

COUNTERING ILLEGIBILITY: A BRIEF HISTORY OF FORCED EVICTIONS IN POSTSOCIALIST ROMANIA

GEORGE IULIAN ZAMFIR¹

*Article history: Received 1 June 2022; Revised 15 June 2022; Accepted 18 June 2022;
Available online 10 August 2022; Available print 30 September 2022.*

©2022 Studia UBB Sociologia. Published by Babeş-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

ABSTRACT. Forced evictions have been recognised as a relevant process in Romanian post-socialist urban transformations. Housing privatization, including restitutions, represents the key driver. Some attempts in grasping the scale of the process have already been made. This article brings extensive quantitative data stemming from national and local levels, which can support improved estimations of the scale: reports of the National Union of Bailiffs and answers to public information requests from multiple municipalities; archival data, local press monitoring and accounts of the process in the city of Cluj-Napoca. At least 100 thousand forced evictions are estimated to have taken place at national level between 1990-2017, comprising several hundred thousand individuals, the Roma population being disproportionately affected. Qualitative data produced through activist research complements the picture. The findings contribute to the debate regarding postsocialist urban transformations, indicating that the role of the state in the production of the housing market through forced evictions-based gentrification has been insufficiently acknowledged. The results are relevant to policy debates, as well as to housing activist practices².

Keywords: forced evictions, postsocialist urban transformations, housing policy, Eastern Europe.

Introduction

In 2022, the municipality of Cluj-Napoca, had its appeal rejected by the court in a case where it sought to recover rent arrears from a family living in public housing. The case is remarkable from two perspectives. One would be

¹ Babeş-Bolyai University, george7zamfir@gamil.com

² Special thanks to colleagues at the Cluj-based Căşi Sociale ACUM! and at the Blocul pentru Locuire network.

the loss in itself, as juridical pathways to evictions are nearly impossible to block. The second concerns the institutional determination to punish debtors, even in a case where minors with disabilities enjoy the legal rights of exemption from rent payments. What the mayor's office legal team argued was that the contract holder did not duly announce the presence of a disabled minor in the household for the period when it did not pay the rent; although the municipal social assistance service actually performed the required social investigation prior to the granting of the certificate of disability by a different institution. The court upheld the initial decision that, regardless of the rental contract provisions, the legal right of the disabled person surpasses those terms. More than exemplifying an abhorrent practice, the case displays the naturalization of a bureaucratic repudiation of public housing, and with it, of its tenants. Through administrative decentralization, municipalities gained increased punitive powers, which are thoroughly employed in social cleansing.

Contrary to mainstream portrayals of the practice, evictions are multidimensional processes. An eviction does not start and stop when the police come and go. The process cuts through the social fabric, individual biographies, politics, infrastructure, and institutional construction and practice. Evictions bear traces of wider processes, or, conversely, they are some of the wider processes at play. However, with a few notable exceptions, until recently they have not raised extensive academic interest. Generally noted down in literature as a phenomenon taking place in the background of the alleged transition from communism to democracy, its scale has not been acknowledged. From a housing policy perspective, descriptions of Romania usually rely on its characterization as a "super homeownership" society. While on particular comparative grounds, it is accurate, the label brings a number of issues to the table, as it conflates more than it reveals about the housing situation. More precisely, it supports the naturalization of homeownership as the favored policy standpoint, one which disparages the rights of tenants in privately and publicly owned housing.

As the figures presented here will show, the postsocialist transformation of the property structure, and along with it, of the housing system, was based on the elimination of housing security for hundreds of thousands of people. Their displacement from restituted buildings that were initially allocated as housing units was legitimized as the alleged required post-communist social healing. In the early 2000s, there were approximately 110,000 leasing contracts in nationalized houses, of which 35,000 in Bucharest (Chelcea 2003:718). While other types of housing have been the target of the practice, one commonality is that the Roma population has been disproportionately hit by the eviction tsunamis. Historically without access to property, most Roma had no claims on their side during the restitution, which was thus conceived as an intrinsic racial project. Although there are no clear numbers on the matter, it is indisputable:

countless accounts point to its racial character. Most pre-2008 crisis reports on housing conditions and evictions in Romania have been compiled by NGOs dealing with the infringement of Roma rights as human rights. A report by Zoon and Templeton (2001) on behalf of Open Society Foundations mentions numerous housing rights infringements, including a case of group eviction in Cluj-Napoca. Romani Criss (2004) had co-edited a manual on “Protection of the right to housing for Roma from Romania” which underscored the perilous housing situation and the institutionalized forms of discrimination, later on contributing with various legal actions and reports on the matter.

Austerity measures, the key effects of the 2008 financial crisis, have deeply reverberated in housing policies and eviction practices. Moreover, the milestone is relevant to the Romanian context, because it slightly overlaps with the state’s accession to the European Union, signaled as the end of the transition period. Thus, from a housing policy debate and practice focused on decommunization and market production, it leaped straight to one concerned with the protection and support of private market actors, particularly financial institutions and real estate developers. The post-2008 global intensification of forced evictions triggered ample responses from multiple actors, such as NGOs, activists, and academics, who all brought deeper insights into the process, including its unfolding in the Romanian context.

Looking back at some pre-2008 crisis accounts on the housing transformations, we notice that some focused on restitution as a required social healing process. To illustrate, even though Stan’s (2006) article acknowledges the precarious situation of tenants in nationalized buildings, it deplores the lack of justice to previous owners because „justice delayed is justice denied”. There are no mentions of ethnic differences when it comes to the effects of restitution on tenants. Moreover, the author concludes, restitution “is simple, [it] brings emotional satisfaction to those receiving the actual confiscated property” (id, p. 202). Others, such as the insightful radiography of the socio-political conditions of transition by Pasti mentions only “persons without property” (Pasti 2006:73) among a series of social groups driven towards social exceptionality by the newly proposed social system.

On the other hand, Chelcea (2003) underlined the tensions between tenants and restitution claimants, while Rughiniş (2004) pointed out evictions as the main housing insecurity problem in the case of Roma. Later on, Petrovici (2012) signals key trends in Cluj’s urban geography, particularly the nationalistic reappropriation of the city by the Romanian working class, a description where evictions are hinted at, yet not accounted for. Vincze (2013) outlines the wider process of intersectional injustice to which Roma are subjected, placing evictions at the core. Chelcea, Popescu, and Cristea (2015:120) estimate that the wave of evictions related to restituted housing rose in 2005, after the 10-year ban on

selling the obtained houses expired, at the same time as the housing market bubble was growing bigger. They connect postsocialist gentrification with the property regime change. Vincze and Zamfir (2019) describe the process of racialized housing unevenness through a case study on forced evictions and subsequent housing trajectories in the Cluj-Napoca. Through a deep story of the role of restitutions in racial housing politics, Popovici (2020) describes the social conflict whose results, primarily forced evictions, are still ongoing.

This article aims to clarify the scale of forced evictions in post-1989 Romania, as well as to signal that evictions have contributed significantly to urban social re-stratification following the regime change, even more so than previously acknowledged. This is relevant not only historically, but also with an eye to organization against housing dispossession and to the fights to come. In this direction, it presents data produced through various methods by the author and the housing activist collectives of which he is a member of: a research project conducted in 2018 by the activist network Blocul pentru Locuire / Block for Housing at a national scale, data stemming from activist research undertaken by Căși Sociale ACUM! / Social Housing NOW group in Cluj-Napoca in the 2015-2022 period, as well as other data produced during his PhD research. Some of the data covers various types of tenures, but the majority deals with public housing or formerly publicly owned real estate. Besides, here, the focus is on urban, not rural areas, where other types of displacements took place.

Forced evictions - studying and conceptualizing the process

Evictions, one of the under-discussed realities of new forms of capital accumulation, represent an increasingly clearly structured and streamlined practice. The study of evictions is constantly expanding, both by drawing global connections (Soederberg 2018), as well as focused on cases in Romania (see Lancione 2019; Vincze and Zamfir 2019; Zamfirescu and Chelcea 2020; Popovici 2020). Judicially based evictions have exploded in recent times (Bhan 2009; Soederberg 2018; Nelson 2019) particularly after the 2008 crisis, the preference for these practices reflecting the legal erosion of the right to housing. In fact, the crisis has led to the solidification of economic inequalities through widespread implementation of austerity measures, which have further reduced the strength of states to help correct them. These general post-Keynesian changes from welfare to neoliberal policies, particularly in Western states, have included rapid housing privatization and increasing commodification. Commodification led to financialization - the transformation of housing in financial assets increasingly traded on markets and through financial instruments (Aalbers and Christophers, 2014).

Recently, we witnessed a wave of publications on evictions dissecting the networks and assemblages (Zamfirescu and Chelcea (2020), going from micro to macro interpretations (Baker 2017), using affects as (anti)eviction tool (Wilde 2020), as well as organized opposition to evicting practices, ideologies and ensuing personhoods (Lancione 2019, Popovici 2020).

Structurally, evictions became one of the standard tools of regulating property relations. They are strongly determined by economic status, often resulting from inability to pay rent or utilities. Thus, it is not just a simple consequence of breach of contract, but a form of poverty punishment. On this point, in a systematic case study in Sweden, von Otter et al. (2017) found that a large part of the evictees suffer from severe social marginalization, more than two thirds among them receiving forms of social assistance. Seymour and Akers (2019) showed that cheaply purchased housing following the foreclosures in Detroit around the crisis came to be the spaces from which many evictions are carried out, the determinant being the interest to make a quick profit from the investors in the detriment of new occupants. So, moving forward from the legalistic definitions, evictions are instrumental and generative for both social classes and spatial uneven development, where real estate is constantly reevaluated. Promoting housing as a financialized asset, along with reducing funding public services are turning evictions into a “new urban frontier,” Patton and Cooper (2016) argue, indicating that the role of gentrification previously noted by Neil Smith has changed and the state is the origin of this new vision. In other words, we must see “the state as a stratifying and classifying agent” (Wacquant 2019: 39). The authors extend the analysis, proposing accumulation through repossession as the interpretation that places evictions in the recent political economy (Cooper and Paton 2019). The process describes how “profit is not only generated by land rent and marketing, but these sites of capital accumulation increase poverty and evictions” (id., p. 3). Together they develop an eviction industry, a dispossession market that is intrinsically profitable, not just a contributing element. Evictions are a state policy of class production through destitution, on the one hand on the one hand, and the production of social ladders, on the other, by supporting the privatization of housing, the accumulation of property and speculation on the market, as well as by withdrawing from the provision of social services.

Van Baar proposes the term “evictability” as a radical approach that goes beyond methodological nationalism, because the creation of borders can take place at different scales through dislocation practices. Securitization is the framework in which the alteration of the Roma transforms them into evictable populations (van Baar 2016). Securitization practices do not lead to a safer world, but only to more insecurity (van Baar et al. 2019: 2). The authors give

the example of how mobility of Eastern European Roma in Europe came to be described as a situation of “migrants”, thus as an altered social body. These practices, they conclude, end up being enshrined in the national legislation, which ends up working against the Roma. In a culturalist approach, they are often described as populations with a history of nomadism, which applies even to non-nomadic Roma (id).

For a contextual understanding of the role of eviction, the type must be directly linked to property and post-socialist housing policies. Privatization of property took place through both through direct purchase, in the case of tenants of state-owned apartments, as well as by restitution. Regarding public housing purchased by tenants following legislation initiated immediately after the change of the socialist regime, the pace was fast. The combination with the withdrawal of the state from housing production has led to a current percentage of public housing below two percent. The present high overcrowding rate, which places Romania at the top of the EU ranking, indicates the acute need for new housing. Given the state policy of unequal territorial development - the concentration of economic production and the allocation of resources predominantly in several large cities, and the de-development of the rest of the territory - the need for housing is, hypothetically, similarly concentrated.

But even so, racial housing marginalization remains a problem in many localities in Romania (Vincze 2013, Swinkels 2014). Following one of the highest restitution rates in nature, compared to the neighboring states, the Romanian state granted the claimants a significant amount of real estate. The restitution process is not over, as more than half of the claims are still pending (Popovici 2020:6). Estimates of financial compensation for all the claims amount to 16 billion Euros, of which 2.7 billion only for residential buildings (id.). Following market support policies as a demand and supply management tool, private housing development has become the main source of growth for housing. Attracting real estate investment has become one of the main coordinates of inter-urban competition, and the ranking of the average price per square meter of housing becomes a mirror of the value of urban brand, an economic good that sets the next potential investment waves. The housing crisis, i.e. what from a market perspective is a mismatch between supply and demand, is reclassified as a measure of success.

Many studies use the analytical lens of the legal system. But a narrow legalistic look at evictions risks missing those cases in which the owners resort to informal methods, such as changing door locks or verbal pressure to leave (Hartman and Robinson, 2003). Watt also points out that such possibilities increase the level of “displacement anxiety” (Watt, 2018). However, the functioning of the legal system is instrumental in understanding the social process.

For example, in an analysis of urban policies around the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, Bhan (2009: 141) concludes that urban policy is in motion and that it is outlined by the courts, becoming essential in governance and planning. The presence of law enforcement, the call for law enforcement and the implementation of the law through a sentence transforms the conflicts in the cases of eviction in simple routine acts, as if there were “a threshold above which the implementation of the eviction happens ‘after’ politics has taken place, where it is a mere technical feature of wider process” (Baker, 2020: 4).

At the structural level, evictions are rendered illegible. Low legibility of the magnitude of the phenomenon can be correlated with its political prioritization. In the absence of other recording systems, judicial ecosystems are the main sources of information. Almost 20 years ago, Hartman and Robinson (2003) pointed out that evictions in the USA are a hidden housing problem, systematic data being unavailable. In the meantime, the situation has changed, but not substantially. Researchers in the US who have addressed the issue (Porton et al. 2020) have found that many court records either contain ambiguous information about how a case was resolved or are false tenant eviction history. Moreover, the American states record the information in different manners: based on the study of eviction files from 12 states, the authors (id.) draw attention to discrepancies and lack of confidence in the data, no matter how accurate they may be.

Similar to our effort (Blocul pentru Locuire, 2019), von Otter et al. (2017) obtained a database of evictions from the Swedish bailiff's association. The Swedish data is more detailed, including all eviction initiatives, as well as their resolution, not just completed cases. Instead, Gerull (2014) comparatively analyzes evictions due to arrears in 14 European countries by resorting to local experts, concluding not only that the procedures are different, but that a common feature is the complexity of the procedures and their incomprehensibility to tenants. The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project conducted in California is an example of activist knowledge of evictions: through collecting quantitative data and interviews, the approach has contributed to the creation and solidification of links between evictees or people at risk of eviction (Maharawal and McElroy 2017).

A previous attempt at quantifying the number of evictions in Romania, as part of a study on homelessness, took place in the early 2000s. The Quality of Life Research Institute conducted a study on evictions from social housing in the years 2001-2004 (Dan 2018). That study produced data from 227 cities (Table 1), except Bucharest and other significant cities, and revealed an upward trend in evictions, both due to utility debt and foreclosures. Results indicated 2,791 evictions for the reported period. Other data from the same research (Dan and Dan, 2005:114) summed up 633 evictions registered just in the year 2003

from municipalities in roughly half of the counties. All in all, these are examples of attempts to systematize the data, on which this article builds upon. Dan (2018) asserts that the lack of aggregated data on the overall number of eviction stems from the lack of institutional interest and capacity. However, as the data presented in this article will show, it appears that the state actively dedocuments evictions, in the vein of Vrăbiescu’s (2017) concept of dedocumenting citizenship.

Table 1.

Evictions reported by municipalities, part of a study led by the Institute of Research Institute for Quality of Life in 2004

	2001	2002	2003	Jan.-March 2004
<u>due to non-payment of utilities bill</u>	149	357	470	54
<u>due to retrocession of nationalized housing</u>	340	546	602	273

Data source: Presented in Dan (2018:24)

Methodology

The data presented in this article stems from several sources. Shortly after starting my Phd studies in 2014, I joined the group later named Căși Sociale ACUM / Social Housing NOW. Among other activities, together with colleagues, we started supporting evicted people living in the Pata Rât area in Cluj-Napoca to apply for social housing, a recurring activity for the next seven years. Preparing applications requires deep understanding of biographies, which were translated into claims for the increase of the social housing stock, as well as fairer allocation criteria. Our efforts later expanded to include various housing policy analyses, at local and national level.

Together with housing activist groups from Bucharest and Timișoara, we formed Blocul pentru Locuire / Bloc for Housing in 2017, a network which served as the basis for launching extended projects. The first project we undertook together was a research on forced evictions at national level (Blocul pentru Locuire, 2019). Together with Ștefania Vintilă, I carried out the empirical phase and we drafted the report with other colleagues. Initially, we aimed for a comprehensive media analysis for the 2008-2017 period through ziare.com portal, coupled with a synthesis of previous reports on the matter. Subsequently we expanded our efforts by sending requests for public information to every urban administration. Finally, we managed to obtain quantitative data spanning the 2001-2018 period from the Romanian National Union of Bailiffs. While the union did not respond directly to our request, the Ministry of Justice did so, as

the ministry oversees the union's activities. The union was founded in 2001, when the profession was legally liberalized. Prior, bailiffs were a part of the court system. However, for three counties out of 40 we received data including the 1990-2001 period. In late 2020, I undertook another project. Using the official portal of court cases of the Ministry of Justice, portal.just.ro, I searched for eviction cases initiated by local authorities in Romania. As a follow-up, I contacted by phone the municipalities where a high number of cases were present.

Lastly, when I was finalizing my thesis in 2021, I analyzed early 1990's archival data of the Local Council of Cluj-Napoca municipality, including the Decisions of the Executive Committee, the institutional body inherited from the socialist administrative organization, as well as local council decisions regarding the management of public housing, along with relevant local council decisions of other Romanian municipalities. Moreover, I conducted interviews with legal professionals, including bailiffs. To provide an answer to the lack of data conveying the magnitude of the process, next the article presents data covering the national scale, and the city of Cluj-Napoca. First, some clarifications on the juridical types of evictions.

Juridical approaches to evictions and administrative evictions: municipalities bypassing the law

According to several consulted legal professionals, including bailiffs, the legitimate forced eviction procedure relies on contracting a bailiff to carry out the court order. That is, only the bailiff is granted the legal power to summon law enforcement representatives such as the police or gendarmerie to physically remove inhabitants. Prior to 1990, as one bailiff active at the time recalls, evictions practically meant relocations. According to a Communist Party directive, when an eviction court order arrived on the bailiff's table, he wrote to the municipality to inform them on the matter, in order to find a relocation solution, to which they obliged. However, the method is not entirely clarified, as the municipal housing agency also initiated the procedure titled "evacuare pe cale administrativă" (en. *administrative eviction*).

According to socialist legislation carried over after the regime change, administrative evictions represented one of the options. That law provided that

in a completely exceptional situation, namely when a housing surface is occupied without a lease contract, but only if that surface is part of the state housing fund under the management of specialized enterprises subordinated to the executive committees (offices) of the people's councils or of other state enterprises, the eviction can take place administratively (art. 23 of Law 5/1973) (Comănescu et. al., 1985:72)

The executive committee made the decision, the eviction being carried out by the companies that managed the housing fund. The Miliția could have been summoned in case of opposition. The procedure could not be applied to housing built and managed by enterprises and other state organizations from their own funds. So it could be applied only in the case of the state housing fund subordinated to the executive committees and only if the house was occupied without a rental contract. Instead of the administrative way, the committees could also resort to the court. In any case, the evicted person could challenge the decision in court (*idem*, p. 73). It should also be mentioned here that, with regard to company housing, in the event of the death of the contract holder, the eviction of the family was carried out only after the allocation of another suitable housing space (*idem*, p. 121).

Administrative evictions were realized in different ways after 1990. One reason is that, following administrative decentralization, the public housing fund is managed in different ways by municipalities. For example, in Cluj-Napoca, the municipality's Patrimonial Directorate and Property Records is the managing authority; in Ploiești - the Administration of Community Social Services; in Piatra Neamț - S.C. Locativserv S.R.L.; and in Călărași - the Legal Department and Local Administration.

Administrative eviction regulations are the result of local council decisions. Presumably, these applied until Government Decision 457/2017, which repealed the articles that stipulated that "the company that manages the housing fund" will evict people who no longer meet the legal requirements to occupy the space. It is unclear whether some municipalities still use this method. For example, the Municipality of Ploiești has such a regulation instituted through LCD 106/2013 and maintained in force through LCD 587/2018 regarding the social housing administration regulation. This regulation applies in cases where the maintenance expenses have not been paid for three consecutive months, the tenant's behavior makes it impossible to live with the neighbors, the net income increases by more than 20 percent for two consecutive years, other people who do not appear in the contract occupies the space, or the tenant acquires a home. According to the departmental specialized report, the motivation for the

need for such a regulation emerges from three reasonings: requests for social housing must be resolved, eviction processes are lengthy, and forced execution is expensive. The combination of the three signals that the stock of social housing is reduced compared to the demand, and the solution is to increase the speed of movement of the occupants, if they do not follow the rules. So, preventing these evictions would oppose the first reasoning, as long as the social housing fund is not increased.

Considering the fact that in the case of the Ploiești regulation as well as the Oradea³ one, the buildings must be vacated within a maximum of 30 days from the notification, which would be sent within a few days from the publication of the LCD; probably in both situations there was already a considerable number of tenants in this situation. The difference between the two regulations is that, in Oradea, the Housing Department issues eviction notifications, resorting to the bailiff only to communicate the contents of the local council decision, and during evictions representatives of the town hall and the municipal police participate. In Ploiești, the mayor issues an order to be implemented by an eviction committee, and the participation of law enforcement is not specified. In the case of S.C. Locativserv S.R.L. from Piatra Neamț, the entity that administers the local council's housing, the articles of Government Decision 1275/2001 are invoked. The mayor's order is not invoked in this case, the procedure being at the discretion of the Housing Fund Department.

In some identified regulations, for example those of Cluj-Napoca⁴ and Dărmănești⁵, the phrase “abusive persons” appears, being defined as “natural or legal persons who occupy the home without a title”. Continuing the definition, non-compliance with Law 114/1996 is claimed, but not in the same way. In Cluj they refer to articles 21 and 27, meanwhile repealed, and in Dărmănești it is less specific. Definitions, by which the action is not cataloged, but the people themselves, should also be noted. Thus, the message is that behavior does not represent the object of analysis and diagnosis, but the person in its entirety. In Cluj, the regulation voted on March 30, 2010, at the beginning of the year in which the eviction of the 74 families from Coastei Street was carried out, is still present on the city hall's website. From the response of the Caransebeș town hall in the research carried out by Blocul pentru Locuire, we note that a choice can be made regarding the method of eviction: legal action is

³ Oradea Local Council Decision 697/2008

⁴ Cluj-Napoca Local Council regulation on administrative evictions:
<https://primariaclujnapoca.ro/informatii-publice/regulament-local/regulament-privind-reglementarea-cadrului-general-de-evacuare-persoanelor-fizice-sau-juridice-care-ocupa-mod-abuziv-locuintele-aflate-patrimoniul-municipiului-cluj-napoca/> (accessed in June 2022)

⁵ Dărmănești Local Council Decision 62/2016

taken in case of breach of contractual provisions; the administrative route is used if there is no contractual relationship with the tenants.

Another type of eviction which initially starts as a legal procedure represents a conflation of two situations: municipalities initiate demolitions without acknowledging the presence of inhabitants. Any opposition to the practice requires legal battles. The activist readings of the practice conclude that municipalities often initiate evictions through various types of pressure, a form of abuse meant to avoid protracted legal actions, which are seen as a cost to be avoided. Thus, in terms of approaches when dealing with evictable tenants, there is more commonality than difference between new private owners who acquired property through restitution, and public institutions managing housing.

National Bailiff Association and municipalities' answers to public inquiries: a first step in estimating the scale

Bailiffs are organized in the 15 Chambers of Bailiffs territorially circumscribed to the 15 Courts of Appeal and are legally required to fill in an activity register; the data is available even at county level. According to the partial information provided by the Ministry of Justice, between 2001-2017 (for Argeş, Vaslui and Iaşi counties, since 1990), 24,373 forced evictions were reported. This number refers to all types of housing, both public, as well as private. The motivations are not present, so how many occurred, for example, following divorces, is unknown. In the case of the Bucharest CoB, which also covers the Ilfov, Ialomiţa, Călăraşi, Giurgiu and Teleorman counties, only about a quarter of the bailiffs reported data, i.e. 53 out of 195. By extrapolation, we can estimate that the actual number of evictions in this area was not 4492, but approximately 16,500, the total per country thus reaching over 36,000. Considering the increased number of restitution claims in Bucharest, the estimates are rather a statistical exercise. Even so, if we extrapolate the national average of more than 2100 evictions over the 2001-2017 period for the whole 1990-2017 period, the number would exceed 57,000. To conclude the extrapolation, a conservative estimate of the number of evictions may actually exceed 100,000, including other legal or informal methods. The data covering the situation in Cluj adds support to the numbers. Moreover, administrative evictions are not counted in, because, as described earlier, bailiffs are not an integral part of the method. It is worth mentioning here that, as media monitoring and other data showed, numerous families experienced successive evictions. Regarding reservations in

extrapolation, for example, in Spain approximately 350 thousand families were evicted after the 2008 crisis, according to an analysis published just six years later (Álvarez de Andres et al., 2014).

Table 2.**Estimated number of evictions in Romania 1990-2017**

Source	Period	Number of evictions
Ministry of Justice, Bailiffs' Association data	2001-2017	24.373*
Estimated to fill in missing BA data	2001-2017	36.000**
Estimated of total number of bailiff led evictions	1990-2017	57.000***
Estimated total number of evictions	1990-2017	100.000****

Data source: author's calculations

* In the period 1990-2000, data only for: Argeş County = 259, Iaşi County = 31, Vaslui = 9

** Extrapolation of data from the Chamber of Bailiffs attached to the Bucharest Court of Appeal, the data being transmitted only from 53 out of 195 bailiffs.

*** The average of approximately 2100 evictions carried out annually between 2001-2017 extrapolated to the period 1990-2017

**** The number includes a conservative estimate by including other modes of eviction, such as administrative or informal

Regarding the territorial distribution of evictions reported by the Ministry of Justice, the North-Western counties show the highest numbers, Cluj, Bihor and Maramureş each exceeding 1000 cases. Constanţa, the county topping the ranking with 1666 cases is followed by Brăila with 1033, Braşov with 918, and the area of Bucharest and neighboring counties with the partially reported 4492. This distribution is difficult to interpret in the absence of correlative data, but some leads could be followed, such as the ratio between the number of nationalized and restituted buildings or the inclination of owners, be they public or private, to employ bailiffs in lieu of other instruments. In addition, it must be specified that this data does not give us effective access to the numerical difference between evictions initiated by public and private owners. Considering the reduced formal rights of tenants in Romania, as well as the generalized practice of non-contract lease or non-registration of contracts, informal forced evictions from privately owned housing may even be the main form of operation.

We also learned from the information provided by the MoJ that the number of evictions through bailiffs slightly and gradually decreased until 2009, reaching approximately 800 per year, subsequently ascending to about 1300 in 2017. From the same source we also learn that the vast majority of actions were carried out in the presence of law enforcement, thus supporting the hypothesis that inhabitants occupied the house until the last moment, due to the lack of alternatives.

Media monitoring brought several types of information. On the one hand, we identified cases that did not emerge from the reports of the public authorities. On the other hand, it sometimes added information regarding the housing situation, the risks of eviction, as well as how the procedure was carried out and the subsequent fate of the inhabitants. Monitoring also shows that there are frequent fires and degradations of social housing blocks. Evictions from vacant land or abandoned buildings are also mentioned by the press. From the accounts it appears that social assistance departments are often not present, the actions being led by the municipal police and the local police. In such cases, alternative housing solutions are rooted in the absence of any contractual relationships. Many families who were evicted from such locations had already experienced an eviction. The municipality of Piatra Neamț reports a high number of evictions (201) and the press information completes the data: in 2012, 500 people were evicted from Muncii street and were displaced in the Văleni 2 area, 7 km from the center, across the deindustrialized area and a river. If the spaces from which the people were evicted were not under the administration of S.C. Locativserv S.R.L, the company delegated by the local council with this task, then they did not enter the count.

The role of the media in othering and racializing people at risk of eviction cannot be sufficiently emphasized. In many accounts, the act is transformed into a grotesque spectacle of the punishment of the “horde” or “șatra”, derogatory terms meant to support alterization through allusions to a Roma nomadic lifestyle. Their contribution to the production of an atmosphere of evictability is certain. Media selection of cases in this sense is obvious, the situations in which the procedure is carried out without conflict and/or without targeting “problem” populations being rather an unattractive banality for reporting in the press. We can presume that the intense racialization of tenants occupying nationalized housing, including through the media, served as catalyst for informally led evictions, because many tenants felt that their legal and social rights to housing would not be defended when pressure for restitution was overwhelming.

For the 2008-2017 period, almost 1700 evictions attended by representatives of municipalities were reported to us by the top 20 of the 184 cities and municipalities that responded to the requests of information from the

existing 320. At the top is Galați with 590 evictions, followed by Piatra Neamț with 201, Bacău with 156, Brăila with 151 and Alba Iulia with 71. Bucharest City Hall did not transmit the data, but we received responses from 36 out of 41 county residences.

In some localities, the number of cases reported by the press was higher than the one transmitted by local administrations. For example, around 100 families were evicted between 2011-2015, from the neighborhood of workers' barracks built by Antrepriza de Construcții Hidrotehnice in Târgu Jiu in 1985, yet the local administration did not mention them. And in Satu Mare, the social assistance service mentioned the case of only one person in 2016, while the press described two group evictions from informal housing in 2010-2011 from the Ostrov area, in the presence of representatives of the municipality.

Table 3.

Evictions reported by Romanian municipalities between 2008-2017

Rank	City	Number of reported evictions between 2008-2017
1	Galați	590
2	Piatra-Neamț	201
3	Bacău	156
4	Brăila	151
5	Alba Iulia	71
6	Orăștie	64
7	Deva	59
8	Focsani	55
9	Bistrița	50
10	Râmnicu Vâlcea	45
11	Călărași	41
12	Ploiesti	38
13	Toplița	33

Rank	City	Number of reported evictions between 2008-2017
14	Târgu Mureş	27
15	Moineşti	20
16	Oradea	19
17	Drobeta T-S	17
18	Piteşti	17
19	Alexandria	14
20	Giurgiu	14
Total		1682

Data source: Public administrations ' answers to public information requests

Lastly, some other data covering the national scale focusing on the recent period indicates that evictions are the modus operandi when managing debtors. Evictions were suspended during the state of emergency, between March 15 and May 15, 2020. In November 2020, I discovered through the official just.ro portal that between March and November, the initiation of evictions was interrupted neither by public, nor private owners. Focusing on the public ones, I identified more than 50 court actions of the Public Utility Service for the Administration of Housing Funds and Cemeteries in Brăila, a city that was already in the top of the reported evictions. The service explained over the phone that this is a strategy aimed at pressing debtors to pay. In Piatra Neamţ, S.C. Locativserv S.R.L. had over 70 lawsuits filed, confirmed by phone. In Eforie there were more than 30 cases, without confirmation, and in Bucharest approximately 50 cases, but in the last case it was unclear how many of these were from homes and how many from spaces with another destination. The Common Front for the Right to Housing signalled in the fall of 2020 the preparation by the Bucharest administration of several eviction actions. In Orşova, the Social Assistance Directorate itself was the initiator of the procedure for several homes. The court action was also present in Călăraşi, where 25 homes were targeted, and it was mentioned on the phone that it was an atypical situation, because the effect of an allocation decision by the local council had been annulled by the court.

Evictions in Cluj-Napoca

To reveal the scale of the evictions in the city, we have put together several sources of information. A concrete number is impossible to find out, due to the lack of organized recording. In addition, some sources are based on eviction decisions, so it is unclear how many of them were carried out, while others are based on the recording of those carried out. In addition to these, there are numerous testimonies of evictions reported by displaced persons. Here the section focuses on the experiences of the Roma who came to live in the Pata Rât area after successive displacements.

When asked for public information, the direction of social assistance Cluj-Napoca did not communicate the number of evictions in which representatives of the department participated, focusing on the presentation of solutions offered to the evictees. Thus, the quantitative data comes from two sources. According to Bailiffs Union reports to the Ministry of Justice, 1051 forced evictions were carried out in Cluj County between 2001 and 2018. The number of evictions carried out by bailiffs puts Cluj county in the 5th place out of the 37 responses by county in the country. Of these, 802 were carried out with the support of law enforcement, so just over three quarters of the total. In the archive of the Cluj-Napoca Local Council, we have identified approximately 800 eviction decisions in the period 1990-1993, presented in detail below.

Data obtained from discussions with interviewees come from several sources. Most of them emerged from discussions with residents of the Pata Rât area, during the preparation of social housing applications. The residential history was relevant because certain situations could bring additional points if supporting documents could be produced, but they were also part of the memoranda attached to the applications, in order to request points for force majeure. Towards the end of the research period, I had in depth discussions with fellow activists with histories of eviction, in order to clarify both personal routes and possible housing trends before and after 1989. Other complementary data come from the book *Pata* (Dohotaru et al 2015) and the *Dislocations*⁶ project of the Desire Foundation. The corroboration of all the data will lead to the outline of a periodization of evictions.

Roma displacement and evictions before 1990 in Cluj-Napoca

The testimonies start their narratives in the 1950s. For example, Ernest Creta, evicted from Costei Street in 2010, describes his series of displacements:

⁶ <https://antievictionmap.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=94df7dbac98649ff97e3e5729dd2be3e> (accessed in June 2022)

I was born on the seventh of February 1951. I was born here in Cluj, on Bufniței Street, in Iris. From there, they moved us from Iris in 1963, on the third of May. 360 families were there. We were a very large Roma neighborhood and when they moved us from there, they moved us to several locations. We went through Valea Seacă, then on Dâmbul Rotund, on Busuiocului, on Popești street, they also moved us to Timișului street, in Someșeni, they moved us between Bârc, also in Someșeni, and then they moved us to Borhanci. And from there to Între Lacuri, and next to the CUG enterprise. Now it's gone, the houses from the old days where they moved us are nowhere (Dohotaru et al, 2016:168)

Later, Creta received allocation in Mănăștur district, but sold the apartment to pay for the child's medical treatment (id. 169). The case is not singular, and several other people who ended up living on Coastei street lived before 1989 in the Mănăștur neighborhood in their parents' apartments, who were tenants in public housing. In another case, a person's father lost his apartment to a loan shark scam. And other people lost their apartments as a result of the early 1990s Caritas Ponzi scheme.

Linda, the colleague from Căși Sociale ACUM, who shares some of the experiences of Creta, tells the story of her family's journey through the city, starting in 1979, just three years before she was born.

Table 4.

Housing trajectory of Linda in Cluj

Year	Area	Reason / type of movement
1979	Dâmbu Rotund	
1983	Paul Chinezu	Abusive entrance in unoccupied housing
1984	Byron	Abusive entrance in unoccupied housing
1985	Aurel Vlaicu	Allocation of state fund housing
1992	Coastei	Sale of Vlaicu apartment - impossibility of utility payment
2010	Modulare - Pata Rât	Eviction
2017	Apartment in the city through the Pata Cluj project	Allocation of housing for Pata Rât inhabitants through a Norwegian state backed project

Data source: personal account of Linda Greta Sziga

Occupying empty houses was a common practice, according to Linda and other evicted people. After identifying a house suitable for occupations and settling in, within a few months, the new tenants were given a calculation sheet by the municipal housing company, implying a degree of formalization. Later, if they were employed, the calculation sheet was renewed every six months or even a contract was signed. On this point, there are two accounts on the matter, as the interviewed bailiff insisted that the calculation sheet was the first step towards eviction. Nevertheless, according to multiple accounts, the practice selectively continued in the first part of the 1990s. It is certain that this method remained alive in the memory of those who came to live in Pata Rât after being evicted. Most of the employees in Pata Rât work in the field of public cleaning, thus getting to know the city in detail, including the buildings that are unoccupied. They often expressed interest in obtaining a direct allocation of an abandoned home. During interviews, both the aforementioned bailiff, and the last director of Grupul Întreprinderilor de Gospodărie Comunală și Locativă Cluj (en. the Group of Enterprises for Communal and Housing Management Cluj) indicated that most families who reached the final phase of eviction-cum-relocation were Roma families with numerous children, who encountered difficulties in paying housing expenses.

Normalization of forced evictions in the early 1990s

The quantitative description of evictions since the early 1990s comes from two sources. After consulting the archive of the Cluj-Napoca Local Council, I obtained access to almost 9000 of the Decisions of the Executive Committee between January 1990 and August 1993. Most of them have as their object the allocation of land for the inhabitants, probably those who only owned the houses, not the land under the building. The second source is the activity report of the RAAIFL - Regia Autonomă de Administrare și Întreținere a Fondului Locativ (en. Autonomous Agency for the Administration and Maintenance of Housing Fund) to the Local Council attached to Local Council Decision from June 27, 1992. After presenting the current housing stock and activities, the report indicates the existence of a housing need, which is unsatisfied :

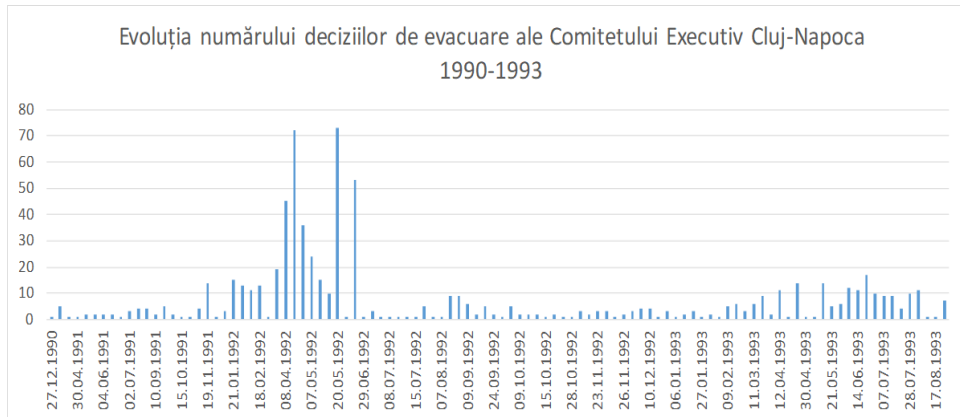
In this field of activity, the lack of living spaces, and their high value on the market, pushes the population to all kinds of maneuvers by which they can occupy a state-funded home.

The described effects are: occupation of homes without legal forms, sometimes with the concurrence of block administrators; non-compliance with the legal provisions regarding the housing norm, followed by the rejection of the documents by the agency; unapproved apartment exchanges to obtain material benefits; abandoning the apartment by moving abroad or to other localities for more than six months without informing the agency. The situations resulted in court action, but some lawsuits were lost by the agency because the block administrators modified their statements; and in other cases the experts who carried out severance of joint tenancy favored individuals. Moreover, between 1990-1991, there were situations where an apartment was allocated to two or more families, which resulted in complaints and contract cancellations. All this led the agency to initiate a general inspection of the situations of each apartment, through field visits, starting on March 20, 1992. In just two months, they had checked almost 20 thousand apartments.

Following the inspection, the agency discovered 430 cases of “abusives” for which administrative eviction was initiated. The discovery of the cases was achieved not only by checking the contracts, but also following the citizens’ hearings at the mayor’s office, local council and directorate, as well as notifications from citizens and tenants’ associations. The report indicates 436 administrative eviction decisions, of which 156 had already been carried out. To cope with the workload, the number of bailiffs was doubled from two to four, but the pace was slow, with evictions averaging four a day. The relation between administrative evictions and bailiffs is not detailed. Other reported problems are:

the lack of storage spaces for the goods of the evictees, the assault of our staff by the evictees, the recovery of the expenses caused by the eviction (approx. 10,000 lei/eviction), which we can only do through the courts

The decisions of the Executive Committee of Cluj-Napoca appear to contain each of these situations. For the period 1990-1993 there are a number of 799 decisions, not including here the situations where reference was made to evacuation of property following a tenant’s death. As of July 14, 1992, evictions are referred to as “administrative evictions,”. They are cataloged as belonging to Biroul Spațiu Locativ (en. the Housing Space Bureau)

Table 5.**Evolution of the number of eviction decisions by the Executive Committee of Cluj-Napoca 1990-1993**

Data source: consultation of public records of Cluj-Napoca City Administration

The first mentioned case was decided at the very end of 1990, on December 27. In 1991, 57 evictions were decided. In some days, between 1-5 evictions occurred, until November 19, when 14 were listed. The intensification of the procedure appears in that month, then continues in the first half of 1992, with a maximum of 74 on April 14. The increase coincides with the installation of the first Local Council and the mayor Gheorghe Funar. More than 400 decisions were taken in those first six months, after which 95 decisions appeared over the course of the second half of the year. Between July 1992 and the beginning of April 1993, a total of over 130 decisions on the topic appeared, so that in the next five months, until August 1993, the procedure will intensify again, with over 150 decisions. The chronology of these decisions confirms the situation in the RAAIFL report: after the initiation of the general inspection by the agency on March 20, 1992, a steep increase followed, accumulating 329 decisions between April 8 and June 22.

The decisions indicate in almost all cases the name of the holders as well as the addresses. Thus, they reveal how some areas in the city have become the focus of the administration's attention. The center, Mănăștur, Gheorgheni, Între Lacuri, and Iris districts contain the most buildings for which decisions were made. The initial hypothesis was that, in the context in which restitution claims were already being formulated, they would have been the main consideration for evictions. However, the decisions of the Executive Committee indicate the existence of other large areas of interest, including socialist districts. The Mănăștur

neighborhood, finalized in the 1980s, had the following streets targeted: Bucegi, Grigore Alexandrescu, Mehedinți, Parâng, Aleea Peana; then the outer limit of the Gheorgheni district: Alverna, Lăcrămioarelor, Albac, Rășinari, Muncitorilor; and the Expo Transilvania area: Dâmboviței, Cojocnei, Răsăritului streets. At first glance, in addition to the old buildings in the central areas, the scope of which is not clearly connected with the restitution process, the buildings of low comfort blocks, including workers hostels, seem to represent a high proportion of the total. A more precise understanding of the situation of the buildings and the tenants who were the target of the decisions requires in itself another research approach that explores the types of allocations to enterprises and the situation of these units in the first years after 1989.

Table 6.

Streets with the highest numbers of eviction decisions by the Cluj-Napoca Executive Committee between 1990 - august 1993

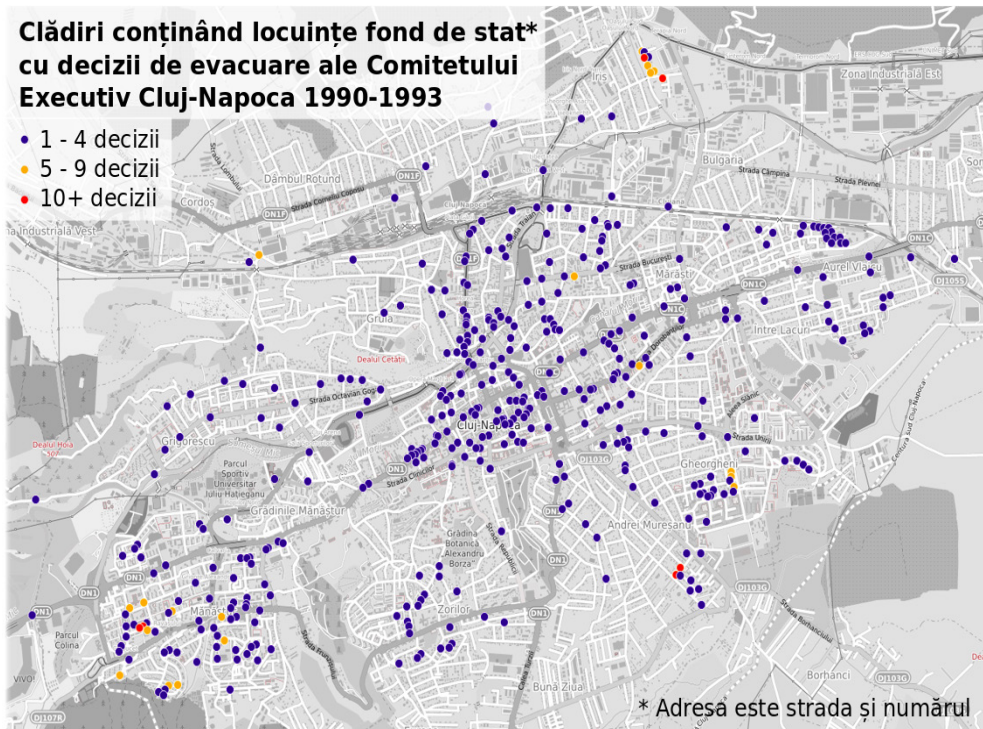
Nr. crt.	Street	Neighborhood	No. of eviction decisions
1	Gîrbău	Mănăstur	47
2	G. G. Byron	Iris	42
3	Lăcrămioarelor	Gheorgheni	29
4	Calea Moșilor	Centru	29
5	Horea	Centru	27
6	Calea Dorobanților	Centru	23
7	21 Decembrie	Centru	19
8	Albac	Gheorgheni	17
9	Bd Eroilor	Centru	17
10	Mehedinți	Mănăstur	16
11	Peana	Mănăstur	14
12	Bucegi	Mănăstur	13
13	Răsăritului	Între Lacuri	13
14	Parâng	Mănăstur	11

Nr. crt.	Street	Neighborhood	No. of eviction decisions
15	Sobarilor	Iris	11
16	Traian	Centru	11
17	Alverna	Gheorgheni	10
18	Cojocnei	Între Lacuri	10
19	Dostoievski	Gheorgheni	10
20	Liviu Rebreanu	Gheorgheni	9

Data source: author's calculations

Figure 1.

Map of buildings containing public housing with eviction decisions issued by the Cluj-Napoca Executive Committee between 1990 - august 1993



Map source: map realized together with Bence Schneider.

Although the numbers discussed above already paint a clear picture of the process, the scale seems to have been even larger. When confronted with the data, a bailiff who was in charge in the late 1980s with compiling data on empty apartments, stated that the number was much higher, as there were approximately three thousand empty apartments in the city in 1989 who were soon taken over by people. Most post-1989 evictions, he asserted, had been carried out without meeting the legal requirements.

Phases of Roma evictions in Cluj after 1990

Numerous people were pushed into a cycle of evictions beginning in the early 1990s. What we know to a greater extent is the situation of the Roma who arrived, often following successive evictions, in the Pata Rât area, an informal housing area next to the landfill, inhabited by 1,500 people. For example, tenants on Byron street, who can be found in the Decisions of the Executive Committee for the year 1992. In some cases, restitutions and the lack of provision of alternatives by the state determined their trajectory to Pata Rât. In others, the lack of possibilities to pay utility costs. Some people also describe how the Caritas Ponzi scheme drew them into a debt spiral culminating in losing their home. These situations apply to those who had a home in their possession. But the following generations, deprived of this advantage, had no other solution available than to informally extend their parents' home, where possible. Thus, both them and their parents, as contract holders, were at risk of eviction. The risk materialized in some cases, but not in all. If for those who had a lease contract for a state-owned home, the risk was major, for homeowners it is considerably reduced, even if not eliminated. Linda tells that at the beginning of the 1990s, more than 20 Roma families lived in the new blocks on Aurel Vlaicu Street; only one family lives there today. Numerous other Roma families who owned apartments in "Groapă", the Molnar Piuariu - Expo Transilvania area, were gradually evicted.

In the **first phase**, the evictions seem to be aimed at holders of contracts expired before 1990 or at post-1989 illegal occupants of empty apartments. Ethnic differentiation is less pronounced, according to sources, as well as in comparison with the later periods. In 1995, the local council enacts⁷ a form of municipality compensation in the case of abusive occupation of homes, premises and land. The normalization of the situation took place in order to "stop and remove this phenomenon of illegal occupation of state-owned buildings", the eviction being the next step established by the action. The motivation came:

⁷ LCD 231/1995

as a result of the acute crisis of spaces for carrying out some production activities, commercial but especially as living spaces, lately they are increasingly frequently occupied by different people who have not been assigned and do not meet the legal conditions of occupation.

In the **second phase**, group evictions occur, many of them following the initial loss of housing. In the series of seven interviews “Dislocations”, conducted by a Desire Foundation team in 2016⁸, residents of the Cantonului area of Pata Rât recount their journeys of living in the city and how they were evicted. The routes pass through several points in the city, including block bunkers in Mănăştur neighborhood or vacant lots, under the guidance of the local administration, with the contribution of other actors who own real estate.

The case of Maria’s family, a colleague from Căşi Sociale ACUM, is another example of an eviction route. Her family was evicted from Moţilor Street in 1998, together with other families. Mayor Gheorghe Funar hastened the evictions, telling them that day that “What the mayor’s office failed to do in 10 years, I did in 24 hours!”. The motivation was that the respective homes were eliminated from the housing stock because they were falling apart, but the family says that they did not have a problem from this point of view during the five years they lived there.

With us in the house, he took down the walls. We only had the fişa de calcul (en. housing calculation sheet). We woke up with them one morning that they were evicting. I said we don’t have time. Just one available day. There had been no previous threat, notice, summons. During that time people were waiting for the contract to be made. They only came with the demolition team and representatives from the town hall, there was no police.

The mayor sent them to submit social housing applications, but when they went to the city hall, they were not received or excuses were found for not supporting the initiative. Some evictees from the Moţilor area ended up living on Cantonului Street, and others in the Dallas or Meşterul Manole Street. Maria’s mother tells that “Funar completed the plan that others did. For him it was a victory,” concluding that he carried out most of the evictions. Others were started nearby, in the area of Între Ape and Ilie Măcelaru Street.

⁸ <https://www.desire-ro.eu/?cat=119> (accessed in June 2022)

Maria's family later moved to Sobarilor Street, in the block that later came into the possession of the Prison Fellowship Foundation, becoming an accommodation center for marginalized people. After staying in that block, they built makeshift homes 20 meters away with six other families. Furthermore, they lived for a month near the Colectiviștilor bridge, in the vicinity of the current headquarters of the Emerson company, and were then moved by the city hall to Cantonului street, on the land where the current headquarters of the Romanian Post is located. Maria underlines that following the evictions, many people became seriously ill, depression and alcoholism appeared, or families were split up, including because the child protection service took away children of the evicted families, if they ended up begging with them, accusing parents from child abuse. In addition, families with more children were better seen by the municipality, and they received increased support. Thus, if the service took the children, the level of obligations towards the families also decreased.

I will briefly mention other cases of group eviction. The OPID block in Someșeni, located at the intersection of Orăștiei and Cornului streets, was almost empty and was partially occupied by families, having been evicted in 1999 by the mayor's office. Other families built makeshift homes on Kővári Street near the train station, on railroad company land, where they lived for a few years until they were evicted by the mayor's office in 2006. Another mass eviction took place on Taberei 4 street in Mănăștur district, where 40 families occupied in the fall of 1998 a worker hostel belonging to the former county Constructions Trust. In the following spring, the police and special forces were present at the action, according to the bailiff who conducted the action. The same bailiff recounted other two mass evictions from worker hostels later turned into hotels, such as the Onyx Hotel on Septimiu Albini street. On Calea Turzii no. 14, close to Cipariu Square, there were some old houses where several families moved in, later evicted by the municipality. Some of them moved to Casa Călăului, a building on Avram Iancu street, also abandoned, from where they were again evicted and led by the authorities to Cantonului street in Pata Rât, following a fire in 2002. In the area of Avram Iancu street 32-34 three families who "worked the brooms all their lives", with formal lease and no arrears suffered the same fate, after the building was left in disrepair.

NATO block on Albac street no. 21, converted into a social housing block in 2012, was another target of group eviction in 2001 involving dozens of families. A person who lived there recounted that his recently divorced mother and him moved in in 1993. At that time, the block was in good condition, and the tenants had contracts with the town hall. They moved into a vacant studio apartment, paying a direct contribution to the block administrator. Gradually, because of neglect, the block deteriorated, the water pipes broke, and later the

access to electricity was cut off. Those who had contracts left, meanwhile other unhoused people moved in. The city hall limited their occupation to the 1st floor, installing iron grills to block access to the other floors, but gradually other homeless people occupied the other floors. The family was moved by the city hall to the “Mănăştur bunkers” on Grigore Alexandrescu str., then to Cantonului str. in 2004.

The last notable eviction from the second phase is of the 74 families on Coastei Street in December 2010. Legally, there were two buildings with 16 leased apartments on the site. The third module was a car workshop that was dismantled in 1991, having several rooms that the residents later converted into housing. A complaint⁹ made by the neighbors of the residents on Coastei street, filed at the Local Council, describes the fires that have occurred in the area, which endanger their homes, as well as that “late in the evening these individuals also hang around on Inău street, hoping to complete their already questionable revenues through the theft of some goods from our yards”. Recalling a similar address sent in 2003, the group explicitly and pointedly demands that the residents of the area be subjected to a “much more rigorous new control”, also describing the steps of legalization and verification of contracts, explicitly demanding that those living illegally be evicted. In a statement, the mayor Apostu argued that:

the eviction from Coastei street was done due to the fact that the way of life caused extremely many controversies for the residents of the area and for the companies in the area and for everything that meant the city¹⁰.

In the **third phase**, starting in 2011, the evictions from the state housing fund continue, but they have a refined legal format and target distinct apartments. The case of Meşterul Manole 2 of 2018 is suggestive in this sense, because among the families occupying the 12 apartments, most were at risk of eviction, but only one family had then reached this phase. Probably, on the one hand, the protest actions of the local activist groups, initiated on the occasion of the 2010 Coastei eviction, intensified later and complemented by the advocacy to ensure the right to housing, had an impact in this direction. On the other hand, the ambitions of the European magnet city of the local administration have led

⁹ City Hall registration number 106108/3/13.06.2008

¹⁰ <https://gazetadecluj.ro/teologii-se-muta-pe-coastei-mai-aproape-de-inima-consilierilor/> (accessed in July 2022)

to increased attention to the topic, to avoid accusations of human rights violations. The city's application for the title of European Capital of Culture 2021, prepared in 2016, is telling in this regard. It promised community reconciliation and the rediscovery of a European route, the main concept, "East of West", being also declared to be inclusive (Cluj-Napoca Association 2021, 2016). In an analysis of the context of the candidacy, I argued that a tentative solution was declared to offer cultural justice to social injustice (Zamfir, 2016). The structure of the candidacy contained significant elements of cultural recognition of the Roma from the Pata Rât area. So new eviction initiatives would have come in apparent contradiction, the mass-media already exerting considerable pressure on the role of these elements. In addition, the number of evictions has naturally reduced, as the informal settlement areas in the central spaces of the city have already been reduced previously. The pressure was concentrated on those areas of high interest for real estate developers, such as Piața Abator.

Simultaneously, the evictability of people displaced in the Cantonului - Pata Rât area continued. In the case of modular homes where a part of the Coastei families were improperly rehoused in 2010, some received eviction decisions in 2021. And in the Cantonului area, the fear of eviction dominates, initially materialized by the lawsuit opened by the National Railroad Company against them in 2011 for occupying unused tracks, later on continuing with the 2020 plans to prepare the area for the metropolitan train. And regarding the evictions from the new social housing, a tenant describes in 2021 that *"there are no more gypsies here in the blocks of Timișului Blajului, only in a block on the edge. They probably didn't pay."*

Concluding remarks

Privatization has been pointed out as a major determinant of increased housing insecurity, yet evictions have enjoyed only limited attention as a tool of reshaping urban populations. The actual magnitude of the practice can only be approximated, because the nature of the process renders part of it illegible. Informal and illegal types are reported at best by the media or researchers. Crucially, the extent of administrative evictions, a favored municipal eviction tool, is as elusive as it is legally questionable. While forced evictions have been present in public discourse and academic literature, it can paradoxically be regarded as a hidden phenomenon of postsocialism: structured data had been scarce at best.

Following several research projects and ongoing housing activist work, this article presented data on the scale of forced evictions. Based on the data supplied by the Ministry of Justice, corroborated with archival data focused on the city of Cluj-Napoca, and answers from multiple municipalities to public requests of information, the number of forced evictions in the 1990-2020 can be estimated at least 100 thousand. It also presented data on a case study, the city of Cluj-Napoca, which supports the estimation. Moreover, the data on early 1990s Cluj indicates a rapid naturalization of evictions as the normal postsocialist housing management instrument. The scale of the process indicates that postsocialist gentrification has been actively induced through brute force.

Evictions in the 1980s in many cases actually represented relocation. Thus, it was a means of subjecting inhabitants, mostly Roma families, to a dramatic episode, in order to pressure them to acquiesce to the dual system of housing-employment. After 1989, evictions turned into a means of expulsion from a reassembled social body, which further supported a systemic deranking in both housing and employment terms. As an intrinsic racial project, property restitution fueled post-socialist Roma subordination, generally contributing to other types of housing displacement throughout the assembling of the capitalist real estate market.

REFERENCES

- Aalbers, Manuel B. and Brett, Christophers (2014). "Centering housing in political economy". *Housing, theory and society*, Vol 31(4):373-394
- Álvarez de Andrés, Eva; María José Zapata Campos; Patrik Zapata (2014). "Stop the evictions! The diffusion of networked social movements and the emergence of a hybrid space: The case of the Spanish Mortgage Victims Group". *Habitat International*, Vol 46:252-259
- Baker, Alexander G. (2017). "Bailiffs at the door: work, power, and resistance in eviction enforcement". In Brickell, Katherine, Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia și Alex Vasudevan (eds.) *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK
- Baker, Alexander (2020). "From Eviction to Evicting: Rethinking the Technologies, Lives and Power Sustaining Displacement." *Progress in Human Geography* (online first)

- Bhan, Gautam (2009). "This is no longer the city I once knew". Evictions, the urban poor and the right to the city in millennial Delhi". *Environment & Urbanization*, Vol 21(1): 127-142
- Blocul pentru Locuire (2019). *Raport asupra evacuărilor forțate din România petrecute în perioada 2008-2017*. (en. Report on forced evictions in Romania in the 2008-2017 period). Available at: <https://bloculpentrulocuire.ro/2019/04/19/raport-asupra-evacuarelor-fortate-2008-2017/>
- Chelcea, Liviu (2003). "Ancestors, Domestic Groups, and the Socialist State: Housing Nationalization and Restitution in Romania." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 04 (2003): 714-40
- Chelcea, Liviu, Raluca Popescu, and Darie Cristea (2015). "Who Are the Gentrifiers and How Do They Change Central City Neighbourhoods? Privatization, Commodification, and Gentrification in Bucharest." *Geografie* 120, no. 2: 113-33
- Comănescu, Ioan; Dinu, Demetrescu, Ioan Mihuță (1985). *Legislația locativă pe înțelesul tuturor*. Editura Politică
- Cooper, Vickie; Kirsteen, Paton (2019). "Accumulation by Repossession: The Political Economy of Evictions under Austerity". *Urban Geography* (online first)
- Dan, Adrian-Nicolae; Mariana, Dan (2004). „Persoanele fără adăpost din România - o estimare a numărului acestora”. *Revista Calitatea Vieții* 16, no. 1-2 (2004): 101-22
- Dan, Adrian-Nicolae (2018). "Homelessness Prevention in the Context of Evictions in Romania." *Sociology and Social Work Review* Vol 1:6-29
- Dohotaru, Adrian; Hajnalka Harbula; Enikő Vincze (eds.) (2015). Pata. Cluj-Napoca: Efes
- Gerull, Susanne (2014). "Evictions Due to Rent Arrears: A Comparative Analysis of Evictions in Fourteen Countries." *Part B* Vol 8(2):19
- Hartman, Chester; David, Robinson (2003). "Evictions: The Hidden Housing Problem." *Housing Policy Debate* Vol 14(4):461-501
- Lancione, Michele (2019). "The politics of embodied urban precarity: Roma people and the fight for housing in Bucharest, Romania". *Geoforum* Vol 101:182-191
- Maharawal, Manissa M.; Erin, McElroy (2017). "The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project: Counter Mapping and Oral History toward Bay Area Housing Justice". *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* Vol 108(2):380-389
- Nelson, Kyle (2019). "The Microfoundations of Bureaucratic Outcomes: Causes and Consequences of Interpretive Disjuncture in Eviction Cases". *Social Problems* Vol 68(1):1-16
- Pasti, Vladimir (2006). *Noul capitalism românesc*. Polirom: Iași
- Paton, Kirsteen; Vickie, Cooper (2016). "It's the State, Stupid: 21st Gentrification and State-Led Evictions". *Sociological Research Online* Vol 21(3):1-7
- Petrovici, Norbert (2012). "Workers and the City: Rethinking the Geographies of Power in Post-Socialist Urbanisation." *Urban Studies* 49, no. 11:2377-97
- Popovici, Veda (2020). "Residences, restitutions and resistance - A radical housing movement's understanding of post-socialist property redistribution". *City - Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action* Vol 24(1-2):1-15

- Porton, Adam; Ashley, Gromis; Matthew, Desmond (2020). "Inaccuracies in Eviction Records: Implications for Renters and Researchers." *Housing Policy Debate* (online first)
- Romani Criss (2004). *Protecția dreptului la locuință al romilor din România - Manual de educare privind legislația internațională și dreptul la o locuință adecvată*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/6t2wub9t>
- Rughinis, Ana Cosima (2004). "Social Housing and Roma Residents in Romania,". Open Society Institute and Center for policy Studies, Central European University
- Stan, Lavinia (2006). "The Roof over Our Heads: Property Restitution in Romania." *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 22, no.2:180–205
- Seymour, Eric; Joshua, Akers (2021). "Building the Eviction Economy: Speculation, Precarity, and Eviction in Detroit". *Urban Affairs Review* Vol 57(1):35–69
- Soederberg, Susanne (2018). "Evictions: A Global Capitalist Phenomenon". *Development and Change* Vol 49(2):286-301
- Swinkels, Rob (ed.) (2014). *Atlasul zonelor urbane marginalizate din România*. Washington: Banca Mondială.
- Vincze, Enikő (2013). "Socio-Spatial Marginality of Roma as Form of Intersectional Injustice". *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Sociologia* Vol 58(2):217-242
- Vincze, Enikő; George Iulian, Zamfir (2019). "Racialized housing unevenness in Cluj-Napoca under capitalist redevelopment". *City - Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action* Vol 23(4-5):2-22
- van Baar, Huub. (2016). "Evictability and the Biopolitical Bordering of Europe". *Antipode* Vol 49(1):212-230
- van Baar, Huub; Ana Ivasiuc, Regina Kreide (2019). "The European Roma and their securitization: Contexts, junctures, challenges". În van Baar, Huub; Ana Ivasiuc, Regina Kreide (eds) *The Securitization of the Roma in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham
- von Otter, Cecilia; Olof, Bäckman; Sten-Åke, Stenberg; Carin, Qvarfordt Eisenstein (2017). "Dynamics of Evictions: Results from a Swedish Database". *European Journal of Homelessness*. Vol 11(1):1-23
- Vrăbiescu, Ioana (2017). "Non- and Dedocumenting Citizens in Romania." *Focaal* 2017(77):22–35
- Wacquant, Loïc (2019). "Class, Ethnicity and State in the Making of Urban Marginality". In John Flint and Ryan Powell (eds.) *Class, Ethnicity and State in the Polarized Metropolis Putting Wacquant to Work*. Palgrave MacMillan, Cham
- Watt, Paul (2018). " 'This Pain of Moving, Moving, Moving:' Evictions, Displacement and Logics of Expulsion in London." *L'Année Sociologique* Vol 68(1):67
- Zamfir, George Iulian (2016). „Cluj Capitală Culturală sau justiție culturală ca răspuns la injustiții sociale?”. *Gazeta de Artă Politică*. Available at: <http://artapolitica.ro/2016/11/13/clujcapitala-culturala-sau-justitie-culturala-ca-solutie-la-injustitii-sociale/>
- Zamfirescu, Irina; Liviu, Chelcea (2020). "Evictions as infrastructural events". *Urban Geography* (online first)

GEORGE IULIAN ZAMFIR

Zoon, Ina, and Mark Norman Templeton (2001). *On the Margins: Roma and Public Services in Romania, Bulgaria, and Macedonia: With a Supplement on Housing in the Czech Republic*. New York: Open Society Institute