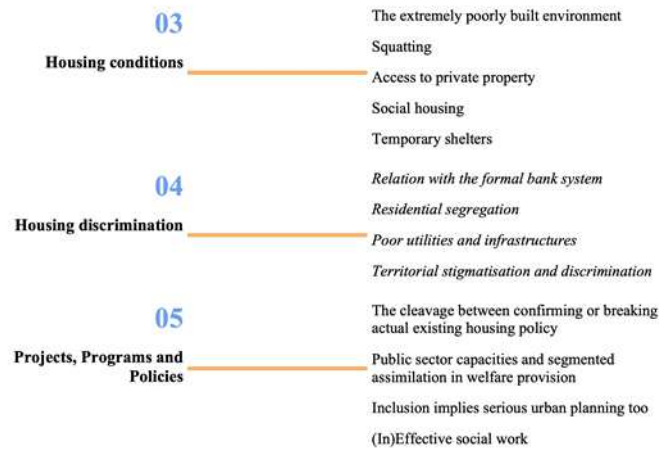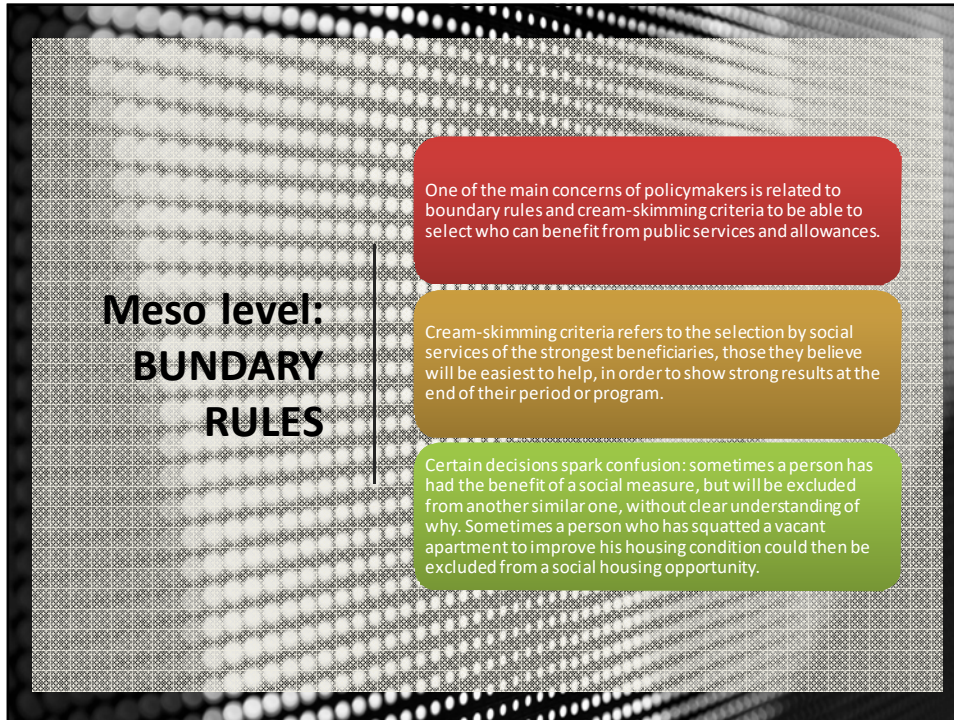|		
Housing is at the core of problems of integration	Housing is sensitive to income, but it is also dependent from exclusionary categorizaton	Housing is financialised, at least for bank loans.
The problem of accessing credits for a stigmatised ethnic group is massive, and it pushes towards alternative informal credit markets.	Limited capacity of informal credit markets for managing large loans for Barcelona, Milan and Paris.	Real estate investments in rural areas or in « gypsy ghetto »

Main structure of the report

03 **Housing conditions**	The extremely poorly built environment Squatting Access to private property Social housing Temporary shelters
04 **Housing discrimination**	*Relation with the formal bank system* *Residential segregation* *Poor utilities and infrastructures* *Territorial stigmatisation and discrimination*
05 **Projects, Programs and Policies**	The cleavage between confirming or breaking actual existing housing policy Public sector capacities and segmented assimilation in welfare provision Inclusion implies serious urban planning too (In)Effective social work

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Micro level

> Roma migrants' tendency to strategically cultivate local, ethnic-majority ties that can offer support in areas in which co- ethnics are less helpful

> Romani butji, the distinctive Roma 'work' or 'trade' based on inventiveness, adaptability, and supportive relationships with the gazges

Meso level: BUNDARY RULES

One of the main concerns of policymakers is related to boundary rules and cream-skimming criteria to be able to select who can benefit from public services and allowances.

Cream-skimming criteria refers to the selection by social services of the strongest beneficiaries, those they believe will be easiest to help, in order to show strong results at the end of their period or program.

Certain decisions spark confusion: sometimes a person has had the benefit of a social measure, but will be excluded from another similar one, without clear understanding of why. Sometimes a person who has squatted a vacant apartment to improve his housing condition could then be excluded from a social housing opportunity.

WIDELY USED CRITERIA

Families with children

Having been in the municipality for many years

Supported by a local committee/association/NGO/activists' group

Nice and open to collaborative interactions

With parents working and without a record of violence or deviant behaviour

WHICH ROMA ARE INCLUDED IN SOCIAL HOUSING PROGRAMS?

- Not everyone is included
- Selection is not based on clear, written, objective criteria
- Understanding which behaviour is appreciated and granted is a «job»
- Deservigness is based on relational « variables »
- Selection criteria are so difficult to understand that social workers and policy making value their work mainly based on their capacity to « understand » the selection criteria, rather than showing positive consequences for their actions.

(available) INSTRUMENTS DRIVEN POLICY OFFER

- In all five contexts: None of the NGOs, municipality, agencies we interviewed has ever developed specific partnerships with the banking system, neither for anti-discrimination purposes, nor for the purpose of knowing the state of banking products offered to the poor, nor to imagine possible projects or win-win collaborations between public and private actors.
- Both Paris and Milan: Local authorities offered housing solutions only for the mother and the young children, de facto dividing the family unit, and attempting at the indivisibility of the couple's unity in its parental responsibilities.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING TO SELECT THE HIGHLY ACHIEVERS

- Transitional housing is considered by the stakeholders we interviewed as very expensive and defined as the integrated partnerships of social housing and social services.
- In this scheme, the household gradually moves in a sort of career of deservingness by meeting predetermined criteria but descending to a lower level after seriously breaking the rules is also possible.
- In the case of some schemes in the Paris suburbs, there is no second-chance, and breaking a rule or, worse, not accepting a housing offer is irreversible and has the immediate consequence of expulsion from the programme.
- Further consequences might also result in individuals or families being put on a blacklist of sorts, closing off access to similar schemes, and the virtual impossibility of receiving housing assistance thereafter.
- The intention is to motivate residents, to give them time to improve their income situation, the final outcome being their own, independent living. The inseparable part of the whole scheme is social work and counselling, offered on site or close by in order to solve any personal problems (paperwork, financial issues, etc.) and build the capacity to stable housing.

So what?

We observed massive selectivitiy: those who are able to combine ressources and ties and multiple strategies within the household may receive welfare support.

The other are excluded. The weakest are abandoned.

The successful are not passively locked into the tightly-knit communities and ascribed belonging of kinship and ethnicity.

Even in the face of powerful structures of disadvantage, they may preserve agency, **reflexive processes of elective belonging**, and **strategic networking abilities** to a much greater extent than previously thought.

An example, among the others: Paris inclusionary policies

Selection criteria based on deservingness	Deservingness based on territorialisation, children stable schooling, income and kindness/politenss	Cream skimming
Heavy burden of rules uncertainty	Strong non-written ethnic profiling by social workers and administration	Parallel black markets

Welfare Mix policy

Roma representatives, NGOs and local authority pointing at a Roma uniqueness, and cultural recognition	An impressive unknowledge of Roma middle class entrepreneurship in the city. A low recognition of Roma integration in local and transregional organised crime	Ethnically-Specialised shelters of Roma family and transitory housing.
A highly contested social work practice	A very effective, but selective, housing intermediation based on social capital created by primary schools and churches (Pentecostal, Catholic)	

	Before the Pandemic	During the pandemic
Macro	A slow but important opening of labour market opportunities for subordinated integration	A large variety of informal economic activities, in the construction sector, and in trade. Segmented integration
Macro-Meso	New information mechanisms, new platform of policy knowledge sharing, consolidated ressources for shantytowns' clearance	NGOs based policy knowledge on inclusionary policies to overcome
Meso	Etremely variable by agency, by locality, fragmented and not monitored	New waves of social housing squatting as a failure in controlling and enforcing public goods boundary rules. Chronic problems in evaluating incentives and services
Meso-Micro	Interrupted linkages. But emerging social innovation like 'Agence immobilière à vocation sociale'	Well developed for primary schools but not for active labour market agencies nor for social services
Micro	Violent and discriminatory encounters, slowly decreasing stigma, emerging openings	Few encounters, increasing segregation, stable stigma, emerging bazar economy based on reputation

Different contexts, common mechanisms

- Ethnic categorization is very strong, even in countries like France where it cannot be openly stated.
- **Durable selectivity arises because people who control access to value-producing resources solve pressing organizational problems by means of categorical distinctions.**
- Frequently treated as second-class citizens, for local authorities **discretion is a key:** it is possible to provide *or not* an answer to Roma problems of housing deprivation, it is possible or not to mobilise and defend Roma against discrimination.
- In this situation, we can note multiple negative consequences: on the one hand, **corruption**, and on the other hand, **strong competition** and ruptures in solidarity among residents.

Government's lack of clear guidance regarding compliance with antidiscrimination laws and regulations allowed organizations to establish and legitimate their own compliance measures

All actors perceive this haphazard discretion in deciding who will benefit and will not as a problem. But it is not openly discussed: there are no deliberative meetings among relevant actors to discuss it.

Charles Tilly (1998, p. 15) defends that "the reduction or intensification of racist, sexist, or xenophobic attitudes will have relatively little impact on durable inequality, whereas the introduction of new organizational forms . . . will have great impact".

Confronted with the scarcity of resources and the desire to assess the family's integrability and solvency on a case-by-case basis, the actors recognise the problems, but do not take steps towards a possible collective resolution grounded in reflexivity.

At every level, we need to look at mechanisms of discrimination.

LESSONS LEARNED: A CHECKLIST OF DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

Consider the bottom of the bottom, the last among the lasts.

Meaningful and continuous social work.

Prevent financial distress, do not only punish it.

Beyond communication and cooperation, information and transparency.

It takes time.

Variety of policy instruments is key.

It is politics, nothing more and nothing less than politics.

Answering the research question

- Long term problems, weak policies in both cities
- Weak coalitions, weak political support, negative policy feedbacks in both cities
- In all cases, a progressive reduction of a fragmented, project based approach
- In all cases, an increasing investment of the state in funding inclusionary, targeted programs for the poor in the housing sector
- Integration is lacking of in-between levels connections.
- Policy improvement is reduced as to improve intercultural skills among social workers. Discrimination is seen as a minor issue, and not an object of policy intervention
- Cities are lacking of « deliberative arenas » to propose drift and changes, and discuss problems in rules and discriminatory programs

Answering the normative question

Facing many failures, laissez-faire emerge as a delusional requests, criticising institutional discrimination

CBOs on the ground in all cities are limited in numbers and unity but claiming for more collective goods and tailored services.

The idea that public policy are only eviction based, and producing ghettoisation and racism reproduction is based on evidence, but may produce paradoxes **Variety of policy instruments is key.**

Roma are not homogenous, as well as hostility is not constant and unvariable

The fact of not governing (many issues related to) Roma groups is not providing an open structure of opportunities, but just increasing a subordinated integration based on racist stereotypes, and the abscence of contrasting mechanisms

Crimes against Roma are not used as a political ressources to improve the quality of policy making. What is not governed has a negative effect of policy coalition support to what is governed.

The emerging pattern of non-interventionism is not so convincing and it is not proved to offer any plainitude of opportunities and rights.

thanks a lot to all the interviewed

for more information, please do not hesitate to write me:
tommaso.vitale@sciencespo.fr

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