

From anti-segregation activism to recommendations regarding desegregation policies

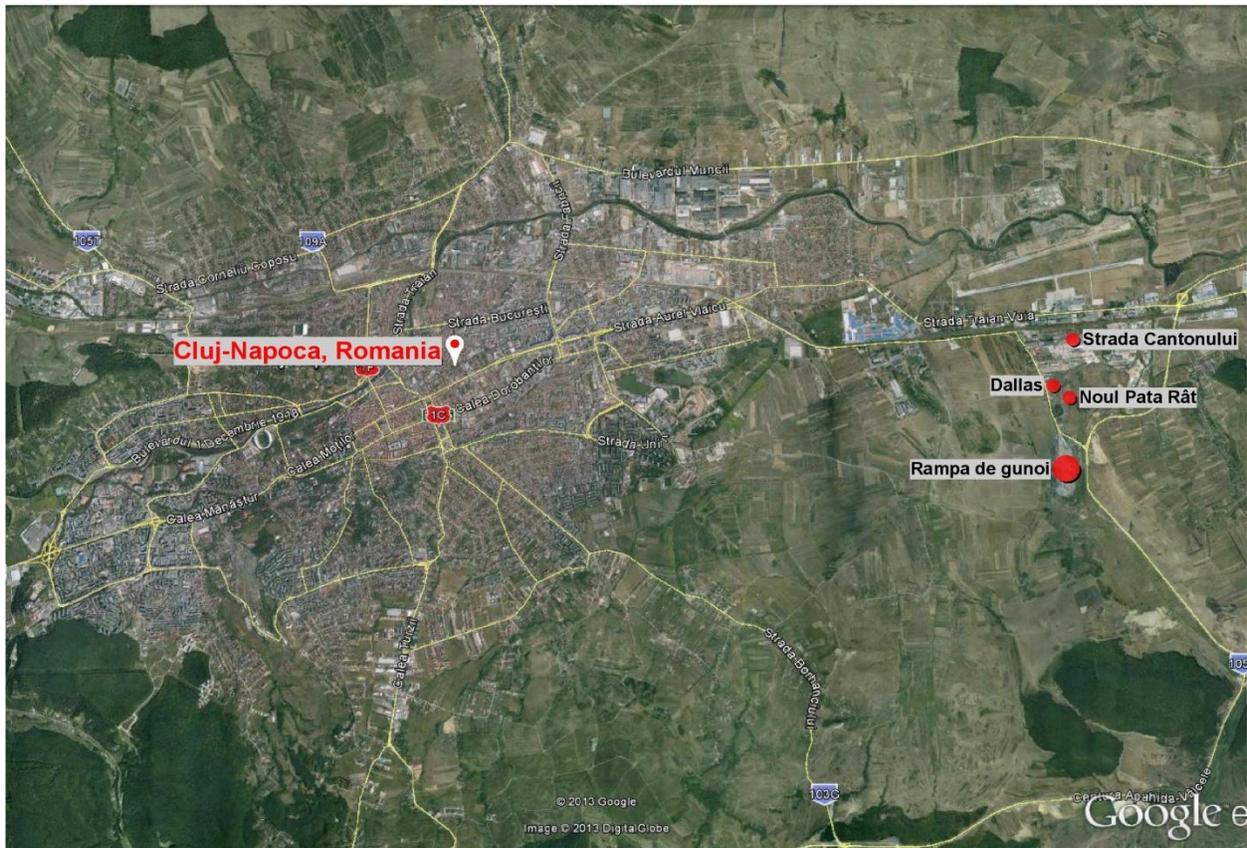
Enikő Vincze¹

The process of ethno-social ghettoization is a manifestation of social injustice and institutional racism, or of advanced marginality. In nowadays Romania it is generated and maintained by the neoliberal societal order that privileges the winners of the privatization and marketization of public goods. This process is inclusive for people, places, and societal areas that might be included into the political economy of capitalism, but it is exclusive towards those who are rendered “surplus” and “needless” from the point of view of the capital.

The ghettoization case of the Pata Rât area from Cluj-Napoca is not singular in Romania.² Still, it is among the instances of biggest complexity, entailing the effects of polluted environment, geographical isolation, socio-territorial segregation, housing deprivation, and cultural stigmatization. This complex problematic affects a large population -- circa 1500 persons, their vast majority (self-)identified as ethnic Roma. Together with several other instances of ghettoization or socio-territorial exclusion of marginalized Roma, the Pata Rât case demonstrates the severity of this phenomenon hardly addressed by the Romanian public policies at national or local levels.

¹ Professor of social anthropology at the Faculty of European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, president of Desire Foundation Cluj-Napoca and founding member of GLOC. eniko_vincze@euro.ubbcluj.ro

² Local and trans-local processes of social marginalization and territorial exclusion were identified by us in several Romanian urban and rural localities through the researches: Spatialization and racialization of social exclusion (www.sparex-ro.eu); Faces and causes of marginalization of the Roma in local settings (<https://cps.ceu.hu/research/roma-marginalization>)



Face-to-face with such an issue, our local [anti-segregation activism](#) started in April 2010 as a reaction to the City Hall’s plans to enlarge the existing “housing area” of Pata Rât (by those times including the improper buildings hosting more than 1000 persons in *Dallas*, *Rampa de gunoi* and *Strada Cantonului*) with some modular houses in *Noul Pata Rât* to host families expected to be evicted from the Coastei street. Forced eviction happened in December 2010.³

In the given context, Foundation Desire together with Association Amare Prhala, and starting with January 2011 the Working Group of Civil Society Organizations (gLOC), assumed a major transformative role: to put a neglected phenomenon, the socio-territorial exclusion and ghettoization of ethnic Roma, on the local and national agenda of Romanian public institutions, and to raise social awareness and shared responsibility among the majority population about the causes, manifestations and consequences of social marginalization and exclusion.

³ See on this the article by Adam Kullmann & Kalman Mizsei, *Repairing the Damage of a Roma Eviction*, March 17, 2014 (<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/repairing-damage-roma-eviction>).

Besides arguing for the need of integrated policy measures, we mobilized civic solidarity for the politicization and internationalization of the problem. For this reason, we explored the potential of several means of volunteer actions: petitions addressing local, national and international organizations and institutions; street protests and other manifestations in public spaces; the organization of public debates and other meetings, out of which the [Stocktaking visit to Pata Rât](#) of representatives of several international organizations in June 2011 had a decisive role; giving support to the Pata Rât communities in their legal fights; facilitating programs for children that increased their participation in the life of the city; sustaining the grassroots initiatives for self-organizing.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed by UNDP and the Cluj-Napoca City Hall in June 2011 opened up an important process. From the point of view of our involvement, this process culminated with the invitation to take part in the elaboration of the Cluj-Napoca Development strategy, in particular in designing proposals for social inclusion. Working closely with academics, civil society, local authorities (in particular the Social and Medical Assistance Department- DASM), the local UNDP team, and the representatives of the segregated communities from Pata-Rat, in February 2014 we submitted the 7-year strategy entitled: “Cluj 2020 – inclusive city” to the team working on the Development Strategy of Cluj-Napoca 2014-2020.

The social inclusion working group which elaborated the strategy was coordinated by Enikő Vincze and Florin Moisă. The analysis providing the rationale for the proposals we formulated relating to interventions in Pata rat was based on the results of the local social survey conducted in 2012 under the coordination of Cristina Raț within the preparatory phase of the UNDP intervention supported by OSI/MtM. In the preparation of the strategy, we used data from the local survey reflecting the composition and social structure of the population inhabiting Pata Rat, and the main risks and challenges these communities are facing⁴.

⁴ In particular, we used data from the local survey reflecting the ethnic composition of the population inhabiting the Pata Rat area and the percentage of those who moved there as a result of administrative measures – these data show that the risk among Roma to end up in Pata Rat is higher than the risk among the majority population and that the relocation measures to the Pata Rat administered by authorities are targeting ethnic Roma; age distribution of the Pata Rat population, which displays the same statistical trend of ethnic Roma across the city (higher percentage of youth, lower percentage of people above the age of 60 that also reflects lower life expectancy among Roma); the school education level of persons above the age of 14, which exhibits that on an overall the percentage of those with gymnasium education is pretty high however there exist big differences among the four communities, as there are

Very briefly put, we proposed to the municipality a vision based on the principles of inclusive and cohesive development that assured the participation of all citizens to decision-making on local development priorities and their budgeting. Our group defined five major strategic directions on which the development of the city should act on in the next 7 years in order to become inclusive:

- ♦ economic inclusion (supporting social economy initiatives; promoting the employment of people belonging to vulnerable groups, among them Roma);
- ♦ facilitating the access of disadvantaged groups to public services (integrated community centers; network of inclusive schools; social housing);
- ♦ integrated specialized services for vulnerable groups (among them marginalized ethnic Roma);
- ♦ the socio-territorial inclusion of marginalized communities from the Pata Rât area
- ♦ inclusive and participatory mechanisms and instruments (Inclusion and Social Economy Unit; Social Observatory; Forms of participation of vulnerable groups on local government; Local Working Group for Roma Inclusion; Integrated system for signaling, preventing and managing cases of social marginalization).

The Inclusion and Social Economy Unit would have the role of coordinating all the proposed participatory mechanisms and integrated social inclusion measures targeting the city of Cluj-Napoca. By covering economic inclusion, the assurance of the accessibility of public services and social services to all in all domains of life (education, housing, employment, health care, social benefits), and the Pata Rat desegregation plan, these institutions would act across the whole administrative apparatus of the City Hall. Within the Inclusion and Social Economy Unit, the Social Observatory would assure that social inclusion policies and measures will be elaborated, implemented and monitored on the base of evidence. As such it will collect, map and analyze data on social inclusion needs, but also on effective policy measures and existing social services. The Inclusion and Social Economy Unit would also promote and sustain the creation and functioning of the Working Group for Roma Inclusion, an initiative expected to be

differences among them also in what regards employment status and work for a source of living on the landfill; the low number of families from Pata Rat who benefit of the guaranteed minimum income or other social benefits; the occurrence of undocumentedness and of cases in which people have identity documents without address (a form of homelessness), phenomena that dispossess them of their full citizenship status and leads to the fact that especially people from the landfill live like refugees without any rights and protection.

implemented at local level by the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion as a guarantee for implementing it at local level.

The Strategic direction of the integrated plan for the socio-territorial inclusion of marginalized communities from the Pata Rât area includes three major programs: integrated measures for the Pata Rât communities; capacity-building of municipality in order to implement the desegregation plan; and campaigns for eliminating prejudices and discrimination based on social status and ethnicity.

These are some of the measures of the proposed integrated program we defined:

- ♦ housing relocation plan in cooperation with other municipalities implemented as a Local Council decision through social housing and other sustaining measures;
- ♦ social economy units, among them ones specialized on construction work as tool for job creation, economic empowerment and as well as for the participation of Pata Rât people in the desegregation process and in the integrated housing program;
- ♦ socio-educational, socio-occupational, counseling etc services provided to relocated families in order to assure the sustainability of relocation;
- ♦ regeneration measures in Pata Rât (as far as the area remains an industrial area, the total ecologization of the old landfill is problematic, and the improvement of the real estate value of the land is hardly possible, these measures will be temporary, but they are needed in order to enhance people's housing conditions, their connectedness to the city by schooling, employment and other activities, their access to services and goods, their security and as well as their capacity of taking part on the related decision-making processes).

In our view, the creation of a Local Action Group assuring the participation of people targeted by the desegregation plan, and the formation of the Inclusion and Social Economy Unit within the City Hall (defined by us as the crucial institutional mechanism for social inclusion policies) are critical. The establishment of both institutions, and their cooperation, must be formally endorsed by Local Council decisions as proof of a political commitment towards an inclusive local development strategy. Members of the local UNDP local team should also have a representative in this Local Action Group especially since in the past one and a half year they

made important steps in mediating between authorities and communities, and towards introducing community members to meetings with City Hall representatives.

Recognizing the merits of this work, now would be the time for setting up this larger Local Action Group with the participation of more actors, which would bring more transparency into the process and could empower communities by bringing them into decision-making positions. The UNDP local team is preparing the creation of a social inclusion unit within the Cluj Metropolitan Area Association focusing on the Pata Rat desegregation plan, which could administer more flexibly some of the externally funded projects used for this purpose. It is expected that this NGO structure, and the proposed Inclusion and Social Economy Unit and in particular the Local Action Group endowed with administrative power, would complete and mutually support each other in this process.

The local public/social policies responding to the complex problematic of socio-territorial exclusion generated by the larger Romanian economic, political and legislative environment might at the best tackle some effects of social exclusion. In order to avoid the reproduction of advanced marginality, behind the local scene, there would be a need for changing macro-economic policies, the politics of redistribution, legislation vis-à-vis forced evictions, the politics of social housing and the public housing fund. Nevertheless, within the existing frames, a municipality like Cluj-Napoca should find resources for creating opportunities and for making them accessible to all of its citizens, including the socially disadvantaged ones. Further on, it should support by affirmative measures their economic empowerment and participation on decision-making, and - while implementing desegregation measures regarding the Pata Rât area - it should avoid further forced evictions or other administrative measures leading to marginalization.

In this sense, the way in which public authorities will handle the recent case of families living in Stephenson street¹⁵ in Cluj will be telling: until now the families have received summons in the name of the Local Police (a special direction of the City Hall) to demolish their informal constructions or they will be demolished by authorities. Recent civic initiatives⁵

⁵ The letter regarding the social consequences of a possible forced eviction from Stephenson nr. 15 and the demand for public information regarding decisions about demolitions were submitted to the City Hall and Local Council on

attracted attention towards the social consequences of the demolitions, warning authorities about the need to avoid repeating the Coastei case. They suggested instead the start of a genuine consultation with the affected people on alternative solutions for avoiding forced evictions altogether.

At the time of this writing, the group of specialists elaborating the social inclusion proposal for the Cluj development strategy awaits the results of this planning process, and signs of a real political and institutional commitment of the City Hall and of the Local Council towards the integrated desegregation measures of the Pata Rat area. The positive steps taken until now by the municipality were of technical matter, responding to some urgent needs, and elaborating the first small projects that promise starting the relocation-related course of action. Besides the Pata Rat related inclusion measures, broader institutional mechanisms would be needed to be put in place in order to structurally change ways in which the development priorities of the city are defined and ensure that the social housing and urban regeneration plans are considering the perspective of the marginalized.

Meanwhile, a regional network has also been created: Recognizing the need for a broader supportive alliance, in April 2014 the Foundation Desire from Cluj, Foundation Ruhama from Oradea, Association Equal Opportunities from Zalău, the Humanitarian Association Together for Them from Baia Mare, the Community Association of Roma from Coastei from Cluj, and the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, and the Faculty for European Studies at the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, created the **North-Vest civic and academic Network** for the participation of marginalized Roma communities in the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of local public policies for inclusive development. Details could be found here: <http://www.desire-ro.eu/?p=774>.

the 27th of March 2014 by a group of activists and affected inhabitants. These are accessible in Romanian language here: < <http://www.desire-ro.eu/?p=725>>.