

RACIALIZED HOUSING AND PROLETARIZATION POLICIES AS INTERNAL SOCIALIST CONTRADICTIONS: ROMA RELOCATIONS BETWEEN 1975-1989 IN BAIJA MARE, ROMANIA

George Iulian ZAMFIR¹

ABSTRACT: The emergence of the ghetto as an urban social formation is regularly conveyed as a specific neoliberal capitalist product. Based on interviews with inhabitants and policymakers and archival data covering more than two decades, this article brings another dimension to the debates on ghetto formation. It traces the urban spatial politics of managing and containing Roma communities in the Romanian NW city of Baia Mare from the late 1970s until 1989. To this aim, it uncovers the debates and decisions regarding the last stages of socialist urban systematization focused on Hatvan, a Roma neighbourhood, and the subsequent relocation projects. Initially, the socialist administration aimed to assimilate the Roma population into the working class. However, a peculiar segregationist policy followed the failed experiment of expropriation and rehousing into low-quality apartments. In the early 1980s, authorities relocated most Roma in the newly built Vasile Alecsandri district to four new specifically designed apartment buildings nearby. The four blocks on Arieşului Street lacked central heating to prevent the accumulation of arrears – a materialization of the decade-long austerity policies. Other urban Roma were funnelled there as well, thus revealing the racialization policies assembled at the local level. Just before 1990, Arieşului was abandoned, and many people decided to relocate in what became Craica, a ghetto that is still in existence today.

Keywords: socialist Roma policies, socialist urbanization, housing, racialization.

Introduction

Starting with the early 1990s, some of the Roma inhabitants of Baia Mare suffered multiple evictions and relocations to uninhabitable spaces. An internationally infamous episode took place in 2012. The municipality moved

¹ Babeş-Bolyai University; george.zamfir@ubbcluj.ro



500 people from the informal settlement of Craica, to the Cuprom office buildings, a metallurgical company (Amnesty International 2013). Half of the residents remained in Craica. Additionally, several other Roma informal settlements surround the city. The Pirita community is located on the Western side, on top of a land where pyrites, a remnant of mining, had been deposited. Another settlement lies on the North-Eastern side, on the hill right next to the former led factory Romplumb.

In an attempt to solve the issue, the Municipal Social Assistance Department provided a map (Image 1) in 2013. It contains potential locations for social housing projects based on a thorough analysis of poverty areas around the city. As the map shows, the areas span from Dura, located at the tip of the airport, to Postfunduș, roughly translated as Beyondend. According to more recent local council decisions², Pinteia Viteazul might be one of the chosen sites. The map accurately conveys how the municipality worked on finding possible permutations for the Roma population. Ethnicity is not mentioned in the presentation, yet all seven “poverty pockets” are inhabited by Roma.

A rich body of literature on ghettoization practices describes how the process was enacted through various scales in postsocialist spaces starting with the 1990s (see Vincze et al., 2019). With few exceptions (Lancione 2022; Plainer 2018), with regards to the state-socialist policies on the matter, research undertaken so far focuses on broader scales such as state or geopolitical block. Urbanization and industrialization were symbiotic policies in socialist Romania. Ensuring access to housing was a critical target reached mainly by 1989. For most Roma, social and housing mobility witnessed rapid increases. Better housing conditions were attained through migration in conjunction with expropriation and relocation. Sedentarization and labour migration as state policies were the central outlooks in the space offered by the state. Sometimes, relocation to apartment blocks proved unsuitable for Roma. Local authorities had to devise a solution for the new issue, which made sense in the current urbanization-industrialization process. Explanations of the enduring Roma housing situation in Romania appeal to a “long dispossession” (used by Vincze 2019) and “foundational dispossession” (used by Lancione, 2022 after Roy, 2017:9). Racialization is more than discrimination and exclusion, “it is about foundational dispossession – the subject whose claims to property are thus always a lived experience of loss” (id.)

By subscribing to the long durée approach, this article addresses the following questions: under what circumstances was the impoverished Roma population of Baia Mare transformed into a subject whose forced mobility is a recurrent episode? Precisely, which factors contributed to the entrenched

² Local Council Decision 320/2022.

neoliberal racialization of the Roma? In order to answer these questions, this article describes the urbanization and housing policies implemented by the local administration in Baia Mare, a Romanian north-western city, together with data regarding the proletarianization of Roma during the late 1970s and 1980s, with a focus on the emerging racial project. It uses archival data and interviews to outline and contextualize several episodes of resettlement. Thus, by illustrating the intersection of proletariat urbanization and assimilation occurring during the 1980s austerity policies, it contributes to the literature documenting state-socialist policies towards Roma and their implications for the complete destitution following the political change. Additionally, it emphasizes how certain levels of autonomy for local administrations were necessary for territorially based racialization practices

Socialist traits of postsocialist ghetto formation

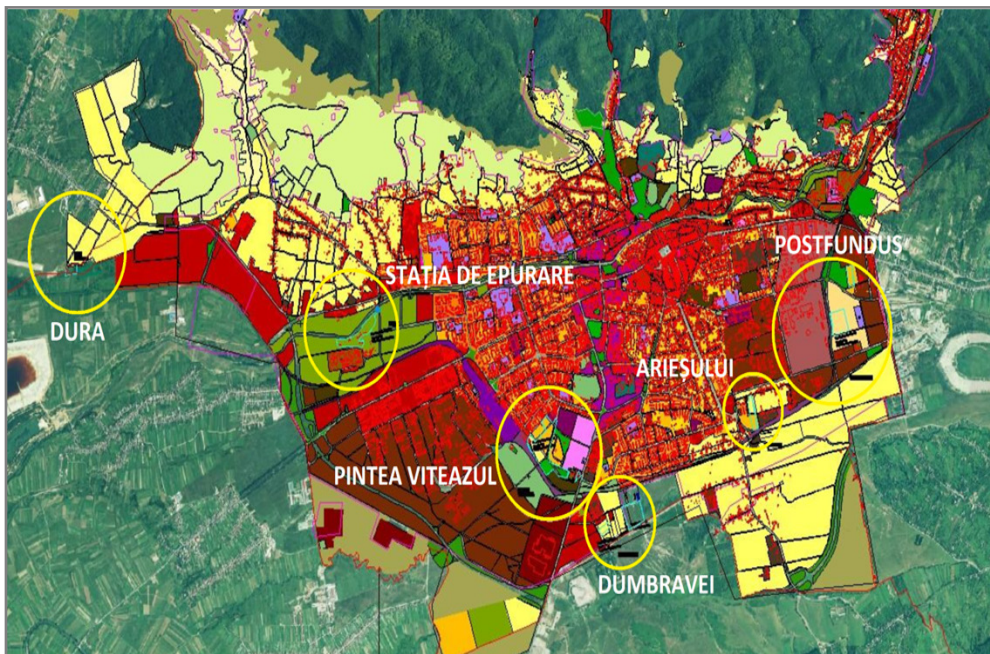
The emergence of Roma ghettos during postsocialist Romania has been extensively researched and tied with uneven development, spatial stigmatization, and population racialization (see Vincze 2013; Vincze and Zamfir 2019; Popovici 2020). Beginning with the 1990s, amidst the socio-political transformations taking place in CEE, Roma had been turned into evictable populations (van Baar 2016). New social geographies with deeply unequal formats took shape. Racial categories played a consistent role in the new urban arrangements. These results were significantly impacted by housing privatization. Restitution and the right to buy, as primary forms of housing privatization, directly impacted the processes.

In a recent article (Zamfir 2022) conveying the extent of evictions in Romania, drawn from various figures, testimonies, and policy documents, I implied that the manner in which local municipalities acted during the first years of postsocialism concerning Roma populations suggested that the advent of the housing regime based on private property was marked by Roma displacement. However, some data, mainly interviews in Cluj-Napoca, pointed out that the origins of the displacements in the early 1990s took shape in the earlier decades.

Several key texts point towards various aspects of the socialist policy regarding Roma. Lancione (2022) analyses the emergence of Roma dispossessions in Ferentari, a Bucharest district. Based on archival data on centralized planning, he points to the embedded racialized framing of the district's production as a socialist planning output. Vincze (2013: 221) provides accounts of the lives of Roma people in Cluj-Napoca in the 1980s before they were forcibly removed and relocated by the municipality in 2010 next to a landfill. In his book on the

history of Roma in Romania, Achim (1998) devotes a short and substantial chapter to the socialist period. He underlines the scarcity of official documents issued by the socialist administration, admitting that future archival work will uncover usable data. A study undertaken in 1977 by the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, which assessed the situation of the Roma, is another source of valuable data. The presented picture is bleak: a considerable part of the Roma population lives in dire conditions, is uneducated, some are unwilling to work, and women are unemployed. As for the culprits, local administrations are admonished for their implicit support of the status quo, including lax mobility controls. The report presents six categories of proposed measures, starting with “measures regarding the liquidation of the nomad and semi-nomad phenomenon among the gypsies.”

Image 1. Map made by the Social Assistance Department of Baia Mare (2013) locating potential sites for social housing projects. The author added names of the areas provided in the documents.



Socialist Romanian authorities were not alone in their efforts to settle and assimilate Roma populations. According to Law (2012: 22), by outlawing the nomadic Roma way of life in 1956, Khrushchev laid the foundation for anti-

Roma racism. Hungarian governments implemented measures in a similar vein (Majteny and Majteny, 2016). For a brief period between 1957 and 1961, the existence of a Cultural Association of Hungarian Gypsies was the closest to an ethnic-cultural acknowledgment by the state (id, p. 34). According to Romanian authorities, the Roma did not fulfil the conditions required to be denominated as a national minority (Anghel 2022: 5).

This article acknowledges recent literature which historicizes housing policies a la longue durée. Andreea Gibbons (2018) describes the conditions in Los Angeles. White (2023) presents the situation in Boise. Both monographs trace connections and relations taking shape in the last century. If socialist policies stressed that nomadism was a problem, the issue of the Hatvan Roma was different: they were settled, not nomadic Roma. Beck (1984:32) explained how the umbrella of Roma did not capture the diversity of languages, occupations, settlement patterns, and historic-cultural trajectories, an obfuscation that excluded professionalized Roma in fields such as medicine, scholarship, and administration.

In fact, authors describing the communist regime approach to Roma in Romania conclude that policies aimed primarily at social integration. Generally, authorities treated Roma as a social problem that needed to be solved with social instruments, particularly employment and housing (see Matei 2016 and Achim 2004). In this regard, the 1977 research and the 1983 response report are instructive, with the latter highlighting the fact that the outcomes did not meet expectations. Amid the national economic difficulties of the early 1980s, “the integration measures had been abandoned” (Matei 2016, 701-2). In the 1980s, Roma ethnic identity manifestations, particularly music festivals, were contained or even banned (Matei 2016, 701). Overall, central authorities did not coordinate policy measures at the national level.

Socialist policies from the 1980s are relevant for creating ghettoization circumstances due to two additional contextual factors in addition to ethno-racial minority policies. The 1968 national territorial administrative reform triggered various systematization and urbanization plans at county and local level. By the late 1970s, significant advances had already been achieved. Thus, the new urbanization policy gradually turned from a plan to a material reality to be managed. Secondly, national economic development plans underwent significant changes following the 1979 oil crisis (Ban, 2014). In an attempt to curb international financial dependence, the government imposed a draconic set of austerity measures throughout the decade. Steering all economic productive efforts towards exports directly hit household consumption and, implicitly, housing management policies.

The literature conveys that governmental decisions were crucial drivers of proletarianization attempts, yet, as we shall see, municipalities play similarly essential roles in the outcome. The literature does not cover how those attempts

have been implemented and what resulted. If Eastern European communist regimes attempted to assimilate the Roma into their national proletarian body, what is the nature of this specific classificatory system? Specifically, as assimilation policies had been their primary goal (Barany 2000, 424), how did housing policies contribute to a socialist racialization, and how did the Roma react?

This article provides data produced in the “Precarious labour and peripheral housing” project framework. It started with a series of interviews taken by the author together with Enikő Vincze. We interviewed architects, planners, constructors, and Romanian, Roma, and Hungarian city residents through life story approaches. Practically, we followed their housing and employment histories in conjunction with specific familial arrangements. Archival research came next, with the primary source being the Local Council Archive Department, followed by the Maramureş County Council and National Archives – Maramureş. Local Council archival sources offered diverse sets of documents, ranging from decisions to resolutions, activity or financial reports, social investigations, plans, meeting notes, and regulations. The archival work initially focused on the period 1980-1989, with some exploration of the early and mid-1970s. Primarily, it aimed to identify relevant decisions of the executive committee of the local council. However, many of the files contained various documents from different years.

The contribution of this article to the literature consists of aspects and processes regarding socialist urban planning and racialization mechanisms. It presents the urbanization process, data regarding attempts at Roma proletarianization, housing policies regarding Roma, and the main problems of urban administration. It brings new empirical data from archives and interviews laying out local processes involving Roma, particularly the 1980s racial project specific to Baia Mare.

Socialist urbanization in Baia Mare

According to the last significant socialist housing legislation, Law 4/1973 and Law 5/1973, there were four funding sources for housing construction, which thus defined the housing property regime. State-owned housing was aimed at low-wage employees, young married couples, newly employed youth, and transferred staff – the latter a central instrument in conjunction with economic development plans. Housing was produced either with centralized state investment funds and managed by local councils through their enterprises or with enterprises’ funds and in their direct management. A vital aspect of the housing regime, housing as personal property, meant a decommodification of

housing: a family could own only one housing unit. In the case of extra inherited housing, they had to be relinquished, and it was against the law to build or sell them. Housing as personal property was produced directly by the population through personal funds - the case of single-family housing or produced by state enterprises and institutions at the request of the population, usually through state-backed credit by the Savings and Credit Bank (CEC) - the case of apartments in blocks. The third category, cooperative housing, was far less common and not even a part of the available statistical data. Personal property represented 70 percent of housing at the national level (Vincze 2017, 32). Their majority was represented by urban and rural single-family houses, followed by block apartments.

As a primary political aim during Romanian socialism, urbanization was directly tied to economic development (Vincze, 2023). With ample underground reserves, Baia Mare became one of Romania's major mining cities. Polymetallic ore had been historically extracted and processed in the area. Due to vast gold deposits, coin minting goes back to the Austro-Hungarian empire. Moreover, as part of industrialization, lead, zinc, and copper became significant commodities. Tunnels pierced nearby mountains with entrances from inside or in its proximity, and ore was processed in the city. In the eastern part, the remnants of the Cuprom factory and its decantation pools still take over vast amounts of urban space. At the same time, the lead production unit, Romplumb, was positioned in the northeast, and other mining operations took place on the city's western side. Until mining production ceased in the late 2000s, toxicity deeply affected urban public health, while cyanide spillovers impacted environments hundreds of kilometres away. An auxiliary industry developed alongside, ranging from geological exploration and manufacturing of mining equipment, complementary to other sectors such as textiles and tiles.

In just 45 years, the city population grew from 21 thousand to 149 thousand inhabitants. In parallel, housing the working class, attracted by the lucrative industry, required considerable investments in housing projects. Because Baia Mare was considerably smaller when socialist urbanization started, the land was more readily available for new infrastructural works, particularly well-suited for industrial needs. After the administrative-territorial reform of 1968, the city's new systematization and urbanization plan was publicly presented at the end of 1971³. The municipality implemented most of the plan until 1989 in various stages. However, it was preceded by a small-scale neighbourhood with Soviet-style architecture built in the 1950s in a semi-central area. According to the interviewed planners, the Săsar neighbourhood took shape in the sixties in

³ Baia Mare Local Council Decision 671/1971.

a northern area with less valuable constructions and a marshy flat terrain. The Gării neighbourhood and the new civic centre were constructed entirely in the 1970s and 1980s. The parallel works unfolding in various areas complicate the chronology of socialist districts. However, V. Alecsandri is the last neighbourhood built under the initial plan in the southern area, over the former neighbourhood Hatvan, inhabited by Roma. Expropriation was a key planning instrument that supported the whole housing production apparatus, even in the 1980s, in V. Alecsandri and other more centrally located districts such as Traian.

In the early 60s, authorities geared housing provision towards efficiently supporting industrial development. That meant increasing the number of apartments at the expense of lower-quality housing. In the 1980s, the Central Planning Committee mandated the Maramureş Construction Trust to deliver up to 3000 units per year, according to a former director of a construction enterprise. The significant number, coupled with the insufficient availability of construction materials, translated into pressure on the Constructions Trust to focus on erecting blocks with smaller apartments if they foresaw a failure to achieve the quota. Generally, however, the quality of blocks gradually increased, with the more spacious and better-equipped apartments generally built in the 1980s, particularly in the central area. Some of the architectural projects surrounding Mara Park received national awards. In V. Alecsandri, production ramped up as prefabricated construction elements were efficiently delivered on site.

As the housing fund expanded, most inhabitants moved up their housing careers. Upon arrival in Baia Mare, some lived in worker hostels (ro. *blocuri de nefamilişti*), usually belonging to enterprises or state-owned small apartments. Worker hostels were positioned near production units and scattered around the city, even in central areas such as str. Hortensiei and Expoziţiei. They were designed as rapid solutions to house incoming workers required to ramp up industrial production. Next, residents moved into more spacious apartments as the Constructions Trust delivered them to enterprises that allocated them to employees.

Some enterprises decided to provide housing for their employees by directly commissioning projects to the Maramureş Constructions Trust out of their funds, particularly in the 1980s. They first searched for potentially available plots for new blocks and approached the Institute for Design. Taking granular control of housing provision meant not only a faster solution but also a matter of pride: managers felt that the socio-economic relevance of their units was greater than that of local authorities. Thus, they deserved greater autonomy. As the competition between production units for workers was increasing, it was also a means of increasing their pool of potential employees. Competition extended at broader scales. Intercity competitions placed urban administrations in a direct

comparison between various indicators, particularly production output and surpassing the yearly plan quotas. In 1980, the Local Council of Tecuci challenged its Baia Mare counterpart to a socialist race. According to the document⁴ describing the process, Baia Mare's council proposed six competition categories, starting with the domain of investment and housing construction – mainly the delivery of new housing a month earlier than the assumed deadline and ending with the “reduction of fuel and electricity, recovery of raw materials, and materials.”

Besides apartments in buildings owned by the enterprise or the state, another category appeared in the 1970s. People interested in owning their apartment now could place their order at The Office for the Construction of Personal Housing (ro. *Oficiul de Construcții Locuințe Proprietate Personală*). Buyers had to take out low-interest credit from the state bank with a repayment period of around 25 years. However, monthly payments were significantly higher than the average rent in a state or enterprise-owned apartment. Thus, only those employees with better wages could afford an acquisition. Higher expertise, an essential asset in economic development, was thus pushed towards an equivalence with personal property, similar to what Lancione (2020) discovered in the Bucharest archives. Higher quality construction, surface, and better positioning were the main reasons for buying instead of renting. The population bought around 14,000 apartments out of 42,000 in Baia Mare in 1990 through this office. In 1965, municipal statistics⁵ registered 36,519 employees. The number grew to 72,655 in 1982 and remained roughly constant until 1985, while in the same four years, 8,233 housing units were delivered (Ib., p. 111). An urban planner claimed that better building methods and administration enabled the housing supply to keep up with population demands. “In the 1980s, we almost openly called them, we invited them ‘Come on because we have available housing,’ and they moved from a comfort at the city peripheries in the centre or wherever [...] and at the periphery we gave to those rather unqualified workers or to a gypsy who was a bit more civilized... because we had those as well, as driver, tractor operator, with family and children.” (former urban planner)

Although even territorial development principles undergirded governmental policies, the spatial positioning of new blocks was relevant to incoming tenants. According to non-Roma interviewees, Vasile Alecsandri district was not usually the first choice. Moreover, state enterprises aimed to mediate state housing allocations for their employees in central rather than peripheral areas. The Construction Trust leveraged its crucial position in the housing

⁴ The Answer of the Popular Council of the Municipality of Baia Mare to the call addressed by the Popular Council of the Municipality of Tecuci, regarding the conduct of the socialist competition for the year 1980.

⁵ County archives consulted by project colleague Dana Solonean, p. 13.

production apparatus to obtain the allocation of the highest quality apartments built in the 1980s around the centrally located Mara Park for its employees. In the late 1980s⁶ and early 1990s⁷, allocation policies clearly outlined the interest.

Neighbouring villages constituted an extended pool of potential employees. In 1985, more than 12,000 workers commuted to workplaces in Baia Mare, according to local council documents. Most lived in the adjacent villages, yet others travelled longer distances of up to 30 kilometres. Economically, subsistence agriculture as a complementary activity was the main reason for choosing commuting. These figures indicate that, while some rural inhabitants were directly attracted by modern urban amenities, other factors strongly structured migration decisions.

Roma as proletarianization subjects

As a general category, Roma encompassed groups with linguistic diversity, a wide range of occupations, different settlement patterns, and historic-cultural trajectories (Beck 1984, 32). The 1977 national report on Roma focused on mobility when rendering populations legible for intervention: settled, semi-nomadic, and nomadic. The Roma population of Baia Mare exhibits diversity, which, similarly, has mattered less and less for local authorities. As part of the working-class migration wave to Baia Mare, some moved in from neighbouring villages, and others from the neighbouring counties Sălaj and Satu Mare, according to interviewees. Many were native Hungarian speakers, similar to some of Baia Mare's older Roma population, while others were native Romanian speakers. A family of Hungarian Roma mentioned that they specifically chose Jupiter Street where colinguals lived, instead of areas inhabited by Romanian Roma when they moved into the city from the outskirts next to the brick factory,

Relevant decisions issued by the municipal and county councils on labour and housing identified in the archives rarely mention Roma as a distinct category. However, meeting minutes from various administrative levels, or internal reports, exhibit more clearly how authorities perceived them as policy subjects: a social problem and potentially criminal population to be contained. An explanation of the duality could be the presumption that policymakers perceived minutes as a private and secured internal means of institutional memory. In contrast, decisions represented the public end result of administrative work. A 1986 report issued by the county-level Securitate to its headquarters

⁶ Decision of the Executive Committee of the Municipality of Baia Mare no. 179/1989.

⁷ Decision of the Executive Committee of the Municipality of Baia Mare no. 27/1990.

(Marin 2017, 333-34) describes that Roma in Baia Mare are “agglomerated with families in different districts” and that “most are employed in various domains of activity,” information obtained through the police action titled “The Nomad,” which aimed at “tracing the gypsies who break our state’s laws.”

Two main paths stand out regarding formal labour: formal employment and self-employment. Both are relevant to housing allocation and management policies. On one hand, interviewees pointed out that numerous Roma were employed in industrial productive units at the Construction Trust or mining companies as lathe operators, locksmiths, and low-level support for labour teams. Vocational schools were vital to upward mobility, granting scholarships, meals, and accommodation. While Roma employment remained focused on blue-collar positions, few managed to rise as team leaders in industrial units, and it happened due to educational opportunities. Another option for formal employment was public sanitation.

On the other hand, self-employment was a legal category based on Law 13/1968, which regulated handcrafting. According to the law rationale, this formal category aimed to satisfy the population’s demands, particularly in rural areas, and generally where “they are not entirely covered by socialist units.” Local councils analysed the individual permit requests and granted them on a case-by-case basis. Scattered examples of council decisions during the 1970s and 1980s convey that the administration granted, rejected, and revoked permits without a clear pattern. In the 1980s, some rejected applications included explanations such as “the applicant is fit for integration in a socialist unit” or “the city-wide popular demand had already been satisfied.” Roma and non-Roma applied for a wide variety of activities. In corroboration with interview data, we can infer that, within this framework, some of the traditional Roma crafters in the city practiced basket weaving, brickmaking, music making, goldsmithing, flower selling, street-food vending, and horse and cart transporting (Ro. *cărăușie*). The latter occupation was quite significant, as the next section will show. Whereas brickmaking was inherently susceptible to redundancy once industrial production ramped up, merchandise transportation from warehouses to households filled significant economic gaps determined by availability and cost. Thus, while through their various occupations as self-employed, Roma played significant roles in the local economy, the policy aim was to have these roles superseded by socialist units. Practically, a conflation between seemingly retrograde occupations and the right to housing directly fed the municipal adverse policies towards Roma.

From Hatvan to Vasile Alecsandri to Arieşului – the making of a neighbourhood through Roma relocations

Hatvan is the original Hungarian name of the southern area of Baia Mare. Its residents were primarily Roma. In 1975, the Construction Trust built the first blocks in the southern part of Baia Mare. Documents show that the initial name of the neighbourhood was Brickmakers, which was later changed to Vasile Alecsandri. Few direct information on how institutions planned the first blocks came up during archival digging. The first Roma families living in Hatvan were expropriated and resettled in these blocks located on the street later renamed Melodieii. Compared with the district's later-stage developments in the 1980s, these blocks had lower comfort, ranking based primarily on the available floor space. According to one account, residents did not welcome expropriation.

Forced, yes. The police came with batons and beat the poor gypsies. When they demolished the Romanians, they gave them downtown. Among us, Hungarians and Romanians lived as well, all kinds, but you never saw the police asking them who stole or who got into fights or to turn down the music; there were no problems. When a policeman came, all the gypsies ran to see him because we really missed the police... (Roma woman).

All available data indicates that residents “devastated” the new apartments and accumulated arrears. Attempts to pressure them into paying did not work. During County Council meeting in January 1982⁸, the county council president admonished the housing manager for irresponsible management and lack of containment of the debt problems around the city and V. Alecsandri in particular. The manager explained that the centralized nature of heating infrastructure prevents individual accountability for the 2,235 debtors spread across the city, with most employed at IMMUM enterprise. Moreover, the manager detailed that according to the president of the city court, arrears cannot constitute a reason for eviction, as bad faith cannot be established. The discussion during the same meeting touches on the topic of “devastated apartments,” where the council president again admonishes the manager, asking, “Why did you put all the gypsies in a single block and not one per stairway so that other tenants will discipline them?” While the manager did not directly respond, he proposed that directors of enterprises should be summoned on the issue, to which the council president attempted to wrap the discussion: “Directors should be left to focus on production.” However, later, the

⁸ Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Maramureş Popular County Council meeting on January 18, 1983, Document No. 660/1983.

vice-president mentions two issues. One concerns the increased deficiencies of boilers and substantial heating network losses. The second regards the debtors, for which the council took measures, starting with the cessation of thermal energy and hot water, continuing with payroll deductions, and lastly, detailing that “we built blocks where we will move those with arrears.”

An example from the local newspaper *For Socialism* (Petrehuş, 1982) describes an episode in 1982 entailing how public shaming was used as a means of discipline. One article briefly presents a report on Melodiei Street no 2 and 4: a team of one journalist, two electricians, and one police officer discovered tampered electricity meters and morally assessed how inhabitants responded to journalistic inquiries. A tenant who presented a payment commitment both to the utility company and the newspaper desk had its name specifically redacted. Another article presents how tenants destroyed state-owned apartments. Again, with precise names and addresses, the reportage starts with cases from Hatvan: “Currently, we work in complex teams to evict recalcitrant tenants on Melodiei, Rapsodiei, and Vasile Alecsandri streets.”

Local authorities deemed the respective illegal activities a significant problem requiring a specific solution. As the present-day map shows, most of the systematization plan of Vasile Alecsandri had been implemented, with the notable exception of its marginal eastern side. The solution came in 1982 and consisted of a special project of four blocks with 227 apartments on Arieşului Street, separated from the rest of the neighbourhood by a significant boulevard. Presumably, the new constructions were erected rapidly, as by the end of 1983, the municipality issued dozens of evictions for Roma residents of Vasile Alecsandri. These blocks contained spacious apartments with 3-4 rooms and lacked central heating. Instead, the housing company provided stoves to decrease heating costs and avoid the provision of unpaid natural gas.

Later, the administration probably relocated other Roma to Arieşului from other parts of the city. In one interinstitutional communication from 1989⁹, the urban management enterprise proposes to the local council the rehousing of 20 residents from the block located on Jupiter 20, “where they have arrears or deteriorated the apartments, to the blocks on Arieşului.” The housing management company handled the precise allocation of apartments in the four blocks. Another inscription¹⁰, this time dated 1990, contains the request of an Arieşului resident for an apartment on a different street in V. Alecsandri district. Written over what amounts to a para-formal racial inquiry is “Postponed to verify

⁹ List of proposed decisions issued by the Sector of Systematization for the Executive Committee of the Popular Council of Baia Mare in 1989.

¹⁰ List of proposed decisions issued by the Sector of Systematization for the Executive Committee of the Popular Council of Baia Mare in 1990.

nationality. (Is he Roma or not?)". Both documents indicate that the area was an administrative racial project. Moreover, the decision in the mid-1980s to repair blocks on streets predominantly inhabited by Roma conveys the practice.

However, Arieşului proved inadequate for Roma needs. As one Roma woman described it, although the apartments were spacious and well equipped, residents were breeding pigs and horses, the latter instrumental in their work, particularly for collecting and selling scrap jars and plastics. After just a few years, they abandoned the blocks in Arieşului. According to an urban planner, the movement occurred two years after their resettlement. Next, according to the same planner, they moved to Craica at the end of the 1980s, and others followed. Other Roma from rural parts of the county arrived in Craica as well.

Moreover, blocks from different locations in the city, which Roma previously inhabited, were "recovered" through reparations in a project where state enterprises were attracted by the city housing company as principal financial backers in return for allocations for their workforce. Seeing that the project was stalling, in 1988, the municipality approved a 14 measures plan¹¹. The plan laid out details regarding funding requirements and concrete phases of repairment. The last point reiterated a previous provision stating that buildings will be secured with metal sheets to prevent abusive entry.

The data exhibits several aspects, of which two are at the forefront: the accumulation of arrears and the apparent misuse of apartments. Nationally, utility prices increased with the 1982 decree, compounding a substantial local problem in Baia Mare: accumulation of debts. This was a key issue for the whole city, as debates in the local administration show. The county ranked first at the national level on the matter. Although numerous tenant associations across the city were indebted, authorities pointed out Roma as the main culprits. A 1985 financial report on the reasons for dissolving the Melodieii 2 tenant association provides a clear example: Roma were unemployed and did not pay. Later, solutions devised for this problem led to cutting access to gas for whole blocks as pressure to pay debts.

Most Roma living in Hatvan in the 1970s practiced subsistence agriculture, were legally self-employed as brickmakers, transporters, tinsmiths, etc., or low-waged employees in public sanitation. Relocation to apartments deprived them of their primary means of livelihood, as the Roma interviewee pointed out. Subsistence agriculture was further criminalized in the 1980s, with numerous documents aiming at eliminating unauthorized constructions of animal pens and coops. In 1985, during one large-scale planned action¹² aiming at stopping

¹¹ Decision of the Executive Committee of the Popular Council of Baia Mare no. 179/March 24, 1989.

¹² Program of measures regarding grazing on the landfill of the Municipality of Baia Mare. Annex to Decision 288/1985, May 27.

inhabitants of V. Alecsandri from breeding pigs in the neighbouring landfill area, the local council required the presence of 50 people to load up confiscated animals. Hatvan-cum-V. Alecsandri was just one of the urban areas where these constructions were erected, with others discovered in the western area next to another new district.

However, the council also noticed that informal housing had been erected in the area. A 1980 report by the Sector of systematization, architecture, and control of discipline in construction offers insightful details. It starts by presenting the rationale: "Considering the indications of the superior party leadership regarding integration in the labour field, education through labour as well as the settlement of gypsy families, the sector of systematization proposes the urgent demolition of the following constructions occupied and constructed abusively by gypsies outside the construction perimeter of the city of Baia Mare, which constitute points of localization of some families from other localities, simultaneously being infection outbreaks."

The report continues by describing each situation for 39 constructions-cum-families. According to the introduction, authorities deemed all inhabitants to be Roma. Notes include names, nicknames, number of children, and parents' occupations, as well as judgments on parenting and labour integration and criminal records. More than half of the constructions were made of adobe, one of fibreboards, while no materials were mentioned for the rest. Concerning occupation, the inventory exhibits a variety: a farm worker and a pensioner, two convicts to labour, eight employed and eight unemployed. In several cases, the report underlines released convicts and their crimes. After listing the details of the 30 families, the report's authors mentioned other buildings located in the area and included in the expropriation plans. The buildings are "occupied by owners **or** gypsies for circa 1-15 years, with stable domicile in Baia Mare, proven through identity papers" (personal emphasis).

The report ends by adding information regarding their origins, "localities such as Zalău, Moftinu Mare, Băița de sub Codru, Asuajul de Sus, Ferneziu, etc." and that urgent demolition should be followed by "sending the gypsies to the localities where they came from." However, only 22 listed families were mentioned as not being domiciled in Baia Mare, and some of the rest are noted as explicitly being domiciled in the city. While we have no information on if and what actions followed after, this exposition is in line with the 1977 state directives related to Roma population management. The reasons behind the informal migration of Roma families to Hatvan can only be speculated, as they pertain to the conditions left behind and the opportunities and intentions of obtaining state-owned housing through existing formal employment channels. As mentioned in a previous section, Hungarian-speaking Roma from the neighbouring county of

Satu Mare obtained state-owned apartments in the Jupiter area. Going by Dehaan's description of the late 1930s urban planning of Nizhnii Novgorod, where "local industry also undermined city council authority by encouraging workers to ignore decrees forbidding the illegal construction and occupation of homes" (Dehaan 2013, 141) – unauthorized housing construction was present. According to the author, effective control of the phenomenon was complicated by the competing interests of state factories – workforce attraction and local councils – planning principles, in conjunction with the right to housing promoted by the state and claimed by the people.

As the nationally imposed austerity measures started in the early 1980s (Ban, 2014) and were heavily intensified throughout the decade, they are relevant in the analysis of the measures above. To attain financial independence from external creditors, the government enacted wartime restrictions related to household consumption of basic goods such as natural gas and electricity to ramp up export-oriented industrial production. Decree 240/1982 raised prices for electricity and gas for households, although it contained subsidy schemes for low-income families. At city level, electricity consumption for industrial production in 1976-1981 ranged between 303.000-357.000 kWh, after which it jumped to 518.895 kWh in 1982¹³. In this context, cost-cutting-oriented measures directly fed the perception that Roma housing "inadequacies" - in relation to the proletarianization project - were systemic costs that appeared as results of improper management by local administrators.

Most Roma interviewed in Baia Mare attest that their quality of life was higher during socialism than in postsocialism. According to Beck (1984:31), this perception was also exhibited in the second half of the 1970s compared to earlier conditions. However, Beck adds another aspect reported by the Roma: that in the same period, verbal abuse and mistreatment towards them increased.

Conclusions

This article presented the intersection of socialist urbanization processes and the proletarianization of the Roma, providing empirical data from the city of Baia Mare in Romania, to show how three conditions collided and supported ghettoization. First, national policies on Roma population management rendered them a social problem, not an ethnic category. Nomadic and semi-nomadic groups, while small in numbers, were presented as concerning and requiring intervention. Settled Roma populations were meant to be socially uplifted through proletarianization.

¹³ County archives consulted by project colleague Dana Solonean, p. 34.

Second, the socialist urbanization process and industrialization policies were directly connected. This modernization project aimed at increasing economic outputs and providing the required workforce with urban amenities. New socialist districts rose through a key instrument: expropriation and relocation of former house residents in apartments. Urban space was thus deemed a resource to be assembled in conjunction with industrialization. Such is the case of Hatvan, the neighbourhood where local Roma resided, which was transformed into Vasile Alecsandri.

Moreover, the territorial assimilation of Hatvan into the socialist assemblage was a double instrument, as it was also meant to control a criminalized population. Hatvan encompassed two preconditions: land to be incorporated as an asset in the economic growth machine through housing provision for workers and the population to be socially uplifted. However, while housing policies succeeded at reducing rampant inequalities, some were reiterated. The urban spatial planning of quality housing was apparent, as the first blocks designed for expropriated Roma were lower comfort designs.

Third, the 1980s national draconic austerity measures were imposed when the urbanization process was quite advanced. Hatvan was in the conversion process. Some of the Roma who had already relocated to the new blocks expressed spatial agency: deprived of their previous conditions, which allowed them to practice legal self-employment as craftworkers and subsistence agriculture, they accumulated arrears and devastated the apartments. The Roma households' social reproduction territory had been drastically mutated through relocation from houses and yards to small apartments. The movement from ground-level houses and yards to small apartments translated into a volumetric containment that cut access to subsistence practices. Food crops, animal husbandry, and hosting horses and carts for transportation were unfeasible – although some attempted to keep horses in apartments. Moreover, numerous unauthorized animal coops appeared in the neighbouring Craica area as forms of enacted spatial agency (Gotham, 2003).

In 1982, the city of Baia Mare ranked first in the country in arrears by tenant associations. The problem was widespread, although associations in V. Alecsandri fared the worst. Economic costs to a perceived cultural adjustment of Roma had been deemed unfeasible. To provide a solution through which to salvage the district, in a context where payroll deductions were impossible in the case of self-employed populations, county and city-level decision-makers came up with a plan: four new blocks with three or four-room apartments erected in the vicinity of, yet completely separated from V. Alecsandri district. These blocks were specifically designed to be heated with stoves to prevent accumulation or arrears. Authorities funnelled Roma residents from other areas of

the city to Arieşului. Unsatisfied with the new relocations, residents moved out in the late 1980s and settled in informal housing in Craica, a ghettoized area maintained to this day.

Finally, this article contributes new insights into how late socialist policies targeting Roma have been adapted both temporally and spatially by local administrations. Thus, it sheds light on the conditions under which neoliberal ghettoization processes unfolded. In this vein, the case of Baia Mare stands as a pivotal addition to the literature on postsocialist urbanization, as it demonstrates that post-1989 urban policies of Roma segregation are drawn on the contradictory approaches exhibited in late socialism: an ethnic group, a racial category, or a potential addition to the proletarian body. Expulsion was the postsocialist municipal authorities' primary response to this contradiction.

Funding disclosure

The research leading to these results has received funding from the NO Grants 2014-2021, under Project contract no. 22/2020 - Precarious labour and peripheral housing. The socio-economic practices of Romanian Roma in the context of changing industrial relations and uneven territorial development.

REFERENCES

- Achim, Viorel (2004). *The Roma in Romanian History*. Budapest: CEU Press.
- Amnesty International (2013) 'Pushed to the margins. Five stories of Roma forced evictions in Romania'. Available at: https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2016/11/eur390032013en_roemenie.pdf
- Anghel, Ionuț-Marian (2022). 'Governing the "Unmarked" Citizens: Romania's Roma in the Grip of Socialist Technologies of Power', *Nationalities Papers*, pp. 1–17.
- Barany, Zoltan (2000). 'Politics and the Roma in state-socialist Eastern Europe,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 33(4), pp. 421–437.
- Beck, Sam (1984). Ethnicity, Class and Public Policy: Tiganii/Gypsies in Socialist Romania. In *Papers for the V. Congress of Southeast European Studies, Belgrade*, edited by Kot Shangriladze and Erica Townsend, 19–38. Columbus (OH): Slavica Publishers.
- DeHaan, Heather D. (2013). 'Stalinist city planning: professionals, performance, and power.' Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- Gibbons, Andrea (2018). 'City of segregation: 100 years of struggle for housing in Los Angeles'. London/New York: Verso.
- Gotham, Kevin F. (2003). 'Toward an understanding of the spatiality of urban poverty: the urban poor as spatial actors,' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27(3), pp. 723–737.

- Lancione, Michele (2022). Inhabiting Dispossession in the Postsocialist City: Race, Class, and the Plan, in Bucharest, Romania. *Antipode*, 54: 1141-1165.
- Law, Ian (2012). *Red Racisms*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Majtényi, Balázs and Majtényi, György (2016). *A contemporary history of exclusion: the Roma issue in Hungary from 1945 to 2015*. Budapest; New York: CEU Press, Central European University Press.
- Marin, Manuela (2017). 'Romii și regimul comunist din România. Marginalizare, integrare și opoziție'. Vol. I. Cluj-Napoca: Editura MEGA
- Matei, Petre (2016). 'Romii' (en. The Roma) in Octavian Roske(ed), *Romania 1945-1989. Enciclopedia regimului comunist. Represiunea P-R*, Bucuresti: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului
- Petrehuș, Mircea (1982). 'Atitudini. Ilegalități care nu pot fi tolerate' (Attitudes. Illegalities which cannot be tolerated). *Pentru Socialism (For Socialism)*. Baia Mare.
- Plainer, Zsuzsa (2018). "Everybody Loved Each Other There": Roma Memories of the One-Time Cinka Panna Colony in Oradea and Its Liquidation during the Communist Times,' *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures*, 32(4), 964-987.
- Popovici, Veda (2020). "Residences, restitutions and resistance - A radical housing movement's understanding of postsocialist property redistribution". *City - Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action* Vol 24(1-2):1-15.
- Serviciul de Asistență Socială Baia Mare (2013). 'Dezbatere publică privind soluțiile de îmbunătățire a locuirii sociale în Baia Mare' (Public debate regarding the solutions to improve social housing in Baia Mare). Available at: <http://www.baiamare.ro/ro/Administratie/Administratia-Publica-Locala/Anunturi-si-comunicate/Anunt-din-29.08.2013--dezbatere-publica-privind-solutiile-de-imbunatatire-a-locuirii-sociale-in-Baia-Mare/>
- Van Baar, Huub (2017). 'Evictability and the Biopolitical Bordering of Europe: Evictability and the Biopolitical Bordering of Europe,' *Antipode*, 49(1), pp. 212-230.
- Vincze, Enikő (2013). 'Socio-Spatial Marginality of Roma as Form of Intersectional Injustice,' *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai-Sociologia*, (2), pp. 217-242.
- Vincze, Enikő (2017). 'The Ideology of Economic Liberalism and the Politics of Housing in Romania,' *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Studia Europaea*, 62(3), pp. 29-54.
- Vincze, Enikő (2019). Ghettoization: The Production of Marginal Spaces of Housing and the Reproduction of Racialized Labour. In: Vincze, E., Petrovici, N., Raț, C., Picker, G. (eds) *Racialized Labour in Romania. Neighborhoods, Communities, and Urban Marginality*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Vincze, Enikő (2022). *The Mixed Housing Regime in Romanian State Socialism, Eszmélet Special Issue*, edited by Attila Melegh "Money, Markets, Socialisms," Eszmélet Foundation, Budapest, 49-69
- White, William A. (2023). 'Segregation made them neighbors: An archaeology of racialization in Boise, Idaho.' University of Nebraska Press.
- Zamfir, George Iulian (2022) 'Countering Illegibility: A Brief History of Forced Evictions in Postsocialist Romania,' *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Sociologia*, 67(1), pp. 37-68.

