

Local engagement for Roma inclusion

Locality study Cluj-Napoca (Romania), 2016

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1. Executive summary

The locality study tells the story of conceiving and implementing an action-based participatory needs assessment and a local project plan in the context of Cluj-Napoca related to the policy domain of housing. In terms of fundamental rights, the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion formed within the LERI research in this city was committed to raising awareness about the accountability of the public authorities regarding the assurance of housing rights to marginalised persons in accordance with the related provisions of the European Social Charter 1996 (Part II, Art. 31).

Both the needs assessment and the LERI Local Project Implementation Plan (hereinafter LERI LPP) targeted problems faced by the impoverished Roma families living in the disadvantaged Pata Rât neighbourhood of the city (in particular in three of its sub-areas, i.e. the Dallas settlement, Cantonului Street and the modular housing area), and in the more centrally placed Stephenson Street. The activities focused on the housing policies of the local public administration that had not meet the housing needs of these communities and consequently had exclusionary effects over the past two decades. The main results of the LERI research in Cluj-Napoca were the formation of the Local Action Group (LAG) for Housing Inclusion, and its proposals for the amending of the social housing allotment criteria that would serve the needs of the marginalised. Some of these proposals were approved by the Local Council, and this was a good start in making social housing policies more inclusive. However, the social housing allotment system still includes discriminatory criteria that exclude the marginalized from access to social housing. The Group also drew up and submitted to City Hall four area documents highlighting the formation and current conditions of the respective territories, and two resource documents that could be used by local public administration in order to provide social housing in other parts of the city and/or legalise informal housing, to improve the housing infrastructure in these spaces and/or prevent forced evictions as an instrument of social inclusion. Even if the City Hall only acknowledged the receipt of these proposals, the publication of these documents would be crucial, because they might be used as an awareness raising and solution-defining model in other localities too.

Keywords/Tags: action-based participatory research, urban disadvantaged housing areas, social housing for the marginalised, legalisation of informal settlements, prevention of forced eviction.

2. Description of the local context

Introduction to the disadvantaged residential areas inhabited mostly by impoverished Roma – the focus of LERI

The city of Cluj-Napoca is the administrative centre of Cluj County and hosts the Prefecture and County Council. It is the economically strongest and most competitive area of the north-west development region in Romania. The Cluj-

Napoca Development Strategy 2014–2020¹ states that Cluj-Napoca has the highest level of development relative to the five localities that it is compared to in this document (Timișoara, Brasov, Iași, Constanța and Sibiu) and even at national level, among all the growth poles of Romania. The analysis behind the strategy considered indicators of development such as human capital, health, demographics and material assets (including housing). Cluj-Napoca is supposed to be an example of a 'competitive city' in its surroundings, named the Cluj Metropolitan Area.² It was designated as one of Romania's growth poles by government Decision (HG 998/2008).

The local housing market and housing fund is strongly influenced by national politics. Current trends from this domain include a public housing fund below 2 %, which is an effect of housing policies embodied in Governmental Decree no. 61/1990 and Law 112/1995 (according to which sitting tenants of state and state enterprise housing can purchase those units), and Law 10/2001 and Law 165/2013 regarding measures of restitution of buildings nationalised during communism. But the small percentage of public housing as a proportion of the whole housing fund is also a result of the state's withdrawal from the role of providing homes, i.e. a very low level of public investment into social housing.

In Cluj-Napoca this is fulfilled by the elaboration and implementation of a social housing allocation system that does not respond to the needs of the marginalised or of people living in extreme poverty: the criteria for attributing social homes from the public stock exclude as 'non-eligible' people without an income and persons whose sources of income are linked to their rights to social benefits – neither are considered aspects that warrant scores for social housing eligible. Housing inequalities not only stem from the privatisation of housing stock, but also from the marketisation and financialization of the domain, trends that are linked in their turn to the development of the real estate business and the related bank credit system.³

The city is envisioned to be a university city with a gentrified centre and suburban residential areas built by private developers; a city which holds several cultural festivals, as a multi-ethnic setting based on the Romanian–Hungarian agreement on multiculturalism, and as a locality that has high potential to attract foreign investors. This latter potential is framed, for example, in the already quoted document *Competitive cities*: "Within Romania, only a handful of cities (e.g., București, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, or Iași) have managed to encourage

¹ Development Strategy of Cluj-Napoca 2014-2020 (*Strategia de Dezvoltare a Municipiului Cluj-Napoca 2014-2020*), p. 242 - available at <http://cmpg.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/strategie-cluj-napoca-2014-2020.pdf>

² The document *Competitive cities, Reshaping the economic geography of Romania* affirms: "Cities like București, Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Constanța, and others are expected to expand their economic mass to include adjacent areas" (Ionescu-Heroiu, Marcel; Burduja, Sebastian Ioan; Sandu, Dumitru; Cojocaru, Stefan; Blankespoor, Brian; Iorga, Elena; Moretti, Enrico; Moldovan, Ciprian; Man, Titus; Rus, Raularian; van der Weide, Roy. 2013. *Full report. Romania regional development program*. Washington DC: World Bank Group. p. 30. - available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/664361468093270286/Full-report>).

³ See more on this in Vincze, E. (2013), 'Socio-Spatial Marginality of Roma as Form of Intersectional Injustice', *Studia UBB Sociologia*, 58(2): 217-243.

and sustain the growth of local innovation sectors. These cities are in a competition (internally, but also globally) for the country's brightest people."⁴

Local authorities and a significant proportion of civil society organisations are strongly focused on winning the 'European Cultural Capital 2021' title. Although this ambition holds prestige for the city on a European level, it entails the risk of culturalising social problems. The final Application of Cluj-Napoca Candidate city for the title European Capital of Culture 2021 opens with a quote of the city's mayor: "Cultura este calea noastră spre vindecare, conectare și dezvoltare în ipostaza de comunitate, de oraș, de Europa" (Culture is our path for healing, connecting and development as community, as city, as Europe). Otherwise, the fundamental vision of the application is based on the idea that "culture" brings everybody together, "culture is the strongest story that we can tell together" (p. 5) and in the "new paradigm of culture" promoted in this vision culture is defined as "the engine of social transformation and urban regeneration" (p.8).⁵ One needs to add that this phenomenon of culturalising social problems is not a particular feature of Cluj-Napoca, but it is an element of the global scene of contemporary capitalism that - while produces huge social inequalities - proposes inadequate, like "cultural" solutions to handle them. One may find analysis about this trend in Mooney, G. (2004)⁶: "flagship cultural events can do little but gloss over and divert attention away from the major structural problems which characterize many ex-industrial cities" (p.327). The risk of culturalisation of social problems consists in: (1) suggesting that social inequalities or the oppression of disadvantaged minorities are resulting from supposed cultural differences between the later and the ruling classes; (2) promoting that cultural programs might solve the problems of disadvantaged minorities rooted in a political economy structurally producing inequalities; (3) hiding socio-economic inequalities and injustices in the backstage of cultural events.

Out of the city's 324,576 inhabitants, 1 % (3,273 persons) declared themselves to be ethnic Roma.⁷ One of the most visible phenomenon that speaks to the marginalisation of impoverished Roma in Cluj is the ghettoisation of the Pata Rât area near the city's landfill, and the existence of other, more centrally placed groups of families with a Roma background who face housing insecurity and the risk of eviction (among them, those on Stephenson Street). The ghettoisation of the Pata Rât area in Cluj-Napoca is not unique in Romania. Still, it is a very complex case (cumulating the effects of a polluted environment, geographical isolation, socio-territorial segregation, housing deprivation and cultural stigmatisation) that affects a large population of circa 1,500 persons, the vast majority of whom (self) identify as ethnic Roma.

⁴ Ionescu-Heroiu, Marcel; Burduja, Sebastian Ioan; Sandu, Dumitru; Cojocar, Stefan; Blankespoor, Brian; Iorga, Elena; Moretti, Enrico; Moldovan, Ciprian; Man, Titus; Rus, Raularian; van der Weide, Roy. 2013. Full report. Romania regional development program. Washington DC: World Bank Group. pp. xxi-xxii - available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/664361468093270286/Full-report>.

⁵ The Application is available here - <http://www.clujnapoca2021.ro/en/home.html> - accessed 31/08/2016

⁶ Mooney, G (2004): 'Cultural Policy as Urban Transformation? Critical Reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990', Local Economy, Vol. 19, No. 4, 327-340.

⁷ Institutul Național de Statistică: Recensământul populației și al locuințelor, 2011, <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/> (Hereinafter *2011 Census*).

Pata Rât's four 'communities' have diverse histories and, besides housing deprivation and insecurity, are all struggling, to different degrees, to access quality (non-segregated) education, decent jobs, adequate healthcare and public participation. The local public administration played a role in the formation of this semi-informal residential area by explicitly or tacitly redirecting persons and families evicted from other parts of the city here, refusing to publicly acknowledge its existence, refusing to provide resources for its infrastructural development, and failing to implement actions towards people's reconnection to the city via raising their accessibility to the municipal social housing stock. This process is illustrated by the series of decisions by local public administration that resulted in the transformation of an area within Pata Rât formerly acknowledged as an industrial zone, into a housing area in 2010, and in the construction of 10 modular houses in this location, which proved to be the 'social homes' provided for the 76 families evicted from Coastei Street in December 2010.

Earlier, in the 2000s, people evicted from several other neighbourhoods (Avram Iancu Street, Calea Turzii, Albac Street, Kővári Street, Byron Street, temporary shelters for civic protection, etc.) were directed towards Cantonului Street (in the Pata Rât area) through the assistance of local public administration and were allowed to settle here via several administrative initiatives, among them:

- the partnership agreements between the City Hall of Cluj-Napoca and Ecce Homo Organisation in 2004 and 2005 regarding the setting up of 50 so-called termopan houses;
- Authorisation 2046/2003 for constructing 'homes with social character' issued by City Hall at the request of the local council;
- Local Council Decision no. 51 from 22 of February 2005 about the taking over of social homes from Cantonului Street donated by the Foundation for Helping the Family into the 'housing circuit' of the municipality;
- decisions (nos. 39180/482/01.06.2005, 68064/482/02.10.2006, 38701/482/03.06.2008) were issued by City Hall in which they proposed to think about the possibility to build a private shelter on Cantonului street from own resources, as a temporary solution, until the City Hall finds another solution for the lack of housing.

Furthermore, the local public administration did not take any affirmative measures on behalf of people living in precarious housing conditions and/or hazardous areas, such as those who lived in Pata Rât. However, legislation for combating discrimination provides that positive measures conceived to protect disadvantaged groups are permitted and are not discriminatory against the rest of the population (Governmental Ordinance no. 137/2000 regarding combating and sanctioning all forms of discrimination).⁸

⁸ This information was collected by local activists and researchers since 2010, including the author of this paper, due to their involvement into different ongoing processes (including court cases) during which they could learn not only about people's experiences but also about administrative acts affecting people's life. Within the LERI LP the LERI local team made a synthesis of these documents and presented them as a project outcome to the City Hall as documents on the urban areas on which LERI was referring to in its activities discussed in section 3 of this paper.

Since 2010, important actors of local civic activism⁹ – by means of street protests, petitions, supporting legal actions against forced evictions, research, policy recommendations, programmes for children, community support and advocacy to nearby authorities – managed to put the challenge of socio-territorial desegregation in the Pata Rât area on the local public agenda. The programmes for children raised awareness about how residential segregation leads to school segregation, and about the need to create spaces and occasions where children from marginalised urban areas might connect with the rest of the city and share experiences with children from other ethnic backgrounds or belonging to more privileged social classes.¹⁰

The anti-ghettoisation activist actions run from 2010 onwards in Cluj-Napoca were an important factor in attracting international organisations' attention towards Pata Rât. The first most prominent event organised by local activists was the 'stocktaking visit' in Pata Rât (10 June 2011) in which representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Amnesty International, the European Rights Centre, the European Commission and Open Society Foundations participated alongside representatives of political parties, national and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and state agencies and, last but not least, the residents of the modular houses, of the Dallas settlement and of Cantonului Street.

Between 2012 and 2013, a technical assistance project of the UNDP garnered the support of City Hall.¹¹ The UNDP project, started in 2012, was a good frame in which to conduct a needs assessment survey, to run community development that mostly focused on the identification of the urgent and long-term needs of marginalised communities in Pata Rât, and to elaborate the 'Integrated Housing Project Package for Desegregation and Social Inclusion of Marginalised People' with a special focus on people currently living in the Pata Rât area of Cluj. The latter was submitted to the Regional Operative Programme in April 2013, and had three project components out of which, unfortunately, only one obtained funding. The three project components were the following: 'Housing for desegregation and social inclusion of disadvantaged families in Cluj City with a special focus on the communities living in Pata Rât Area'; 'Recycling business facility for small and medium enterprises (SME-s) in Cluj Napoca Metropolitan Area'; 'Integrated services for social inclusion of the highly disadvantaged communities in Cluj City with a special focus on the communities living in Pata Rât area'. Out of these project proposals, the first one targeted the rehabilitation and modernization of three old, empty public buildings to transform them into apartments for social homes (refurbish 11 apartments) - this was declared ineligible since it did not request the minimum budget required by the project call. The third project aimed at the rehabilitation, extension, modernization and

⁹ Association Amare Phrala and Desire Foundation, who in 2011 initiated the creation of gLOC (*Grupul de Lucru al Organizațiilor Civice*, Working Group of Civil Society Organizations), which was joined later by the Community Association of Roma from Coastei, established in 2012, with the support of the European Roma Rights Centre as a registered organization acting on behalf of the evicted Coastei community.

¹⁰ ROMEDIN - Education for social justice and inclusion, 2014-2016 (http://www.desire-ro.eu/?page_id=968).

¹¹ 'Preparatory Phase for Model Project: Making the Most of EU Funds for Sustainable Housing and Inclusion of Disadvantaged Roma (explicitly but not exclusively targeted) in Cluj Metropolitan Area', financed by Open Society Institute, Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma, http://www.undp.ro/projects.php?project_id=68

equipping of one empty building and transforming it into a social inclusion centre that included residential services - this proposal eventually could not be approved because it turned out that the building was not in the property of the municipality. The second project component was the only successful one, and as a result of this, an industrial hall was constructed in Pata Rât close to the landfill, which gives space for a company that created 10 jobs for persons from the disadvantaged groups settled in the area.

All of the above projects focused on infrastructural development and the recognition of it gave impetus to new local development directions. A new project proposal was prepared in 2013 by the former UNDP project team and Cluj-Napoca City Hall to the 'EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014' ('Social interventions for desegregation and social inclusion of vulnerable groups in the Cluj Metropolitan Area, including the disadvantaged Roma' project). As a predefined Norwegian project, launched with a budget of over €2 million, it was designed to target human capacity development and the provision of soft measures. Branded as 'the Pata Cluj project', at the time of writing this study it was still being run by the *Cluj Metropolitan Area Intercommunity Development Association* (hereinafter ADI ZMC) in partnership with Foundation Altart, the Community Association of Roma from Coastei, and Habitat for Humanity Romania. The Pata Cluj project website states: "The project proposes to develop an integrated process of local development through the assurance of social and human interventions needed to sustain the sustainability and efficiency of infrastructural development for social housing initiated by Cluj-Napoca City Hall".¹² Since the key issue of Cluj-Napoca LERI research is housing exclusion, this is a relevant information for understanding the local circumstances in what regards the local housing-related initiatives at the time of the implementation of LERI and the relationship between them.

The research started with the aim of increasing the community's participation in mainstream society; preparing the community for desegregation and improvement of the housing situation; enhancing access to education, creative development and vocational qualifications; improving access to healthcare services; improving the employment situation; increasing access to social services; and improving community security.¹³ In the press release from 5 February 2015 that marked the official LERI launch, the manager of the LERI local team declared that due to "the planned interventions at social, educational, cultural and employment level ... at the end of the second year the community members will be better prepared for housing projects and for desegregation projects that we would like to continue with these interventions."¹⁴ At the frequently asked questions of the Pata Cluj website, under the question "What kind of project is the Pata Cluj project?", the latter is defined as "an integrated project of social intervention based on restorative practices".¹⁵ In the autumn of 2015, the Norwegian funds for combating poverty in Romania allocated an additional €1 million to the Pata Cluj project to build 32 social apartments in

¹² <http://patacluj.ro/nevoia-pentru-pata-cluj/>, accessed 31.08.2016

¹³ More information about the project is available here - <http://www.patacluj.ro/welcome/>, accessed 24.06.2015.

¹⁴ Press release *Lansarea Pata-Cluj, un proiect integrat de incluziune a romilor din Pata Rât. Cum se va schimba viața comunității marginalizate în doi ani?*, published on the project's website, accessed 14.04.2015.

¹⁵ http://patacluj.ro/intrebari_frecvente/ - accessed 31.08.2016

Cluj-Napoca and in the Cluj Metropolitan Area.¹⁶ The yet-to-be-built apartments will become the property of the project promoter, an NGO with a public utility.

All the local initiatives listed above focus on development of the local housing stock and/or on community building. However, none of them is aimed at providing inputs for the improvement of local social housing policies or to develop the public housing fund. Consequently, these local development projects still left room for further actions and local change. Even the Pata Cluj project has not reduced the relevance of the planned LERI activities in the locality.

In September 2015, as part of the Development Strategy of Cluj-Napoca 2014–2020,¹⁷ the local council adopted proposals related to social inclusion under the chapter 'Cluj 2020 – inclusive city'.¹⁸ The proposals of the latter were structured around five strategic directions: economic inclusion (supporting social economy initiatives and promoting the employment of people belonging to vulnerable groups); facilitating the access of disadvantaged groups to public services (integrated community centres, a network of inclusive schools and social housing); integrated specialised services for vulnerable groups; the socio-territorial inclusion of marginalised communities from the Pata Rât area; and inclusive and participatory mechanisms and instruments.

Therefore the proposals of the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion (discussed in detail in Section 3 of this report) could be presented during the lifetime of the LERI LPP implementation (October 2015–February 2016) as a potential contribution to the operationalisation of some of the strategic directions defined in the Cluj-Napoca Development Strategy 2014–2020.

Local stakeholders as initially identified

The LERI field expert identified during the preparatory phase the major local stakeholders in Cluj-Napoca as presented below. The list completed in 2014 included all the potential stakeholders that the LERI field expert could identify at the moment at local level, but eventually not all of them were directly involved into the LERI research.¹⁹

Primary stakeholders:

- 'representatives' of other marginalised Roma communities (people living in Cantonului Street and on Stephenson Street, who could mediate the communication between authorities and communities);
- the Community Association of Roma from Coastei (a grass-roots organisation formed by people evicted from Coastei Street and relocated to Pata Rat);

¹⁶ On the redesigned platform of the website, one might read today that the list of Project Objectives under objective no. 9 "Desegregation and housing" was completed with information regarding the new housing component (<http://patacluj.ro/temele-proiectului/> - accessed 31.08.2016).

¹⁷ Accessible here - <http://www.primariaclujnapoca.ro/userfiles/files/strategia2015.pdf>

¹⁸ This chapter was created in the Fall of 2013 by a group of academics, NGO people, and civil servants coordinated by Enikő Vincze and Florin Moisă. It is available here - <http://cmpg.ro/?p=244>

¹⁹ The potential stakeholders were identified according to the requirements of the *Stakeholders Engagement Analysis Report. LERI Project - EU Agency for Fundamental Rights*. See about this also in footnote 24.

- the Pro Roma Foundation (a Netherlands-based humanitarian organisation providing support for people from Dallas/Pata Rât over the past two decades);
- the Desire Foundation (a civil society organisation involved into anti-ghettoisation activism and activism for social and housing justice since 2010);
- Romano Suno – Roma Student Association, and the Resource Centre for Roma Communities (CRCR), a non-governmental organisation created with the aim to support Roma communities;
- a county council Roma expert (a consultative position created in line with the county council under the national strategy for Roma);
- high-level representatives of City Hall, and elected local councillors as 'key stakeholders' (decision-makers in matters related to social housing);
- the north-west regional bureau of the National Agency for Roma (ANR N-V), a government organisation responsible for monitoring the national strategy for Roma at regional level;
- the Department of Social and Medical Assistance (DASM) of City Hall (the directorate that also runs social inclusion projects, and is involved into matters regarding child protection, allocation of social benefits to the marginalised persons, providing support for evicted people and homeless);
- academics/researchers from Babeş-Bolyai University (involved in the former years into researches on the social exclusion of the Roma).

Secondary stakeholders:

- the Roma Party (the major political party representing Roma);
- the local police (the unit functioning under City Hall that administers evictions, among other functions);
- the urbanism department of City Hall (the unit under City Hall that has relevance from the perspective of the development of urban residential areas).

'Low stakeholders':

- Roma school mediators, a Roma school inspector, and the County School Inspectorate (with responsibilities for ensuring marginalised Roma children access a school education).²⁰

The initially foreseen barriers for these potential stakeholders were related to the question of how and to what extent they would want to get involved in the LERI research, and to the dilemma of the cooperation between stakeholders whose relationships in real life are marked by unequal power relations.

During the implementation phase of the local activities plan, a representative of ADI ZMC was included as a consultant in the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion (for the role and tasks of this action group, see next sections, in

²⁰ The classification of stakeholders into these categories used the typology provided by FRA ('key' and 'primary': whose interests are aligned with those of the LERI research; 'secondary': having an impact on the addressed issues, but not necessarily supportive; 'low': not directly connected to the proposed local plans).

particular 3.C.3.3.) In the autumn of 2015, the ADI ZMC's local project, being run in Pata Rât, extended its actions to include a housing component.²¹

At the beginning of the needs assessment process the LERI local team was formed only by the two LERI field experts (Enikő Vincze as primary field expert and Simona Ciotlăuș as a second field expert). In a next step two academic co-researchers were formally introduced into the LERI local team during the second part of the needs assessment phase. In October 2015 (when the local initiative plan was started to be implemented in Cluj-Napoca and when more co-researchers could have been co-opted into the LERI local team), the PAR team could be constituted. It included all the field experts and co-researchers as core members of the to-be-constituted Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion, which, besides the PAR team members also included representatives of institutional stakeholders invited as consultants. Therefore, one may say that the "LERI local team" was actually not an organizational structure, but a process of organizational development undergoing during the lifetime of the LERI research.

Resources and barriers identified before the needs assessment

As part of the preparatory phase of the LERI research (between October 2013 and January 2015), the local institutional context for counteracting housing exclusion with policy measures seemed to be very promising. There were great expectations for anti-ghettoisation and pro-desegregation civic activism, as well as the UNDP technical assistance project. There were also high expectations for the broad local network tasked with developing an integrated housing programme for the impoverished Roma living in the Pata Rât area, and for the elaboration of the social inclusion chapter for the Development Strategy of Cluj-Napoca 2014–2020. The political will seemed to be there for developing technical knowledge, initiating institutional change and providing funds on behalf of these interventions.

However, a little later, one could observe that Cluj-Napoca City Hall transferred responsibility for the social inclusion of marginalised Roma communities to ADI ZMC. The Cluj-Napoca Development Strategy 2014-2020 proposed the creation of a social inclusion unit within the City Hall. According to this proposal this could have been the institutional unit coordinating integrated social inclusion measures across different departments (directorates of social and medical assistance, of patrimony, of urbanism, of local police, of school education and culture etc.) to be adopted by Local Council decisions. Up until now, this unit was not created. Parallel to this, the management team of Pata Cluj project implemented by ADI ZMC presented another concept about the institutional needs supporting the desegregation plan of Pata Rât, which affirmed: "In this context the Association for Inter-communitarian Development of the Cluj Metropolitan Area is the optimal body to carry out the De-segregation/resettlement Action Plan of Pata Rat, hosting the Center for Coordination of Social Inclusion in Cluj Metropolitan Area. The CCSI-CMA will be responsible for coordination of and partly caring out the 'soft' measures needed for the social inclusion of highly disadvantaged

²¹ See footnote 20.

families from Pata Rat."²² As a matter of fact, by mid-2015, when the LERI LP was developed, there were no initiatives coming from City Hall or from the local council with regard to the elaboration of action plans for implementing the broad strategic directions for the desegregation of the Pata Rât area, or for developing the social housing stock of the municipality in a way that would facilitate access for the most marginalised.

Under these conditions, the LERI local intervention (with, at its core, the proposal regarding the amending of the social housing allocation criteria) was not equally welcomed by every section of the City Hall. As elsewhere, Cluj-Napoca's local public administration institutions are not homogeneous and not every decision-maker or person holding high executive functions is equally committed to addressing issues of social exclusion. The fact that the proposals of the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion for amending the social housing allocation criteria were supported more strongly by some decision-makers while others were unenthusiastic was reflected in the discussions at the public meeting of the local council on 16 December 2015. At the end of these debates the vice mayor, who was at the same time the president of the local council's housing committee, concluded:

*"From the multiple proposals that you approached us with, some did not fulfil the votes of the majority, but some other proposals were voted in. This is a step forward, this was a solution of compromise, which is, though, a revision in the sense of your proposals."*²³

Main issues identified by the needs assessment and the priorities put under the focus of LERI

The LERI research started in Cluj with the needs assessment that focused on the situation of marginalised Roma communities, and consequently identified the core priorities and needs, as perceived by the communities' members. It was conducted between February and June 2015 as a set of actions carried out in the field, which provided the bases for the final LERI LPP implemented between October 2015 and February 2016. Because the designated approach was participatory action research (PAR), the LERI local team aimed to ensure the research's participatory character from the very beginning, when defining particular research topics and needs to be addressed. That is why the LERI local team took the problems people were facing and discussed them during the needs assessment phase very seriously. During the LERI needs assessment phase (March–June 2015), people from the targeted disadvantaged housing areas in Cluj-Napoca all faced severe risks stemming from their housing insecurity. By the time the needs assessment was conducted in this city, the following specific events had taken place in the five targeted communities, which could be used as entry points into the field:

²² Available here - <http://localdevelopmentforinclusion.org/assets/05-draft-outline-to-the-de-segregation-and-social-inclusion-action-plan-for-pata-rat-2014-2023.pdf>, accessed 31/08.2016.

²³ Fragments from the Local Council meeting's minutes published on the City Hall's website (*Proces verbal încheiat în 16 decembrie 2015 cu ocazia ședinței ordinare a Consiliului Local al municipiului Cluj-Napoca* - available here, <http://www.primariaclujnapoca.ro/userfiles/files/Proces-verbal%2016%20dec.pdf>, accessed 31.08.2016.)

- In February and March 2015, families living at 15 Stephenson Street (approximately 80 persons) continued to be the target of a series of local police raids and complaints from neighbours. At the same time, two families who had built informal homes as extensions to their legally existing main houses lost the legal case brought against them by City Hall and consequently received a court decision for the demolition of their homes. Moreover, the security of people living in this area was further threatened by local development plans promoted by a real estate investor, as well as by the general urban plan of the city, which allows the construction of large-scale office buildings there.
- The vast majority of more than 300 persons evicted from Coastei Street in December 2010 have been living in the modular housing area of Pata Rât created by City Hall through local council decisions. People from this community approached the LERI field experts in May 2015 requesting advice on how they might strengthen their position within the Norwegian project, which had been implemented in the previous eight months. They expressed concerns about the large project's lack of a housing component, because their core problems were the result of housing exclusion.
- Representatives of the Romanian Railway Company (hereinafter CFR) approached the families living on Cantonului Street in the beginning of June 2015. The company detailed its plans to demolish the 'illegally built barracks'. It argued that the land the families were living on belonged to the Romanian Railway Company. The vast majority of people from Cantonului Street without those in Pata Rât (about 600 people) have been evicted – individually or in small groups – several times during their lifetimes. Originally they lived in other urban areas (such as Byron, Avram Iancu, Kővári Street, Calea Turzii Street) or in other locations of the city in privatised blocks of flats, former worker dormitories, apartments retroceded after 1990 or former social housing. Out of these, about 80 families had been 'temporarily' relocated to Cantonului with the acknowledgement or the support of City Hall and the local police. These administrative measures started at the end of the 1990s and culminated during the early part of the 2000s, but resumed at a later date. They were supported by official documents like the ones which stated that the families should be given 'homes with social character' maintained by two humanitarian organisations, settled into containers donated to homeless people by the railway company, or should build themselves houses in a 'private regime' (i.e. from their own resources).
- Issues around the informal settlement of Dallas in Pata Rât were still pending in the spring of 2015. Although the Pro Roma Foundation purchased the land where older improvised homes and newly built houses were located, there was no further progress in the plan to legally recognise these constructions. Consequently, the inhabitants here continued to possess identity cards issued with other addresses from Cluj-Napoca or issued by other localities. Some of them had so-called temporary identity cards without a domicile that needed to be renewed on a yearly basis. City Hall was not really open to discussions about the future of the Dallas 'private district', according to the accounts of the Pro Roma Foundation representative and of dwellers from Dallas. They reported to the LERI local team during several meetings (also at the meeting during the visit of the FRA representatives in Dallas in February 2015) that the City Hall is waiting for people to leave the city as

a result of closing down the landfill and does not want to transform the space into a residential area. City Hall argued that the whole Pata Rât area was an industrial zone where no residential development should be permitted in the next 10–20 years due to its polluted nature. However, in 2010, City Hall constructed modular houses less than 50 metres from Dallas.

- The situation of the Roma families from outside Cluj County, and of the Corturari families from Cluj-Napoca settled in the Pata Rât landfill was bleak, not only due to their generally precarious and insecure conditions, but also due to plans to close down this non-ecological chemical waste deposit. The majority of shacks where they lived were under the threat of demolition during this process. The local authorities refused to legalise these dwellings because they were situated too close to the polluted areas of the landfill and the chemical waste deposit. As a consequence, they could not be connected to basic facilities such as sewage, running water or electricity, nor could they benefit from subsidised heating during the cold season. People living there had no chance of accessing social housing in Cluj-Napoca either.

These developments were all related to the effects of housing exclusion and, in particular, to housing insecurity, precariousness and deprivation.

Consequently, the core priorities identified within the targeted Roma communities through the PAR needs assessment were the needs created primarily by housing exclusion, such as:

- increasing accessibility to social housing, as expressed by people living on Stephenson Street, Cantonului Street and in the modular housing area of Pata Rât;
- legalising informal housing as far as this is a prerequisite to improving housing conditions, as expressed by people living on Stephenson Street, Cantonului Street and the Dallas settlement of Pata Rât;
- preventing forced evictions, as expressed by people living on Stephenson Street, Cantonului Street and the modular housing area of Pata Rât.

Specific requirements were also cited by people who both lived and depended on the landfill for their livelihood, however, due to the limited resources of the LERI research, this set of problems was not included on the agenda of the local intervention.

Since the LERI research aimed to better understand the design, implementation and monitoring of Roma integration policies and activities at local level, the LERI local team also followed how the policies of Cluj-Napoca Municipality responded to the housing exclusion-related challenges during the needs assessment. In order to understand the situation of Roma communities and how local policies responded, the starting point of the local intervention was constituted by the core priorities identified by the Roma themselves.

The next chapter describes in details the methods of the needs assessment.

3. PAR methodology employed

Key research questions

Based on the general LERI question ('what works and what does not work in the local inclusion policies for Roma') and the immediate challenges faced by impoverished Roma communities from Cluj-Napoca targeted by the LERI research (discussed in the former paragraph), the field experts decided to run a participatory, action-based needs assessment. This needs assessment was defined by the needs of the community and the means of LERI. In light of people's housing-related needs (supporting their applications for social housing), field experts aimed to produce knowledge²⁴ based on the following:

- the manifestation of housing exclusion in reduced access to social housing, in the formation of informal settlements disconnected from sources of infrastructural development and in the existing risk of forced evictions;
- the need for inclusion measures;
- the way and extent to which the local public authorities handle the above set of problems.

Shifting methods from 'participatory' to the 'action research' paradigm during the needs assessment

The actions taken during the needs assessment phase through participatory methods were a set of activities that could not only assure a trusting relationship between the researchers and the communities whose needs were supposed to be assessed, but could also offer support to people who sought to solve their housing security-related problems.

The LERI research focused on the methods below and resulted in the following activities:

Meetings with representatives of institutions whose work related to housing

1. Exploratory discussions between the LERI field expert and invited institutional representatives in a group for housing inclusion (3 February 2015: ANR N-V, the Resource Centre for Roma Communities, DASM; 26 March: ADI ZMC; 2 April: DASM).
2. Exploratory discussions between the LERI field expert and local authorities' representatives in the context of visits from FRA delegates to discuss the potential for using LERI resources to sustain local policies for social and

²⁴ This endeavour was supported by the existence of former researches related to the Pata Rât area and territorial marginalization, available in the following publications: *Accesul femeilor și bărbaților de etnie romă la muncă decentă*, edited by E. Vincze, Cluj: Desire, 2011; *Situația școlarizării copiilor cu domiciliul în zona Pata Rât*, by S. Ciotlăuș and E. Vincze, In ROMEDIN. Educație pentru incluziune și dreptate socială, Cluj: Desire, 2015; *Rampa de gunoi: spațiul marginalității urbane avansate rasializate în România de azi*, by E. Vincze, in *Antologia Critic Atac*, Editura Tact, 2012, 53-68; *Urban landfill, economic restructuring and environmental racism*, by E. Vincze, In *Philobiblon – Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*. 2013. 18(2): 389-406; *Guest Editors' Foreword for the Special Issue on "Spatialization and Racialization of Social Exclusion. The Social and Cultural Formation of 'Gypsy Ghettos' in Romania in a European Context"*, by C. Raț and E. Vincze, In *Studia UBB Sociologia*. 2013. 58(2): 5-23; *Socio-Spatial Marginality of Roma as Form of Intersectional Injustice*, by E. Vincze, In *Studia UBB Sociologia*. 2013. 58(2): 217-243.

housing inclusion (deputy prefect, Roma expert from ANR N-V, CRCR director, vice mayor – February 2015).

3. Participation of the LERI field experts in some working group meetings organised by public institutions on issues related to housing (at City Hall, 31 March: Stephenson Street with the vice mayor, DASM representatives, City Hall's legal advisor, representatives of the local police, ADI ZMC team members; at the Prefecture, 2 April: Stephenson Street with community delegates and members of the Mixed Working Group for Roma inclusion; at the Prefecture, 8 April: meeting of the Mixed Working Group for Roma inclusion on the International Roma Day, and meeting with the prefect; at the Prefecture, 14 May: meeting of the Mixed Working Group for Roma inclusion on the housing problems of people from Pata Rât and Stephenson Street, with the participation of the deputy prefect, of ANR N-V's Roma expert, of ADI ZMC's project team, of a delegate from the cadastre office, of the director of DASM and other delegates from the Mixed Working Group, staff members of the prefect's office; 17 April, 21 April, 27 April: discussions with DASM representatives on the housing and social conditions of people from Stephenson Street).
4. Letters addressed to public institutions by members of the PAR team in which, among others, reference was made to the resources with which the LERI research might contribute to the housing inclusion issues (20 May, request for public information on the municipality's social housing stock, housing-related projects and plans regarding disadvantaged housing areas of the city, on institutional procedures for evictions; reports on housing insecurity on Stephenson Street (31 March and 29 April), and on Cantonului Street (09 June and 17 June), which put the analysis of the current situation in the light of the history of the formation of these disadvantaged housing areas – reports submitted to City Hall, to the Prefecture, to ANR N-V and the Romanian Railway Company (hereinafter CFR).
5. Meetings of LERI field experts and PAR team members with representatives of other institutions, during which discussions took place on urban development plans affecting disadvantaged housing areas, on preventing evictions, and on possible ways for legalising informal settlements (3 April: architect; 17 April, 22 April, 4–8 May: lawyer for Stephenson; 23 June: lawyer for Cantonului; 20 May, 19 June, 24 June, 29 June: cadastre office; 9 June, 17 June: CFR).

PAR team workshops

1. Exploratory discussions between LERI field experts with the potential academic co-researchers of the PAR team in the frame of visits of FRA and Budapest Institute delegates to Cluj (5 February and 20 March: Cristina Raț, George Zamfir, Robert Matei, Adrian Dohotaru).
2. Exploratory discussions between LERI field experts with representatives of public institutions and people from the targeted communities about how the latter might benefit from the resources of LERI, and about the formation of the PAR team and its role in the LERI research (6 February, 21 March: Claudia Zsiga, Alexandru Greta, Elena Greta (modular houses), 5–6 February 2015: Bert Looji (Pro Roma Foundation); 14 March, 20 April, 22 April: Simona Bøjte and Magda (Stephenson); 14 March: Mihaela Berki and Adrian Pusztai (Cantonului); 21 March: volunteers working with children from the landfill; 21 April: Magda Lazar from DASM).

3. Sharing and improving knowledge on PAR with potential academic co-researchers and community co-researchers, and peers as research staff (21 March, Enikő Vincze, Simona Ciotlăuș, Robert Matei, Cristina Raț, George Zamfir, Adrian Dohotaru, Simona Bőjte).
4. Elaborating a work plan for the action-oriented needs assessment by the academic co-researchers of the potential PAR team; the plan was adjusted during the effective needs assessment phase in order to make it as responsive as possible to the current realities of the 'field' (Enikő Vincze, Simona Ciotlăuș, Robert Matei, Cristina Raț, George Zamfir, Adrian Dohotaru).
5. Individual and group discussions/scenario workshops of LERI field experts with some potential PAR team members on the implementation of the work plan, on the encountered challenges and problems, and on ways to handle the ethical and professional issues occurring during the action research (30 March, 5 April, 24 April, 30 April, 5 May, 21 May, 8 June, 9 June, 18 June: Robert Matei, Cristina Raț, George Zamfir, Adrian Dohotaru, Simona Bőjte, Florea Cojocnean, Ioan Doghi).

Community consultations

1. Individual and group discussions, and in-depth interviews during the actions of the participatory needs assessment, i.e. the intervention of filling in the applications files for social housing and of documenting current problems resulting from housing insecurity (such as the risk of demolitions and evictions, and difficulties accessing adequate social housing) on Stephenson Street, and on Cantonului Street (on Stephenson Street: 7 March, 14 March, 26 March–13 April; on Cantonului Street: 8 June, 12 June, 19 June, 23 June, 26 June, 29 June, 30 June. Around 100 social housing request files were started by the two LERI field experts, two academic co-researchers and three community co-researchers. This action continued over the following months during the LPP implementation phase).
2. Forums, during which people were consulted about the steps to be taken in relation to public authorities and other institutions about their housing problems, and/or where they were informed about meetings with institutions (families from Stephenson Street – 20 April, 22 April, 28 April; from modular houses area from Pata Rât, 8 May; and from Cantonului Street, 8 June, 9 June, 18 June);
3. Informal discussions with people from Dallas (29 June) and from the landfill area from Pata Rât;
4. Informal individual and group discussions on the impact of Pata Rât-related projects on their housing condition and the use of LERI resources for identifying suitable models for administering collective housing (26 April, 28 April, 29 April: modular houses area of Pata Rât).

The major research questions were identified between March and June 2015 when assisting 135 social housing applicants from Stephenson Street, Cantonului Street and the modular housing. While filling out and submitting social housing application files, the LERI local team was able to learn about people's housing needs, problems, options and experiences with social housing accessibility in Cluj-Napoca, as well as with the local social housing policies and practices of the municipality. At the same time, it could also enrich people's capacity to follow institutional procedures, articulate their claims for adequate housing, and change the dominant practices that excluded them from accessing social housing. The

knowledge acquired during this process was noted, and later on, during the implementation phase discussed in the next section, was detailed in a series of documents presented to the local authorities (such as the proposal for amending the allotment criteria for social housing – in November 2015; four area documents and two resource documents – in February 2016). Through elaborating and submitting reports to public authorities at the municipal and county levels about the housing insecurity that inhabitants of informal settlements faced, the LERI local team learned how disadvantaged and insecure housing areas were formed in the city, what kinds of risks people from these areas faced, and how the public institutions were equipped to solve these problems.

Therefore, the LERI local team did not set up formal interviews to discuss people's everyday lives, or institutional stakeholders' opinions, during the needs assessment or during the implementation phase, nor did the team use predefined questionnaires or record the interviews following strict predefined guidelines. Instead, the LERI local team took informal notes during and immediately after the in-depth discussions, which were conducted both individually and in groups. During these events, LERI local team members intervened by suggesting joint action plans that could address the identified problems. Moreover, the team informed the interested parties about instruments that could support the implementation of these plans.

This was how the LERI local team undertook the needs assessment and the implementation of the local intervention. Its methods combined participation with action, so that the actions taken were informed by participative knowledge and so that the knowledge produced from one stage informed the actions of subsequent stages.²⁵ The PAR used was not community-oriented; instead it was issue-oriented as it addressed the subject of housing exclusion/inclusion. It took place in five Roma communities in Cluj-Napoca (one in Stephenson Street and four in the Pata Rât area) and in several institutional settings where issues related to these areas were discussed by public authorities or other stakeholders. For reflections and feedback of both the local co-researchers and those of the field experts on the application of these methods, see Section 4. Reflections on the limitations of PAR are discussed in Section 5.

Ethical considerations

The participatory actions run during the needs assessment phase (i.e. filling in social housing request files for people from disadvantaged and/or marginalised housing areas) highlighted an important ethical problem in the PAR approach that the LERI field experts used. The LERI local team supported people in applying for social housing while knowing that they might not be 'eligible' and/or might receive low scores in the selection process that would therefore not get them onto the list of social housing applicants. The argument for submitting the application files, even for those who were unlikely to be 'successful' in this sense, is that by these means people might make themselves and their housing exclusion problems visible in the eyes of local authorities, which could significantly contribute to highlighting the extent to which the social housing system is exclusionary. This helped the LERI local team argue for amendments to

²⁵ The view on PAR of the author of this paper is presented at the Conclusions and recommendations section of this report.

the criteria for social housing allotment so as to meet the needs of the socially marginalised groups. During the action of filling in and submitting social housing application files, the LERI local team learned that people were very much able to recognise the value of their efforts underlying their own case, and they felt empowered because they could express their rights for adequate housing and for changing the dominant practices that excluded them from accessing social housing. As one of the community co-researchers expressed:

"We were forcibly moved into this hazardous area, near the garbage dump five years ago, after we were evicted from an area close to the city centre. Five years are gone, and we are still here. We have to remind the public authorities about our existence, and about the fact that we belong to the city and we want to move back to the city, and we need their support for this. We need to have access to social houses. That is why we have to submit, year after year, applications. Till when they will realise that they have to change something in their procedure. Otherwise we will never get anything" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016, male).

As far as the issue of legalising informal homes and preventing forced evictions is concerned, even if these were issues that had little chance of success in the particular timeframe of this project, they could not have been avoided and had to be addressed in order to initiate local housing policies that are more inclusive for those who live under insecure and deprived housing conditions. The LERI local team took up these issues in accordance with the existing legal provisions, and national and EU initiatives for these matters. In relation to this issue, two of the community co-researchers noted:

"We are under direct risk of eviction. It happened that during the lifetime of the LERI research, the City Hall provided an extension of the deadline when our improvised homed would be demolished. The problem is not solved, but at least we obtained an extension" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016).

"If the LERI local team would not have intervened into the situation when the railway company came and threatened us, who knows how that situation could have ended. Our team reminded the company of the fact that in the past they lost two court cases on this issue, and reminded the City Hall about the fact that they had an agreement with the humanitarian organisation that provided the houses for us on that very land that now seems to be under negotiations in what regards property rights" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016).

4. The local intervention description - Goals, partners, process and results

Goals of LERI local intervention in Cluj-Napoca

The main goals of the LERI local intervention in Cluj-Napoca were (1) to continue collecting evidence of housing insecurities faced by people living in marginalised communities in Pata Rât (Cantonului Street, the Dallas settlement, and the modular housing area) and on Stephenson Street, and (2) to use the gathered knowledge to influence the development of the local housing policies which respond to people's needs.

Based on the results of the PAR needs assessment presented in the previous section of this report, three main aspects of housing inclusion were intended to

be tackled during the LERI local intervention: increasing accessibility of social housing, identifying ways to legalise informal housing in the targeted areas to improve housing conditions and security, and prevention of forced evictions.

LERI also aimed to contribute to local processes by helping to sustain communication between the local authorities and the people directly concerned with these issues, and by improving the shortcomings of the current social housing mechanisms. For this purpose, the field experts envisaged the creation of a Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion that could create proposals regarding the three topics (above) in relation to the selected housing areas.

Carrying out the local intervention

The PAR team and the stakeholders involved

Two LERI field experts coordinated the local intervention activities. The work of the five community co-researchers (one from the modular housing area, two from Cantonului Street, one from the Dallas settlement, and one from Stephenson Street), two academic co-researchers, and one institutional co-researcher (ANR N-V expert) were supported by the local fund (while one more academic co-researcher from Babeş-Bolyai University acted on a voluntary basis during the project meetings (Activity 1)). They formed the PAR team and, as such, were the core (i.e. the regular) members of the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion.

Besides the PAR team members listed above, four representatives of the targeted institutional stakeholders (Prefecture, ADI ZMC, DASM, CRCR) acted as consultants to the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion.

The LERI local intervention in Cluj-Napoca and a proposal for meetings with the staff of different departments of City Hall were presented by the PAR team to the mayor and the vice mayor in October 2015. The LERI local team also requested the nomination of a person who might act as a consultant for the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion. The vice mayor welcomed the efforts proposed by LERI and endorsed the planned activities. No one from the mayor's office was delegated to the proposed group, however a representative of DASM and City Hall agreed to act as consultants – a situation which reflected the approach of the local public administration, i.e. associating the challenges of social inclusion with the measures provided by the social assistance department.

The stakeholders involved had different motivations, according to their position and involvement into the subject. One of the LERI local team's aims was to help community co-researchers developing better skills in communicating within their communities and learning about procedures to address public institutions. The vice-prefect was also eager to learn about the initiatives of civil society organisations that could provide innovative solutions to old problems. The LERI expert assumed that the director of DASM would be interested to see how the direction specialized in social services might link its work to housing-related issues. The manager from ADI ZMC involved into the Pata Cluj project was ready to figure out how the knowledge produced by the LERI team could be used in the Pata Cluj project, especially its housing component. Experts from CRCR were interested to see how some of the proposals presented together within the Cluj-Napoca Development Strategy 2014-2020 might be translated into more operational measures in what regards the marginalized housing areas of the city and the municipality's social housing stock.

Relationship with stakeholders during the implementation of planned local interventions

The PAR team chose to apply different approaches to the concerned stakeholders. People living in the targeted disadvantaged areas were offered assistance in completing their social housing applications (during the needs assessment phase) and were consulted again, later on, following the results of the selection process. By the end of July 2015, this had resulted in the submission of 135 applications. Out of these, around 25 were assessed by the housing committee and the rest were declared ineligible, mostly because they "did not provide evidence of permanent income". Altogether, from the total of applicants for social housing in Cluj-Napoca (468), circa 42% were declared non-eligible. Filling out the forms gave PAR team members the opportunity to initiate discussions and acquire information about people's housing history and experiences in a non-intrusive way. At the same time, the participants and applicants were duly informed about the additional purpose of filling out the application files (ensuring that their voices and needs were heard by the local authorities) and were invited to join discussions on further steps to draw the awareness of the local authorities to the daily challenges they face (proposing amendments to the allotment criteria for social housing).

Interactions with the local authorities were very formal and included submitting letters and documents with the findings of the LERI local team, and participating in official meetings with various representatives, if invited. At the beginning of the implementation phase, the project team wrote to the mayor and vice mayor to inform them about implementing the local interventions and how this might contribute to measures in the spirit of the social inclusion chapter of the Development Strategy of Cluj-Napoca 2014–2020. Informative documents were also submitted to the Prefecture and the north-west regional bureau of the National Agency for Roma. The presentations of the team included information about the planned actions and objectives of LERI. Later on, further information resulted from documenting the situation Roma communities find themselves in, and from examining existing policies. There was a consensus among the LERI local team and City Hall representatives about presenting problems and proposals in a written form to authorities, getting back written responses and participating in institutional meetings if invited.

M&E activities and results of the LERI local intervention in Cluj-Napoca

PAR workshops

These were internal meetings during which the LERI field experts and co-researchers discussed the intervention-related topics, evaluated past activities, discussed further measures and decided, if necessary, on possible changes or mitigating measures. That means, that these workshops have been planned in collaboration with the local LERI local team and served also as forum for monitoring and evaluating the progress and results of the LERI local intervention.

At the same time, these regular PAR workshops also served as capacity-building opportunities during which methodological questions, the researchers' impressions from the field, and any external occurrences that had had an impact on LERI were discussed. During the workshops, attention was devoted to the community co-researchers' skills development concerning consulting, informing and empowering people.

The community co-researchers were selected based on their activism and commitment to LERI on a voluntary basis during the needs assessment phase. Everyone knew that as result of his or her involvement in LERI, roles in the communities might also be (re)shaped. People might feel empowered to take on leadership roles and/or represent the needs of communities to the local authorities. The PAR workshops enabled them to reflect on such changes in the local context and to discuss ways of communicating with the locals, as well as improving competency in conducting and leading public discussions.

Besides developing relations with the locals, co-researchers were able to learn about various means to approach local authorities and arrange meetings with them. Working together, the project team submitted to the latter open letters, requests for formal meetings and documents developed by the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion. Raising awareness of these means and involving people in the preparations through group discussions were all crucial aspects of empowerment in the local communities. During these discussions, it was important to draw attention to the fact that the responsiveness of local authorities to these actions might vary a great deal. Therefore, the possible results of such measures could be expected in the long term. While the topics of these meet ups stemmed from the information and issues shared by community members, the discussions were primarily set and facilitated by the PAR team. The explicit intention of the LERI local team was to launch these cooperative decision-making mechanisms and improve the community members' skills so that they could conduct these activities on their own in the future. Feedbacks from the local team members were collected on an ongoing basis while shaping the agenda and the main topics discussed within the PAR workshops.

Social housing applications and the proposal for amending the allotment criteria of social housing²⁶

When planning and launching LERI activities in the targeted localities, the LERI experts were already known in the communities and could build on previous strong cooperation. Their first trust-building activity within LERI was assisting locals with filling out their social housing applications; this was undertaken during the needs assessment phase of the LERI research since the applications had to be submitted by the end of July 2015. Since the LERI local team prepared and submitted 135 social housing applications and, in almost all cases, the applicant households had at least two adults and children, the project team estimated that face-to-face discussions were carried out with approximately 250 individuals, half of them women, the vast majority between the ages of 20 and 50.

Based on the evaluation of the face-to-face discussions during the implementation of the local intervention (October 2015–February 2016), the PAR team prepared a proposal for City Hall about amending the criteria for the allotment of social housing. Based on the prior contact of the LERI local team members with the vice mayor, the project team was advised to present its suggestions on these matters in written form by 10 November 2015. Consequently, the team submitted its proposals, supported by a set of legislative arguments around the rights of the marginalised to (social) housing, to the

²⁶ Defined in the LERI LP as *Activity 1: Intervention focusing on increasing access to the local social housing fund.*

mayor, vice mayor, local councillors, directors of the patrimony and social and medical assistance departments, and members of the social housing committee.

Four members of the PAR team were invited to a face-to-face meeting with the housing committee, which included the vice mayor. The City Hall's committee on social housing (composed of the vice mayor, the director of the patrimony directorate, and some local councillors representing both the ruling and opposition parties), had prepared its own amendments and announced a public consultation on this matter.²⁷ The group mobilised several NGOs and persons from Cluj and Bucharest who supported its proposal. Unfortunately, during the ten-day-long public consultation, there was no time to arrange meetings with local councillors to advocate for the proposals. Nevertheless, the group members had a meeting with the housing committee that included local councillors from different political parties – alias, the project team had the chance to discuss the proposals at least indirectly with the local councillors before the local council meeting. The final decision was adopted by the local council meeting early December 2015. Ultimately, during the last local council meeting in December 2015 (where four members of the PAR team participated), the housing committee presented its version of amendments for the allotment criteria and the local council adopted them.

Some of the recommendations of the PAR team were incorporated into the amended regulations such as:

- deeming applicants who gain income on the basis of a labour contract for a determined period of time and who have a temporary ID with no domicile but live in Cluj-Napoca as eligible, and
- an increase in the score given to so-called exceptional cases.

This is a significant success, as changing the criteria is not necessarily a politically easy thing to do, and it shows that the evidence based policy making and participatory approach has value.

However, several crucial recommendations were not accepted by the majority of the housing committee and therefore were not adopted by the Local Council, among them:

- the elimination of the criteria of level of school education;
- the consideration of inadequate housing conditions and housing insecurity;
- the consideration of chronic illnesses, explicitly mentioning the situation of people living in hazardous areas, informal settings, at risk of eviction or who had been evicted several times before as 'exceptional cases' requiring more support in the form of higher scores.

During the implementation phase, the LERI field experts maintained contact with the applicants and provided updates on the status of their applications, which was a way to monitor the outcomes of this action. This activity was particularly challenging for the community co-researchers. The whole PAR team supported them in tackling such situations, and the preliminary and final results of the selection process were communicated to the applicants in three locations by the group of field experts, academic co-researchers and community co-researchers.

²⁷ The public consultation was announced on the website of the City Hall for the period between 17-27 November 2015, <http://www.primariaclujnapoca.ro/userfiles/files/proiect%20locuinte.pdf>

The preliminary results were published by City Hall in the middle of December 2015 and the final results in March 2016.

Based on the feedbacks received from local co-researchers, there were no tensions around learning about these results in the Roma communities. This proved to us again that people considered demanding their housing rights by the means of these applications an important act and a success in itself, at least as important as the concrete scores that they received for their applications. Since they are among the most neglected categories of people in the city, whose interests are largely neglected by decision-makers, and since they had no other formal ways by which they could have communicated their housing conditions and needs to the public administration, they acknowledged that they should continue this process in the years to come.

Set-up of the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion

The formation of the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion was one of the most important initiatives of the LERI local intervention plan, both from the perspective of capacity building and from the perspective of improving the sustainability of social housing policies in Cluj. The group was composed of the PAR team (field experts, academic co-researchers, community co-researchers, institutional co-researcher) which had actually worked on the activities and several consultants occupying important positions within local institutions/organisations. Its aspects were framed by a Memorandum of Understanding agreed on by all participants. The Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion was especially successful in strengthening cooperation with the Prefecture and the ANR N-V.

The group had monthly meetings during the implementation phase (between October 2015 and February 2016), which focused not only on the discussion of housing situations within the targeted areas – and found ways to gain more knowledge on this – but also debated potential proposals for the three identified aspects of housing inclusion (i.e. increasing accessibility to social housing, legalising informal homes and settlements in order to improve the inhabitants' housing security and conditions, and preventing forced evictions). These meetings were also occasions for evaluating what happened in the prior stages of the implementation of the Local Action Plan. In the development of potential measures on these subjects, the legal advisor, who joined the group at a later stage, had an important role since he conducted the legal mapping necessary for this endeavour.

The Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion could only have an advisory role in relation to the local public authorities, obviously meaning that its recommendations could not be mandatory and the latter were free to both accept and refuse the proposed measures. During the implementation of LERI, the project team was also able to document and analyse the reactions of the public authorities.

All the planned activities were accomplished except the Activity 3.3. Documenting the provisions of a new round of EU funds and related document analysis. The reason for this was that the launch of these programs and their related documents that could have been analyzed was prolonged by the Ministry of European Funds until the middle of 2016. At the time of writing this report (September 2016) not all the calls have been launched, yet. Among others, the CLLD program has not published its documents, therefore document analysis

could not have been conducted during the LERI research period. ²⁸Mapping the housing situation of marginalised urban areas and mapping on the legalisation of informal settlements and preventing forced evictions

Defined under LERI LPP as Activity 2: Intervention for identifying ways of legalising informal settlements, improving the housing conditions in these settlements, and preventing forced evictions, and under Activity 4: Intervention for elaborating plans of measures regarding housing inclusion based on the Cluj-Napoca Development Strategy 2014–2020 and on the LERI needs assessment. As described and explained in this section, the planned sub-activities targeting the meetings of authorities to talk about the measures recommended in the submitted documents could not be accomplished. The elaborated area documents and resource documents might be used for further endeavours to develop detailed measures regarding housing inclusion.

During the needs assessment phase, the inhabitants of all selected housing areas shared their experiences of forced evictions and expressed their profound concerns about the effects of informal housing on their living conditions (in terms of (in)security of tenure and of (not) being provided with access to basic public services such as electricity and water). Thus, the capacity and trust-building activities had to include initiatives that responded to these problems.

Therefore, the PAR team decided to run two major initiatives on these matters.

Based on knowledge of people's housing histories and conditions gathered during the needs assessment phase (via the action of preparing and submitting their social housing applications) and from prior research and legal and administrative documents (such as related laws and local council Decisions), the project team developed four area documents (one on each of the areas targeted by LERI, i.e. the modular housing area, the Dallas settlement, Cantonului Street and Stephenson Street) and submitted them for the attention of different directorates at City Hall with proposals for measures to be taken in each case.

Documenting the ways (from international and national legislation) of legalising informal settlements as a necessary step for the improvement of peoples' housing conditions and security, and preventing forced evictions, as a result of which the project team put together two resource documents on these subjects and submitted them to the relevant public bodies with the requirement that they consider them when looking for solutions to housing insecurity and deprivation in the targeted areas.

By the end of May 2016, the project team received two formal responses from the City Hall signed by the mayor regarding the six documents mentioned above, which only acknowledged receipt and study of them, and that the City Hall will inform the team of any further decisions on them. Even if the initial LERI plan in Cluj-Napoca in regards to the development of measures on housing inclusion were not met²⁹ because the available resources were not sufficient, the four area documents and the two resource documents that the project team developed, along with its proposals for amending the allotment criteria of social housing,

²⁸ For the calendar of opening the calls, check here: <http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/apeluri>.

²⁹ As described in section 3.B. of this report *under Activity 4: Intervention for elaborating plans of measures regarding housing inclusion based on the Cluj-Napoca Development Strategy 2014-2020 and on the LERI needs assessment*.

might be used by City Hall in the future in its effort to create detailed intervention plans for each of the targeted areas.

It should be noted that monitoring and evaluation activities were integral part of the operation of the PAR team and the Local Action Group. Their meetings have regularly covered tracking of the local progress, checking the planned versus actual results and revision of the project plan if modifications were necessary.

5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned

Reflections on PAR methodology and on intervention

An ongoing challenge for the LERI field experts was how to balance the need to effectively assist/help local people in fulfilling their housing needs with the need to document institutional processes of social exclusion/inclusion. This was a question of how research might be practised and used as a tool of social action both for bringing attention to previously invisible groups and for initiating changes in the system that was excluding and marginalising them. As one of the community co-researchers observed during the evaluation meeting of the team:

"We made some very important steps, but due to the short time we mostly managed to open up processes and less to fulfil concrete results" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016, male).

Completion of the social housing request files, documentation of the history of the formation of the respective disadvantaged housing areas and their current conditions, and the official letters submitted to authorities presenting all these issues were actions that could not have been accomplished without the participation of the key stakeholders. The most significant functions of the needs assessment and the implementation of the local intervention were to create knowledge that could support people and to turn people's everyday knowledge and experiences into outputs (documents, letters, reports, etc.) that could be used to approach local decision-makers and provide evidence on the related problems so as to urge actions from local government. As two of the community co-researchers mentioned:

"During LERI we could learn how to approach City Hall and we could also learn about our rights. It was important that we could put together information about our problems that City Hall would not like to bring on the surface if it would depend only on it. Therefore, they maybe did not welcome everything that we did" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016, male).

"It was the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion, and Foundation Desire that made us open up the discussion about the need to modify the social housing allocation criteria. This was what we were able to succeed in this time. Probably this process will have to be reopened and continued in the future" (evaluation meeting 11 February 2016, male).

Meanwhile, the project team also had to deal with the changing dynamics within each and every community, including negotiations on positions of leadership and on community representation. These were influenced by existing patterns of internal power relations, disagreements and even conflicts emerging from the past. Notably, some of these local conflicts were strongly related to the insecurity of housing and to the precarious livelihoods in these disadvantaged areas. The participation of local people in these actions within the LERI research also acted

as a mechanism that contributed to the permanent reconfiguration and redefinition of the Roma community both within the community and in its relationships with the outside world, including the LERI local team members. With regards to the impact of the LERI research in this sense, a community co-researcher observed:

"If we would not do actions like this, we would not exist in the eyes of City Hall" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016, male).

And another added:

"It was great seeing how we could act together in order to obtain and link different information about our housing situation, information from the cadastre office, from the Prefecture, from the railway company, from architects, from lawyers, and not least from our people actually experiencing the effects of living where they live, on the margins of the city and under insecure and inadequate conditions" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016, male)

Lessons learned

The long-term relationship between the LERI field experts with the people from the target areas preceding the start of the LERI research was crucial to starting local actions. Since this project was to be participatory and action-based, the LERI local team decided to remain open to, and to respond to, people's current challenges. Therefore, the project team did not approach people with general questions on their lives and needs, but dealt with only those aspects that were of immediate concern to them. As such, people's participation in the needs assessment and local intervention started from the moment they described their most pertinent current issues. It continued with the creation of situations where they could share their (housing) histories and current concerns with the LERI local team via the actions that were taken on their behalf (such as preparing and submitting the social housing request files for the 135 persons/households, as well as other successive documents presented to City Hall). The knowledge produced in this way was a reminder about how the targeted disadvantaged areas were formed historically and what kind of measures authorities might develop and implement if they were to effectively act for those peoples' benefit.

The housing needs identified through the needs assessment and local intervention were produced within the frame of power relations between, on the one hand, local authorities (accountable for developing and implementing public policies) and, on the other hand, people inhabiting disadvantaged housing areas and facing different forms of housing exclusion. It is unsurprising that the definition of these housing needs and the structural causes behind them were interpreted differently by actors in different positions in the local power hierarchies and class structure.

The politics of research assumed by the team made it able to give voice to the perspective of the marginalised groups, for supporting their claims, for offering instruments to express their demands in front of public authorities, and for strengthening the latter's awareness about the responsibilities they have towards the housing rights of marginalised citizens. By using the skills of field experts and academic co-researchers, the project team put people's everyday knowledge and experiences into a format that would raise decisions makers' awareness of people's needs, of people's rights to the city in which they live and work, even if their housing and labour situation is characterised by informality and is not

properly acknowledged by the local public administration or by the city's more privileged population. Therefore, the aim of gathering information through action-based participatory research about their condition, and the ways public authorities give or fail to give attention to them, was to increase the readiness of the latter to respond to the housing needs of the most marginalised.

Besides the multiple causes behind of 'what works and what does not work in Roma inclusion' already identified in this paper, one should also recall the message formulated by the institutional co-researcher:

"We have strategies, but the mechanisms do not move on their own, there is a need for people who put in motion these mechanisms. And there would be a need for a much stronger determination from the side of the central government in its relation with the authorities of local public administration. One of the objectives that should be respected at all levels would be to apply the law for the benefit of the citizens, regardless of their ethnicity. But furthermore we need laws that prevent people of being pushed towards the periphery of society. For example, the strategy for combating poverty should be correlated with the strategy for the social inclusion of Roma" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016).

And last but not least, the evaluation of one of the consultants of the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion also added an important aspect to this discussion:

"The local public administration is not prepared enough for the issue of accessibility to adequate housing of disadvantaged categories. Therefore, without the involvement of civil society organisations, a process like the one opened up within the LERI research focusing on the modification of social housing allocation criteria, nothing would have happened in this direction" (interview for the project video, 29 August 2016, male).

What might come next?

The established Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion can be activated whenever there is a need for mobilising the network of cooperation.

If City Hall representatives contact the field experts to discuss the issues addressed in the area documents and the resource documents in the future, they will invite the community co-researchers involved on the PAR team to attend these discussions.

People from the targeted areas might continue to mobilise individually or in groups to prepare and submit social housing request files.

Members of the Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion might make use of their experiences and knowledge gained during the LERI research in future situations and activities.

The limitations of the LERI research need to be transcended by other types of programmes, which could have more power to put pressure on local authorities,³⁰ and/or by other initiatives that could invest more into effective changes for housing conditions. The project implemented in Cluj-Napoca by

³⁰ More information on the project are available here - http://www.desire-ro.eu/?page_id=2219, and here - <https://www.facebook.com/CasiSocialeACUM/>.

Foundation Desire ("Justice for Roma through the legal enforcement of housing rights") with the support of Human Rights Initiative program "Engaging Roma in Europe around Justice and Rights" continues the activist actions of Foundation Desire and other local actors run since 2010 in Cluj-Napoca against ghettoization and for social and housing rights and justice. The project includes the local and national campaign "Căși sociale acum!" (Social Housing Now!) launched in May 2016. Due to its focus on social housing it is related to LERI, but it frames its actions under a different, i.e an activist approach.

With regards to the need for similar interventions, one of the community co-researchers stated:

"This intervention was a key for us that opened up several doors, and as well as to learn about our own situation in the light of official documents that we had had not access to before. But if we do not continue this, probably all we produced will stay locked in some office" (Evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016, male).

An academic co-researcher stated:

"This work was very unusual for me, but for that reason very challenging. I could be part of a collective effort that made connections between different public institutions (such as City Hall and the Prefecture) that hardly cooperate on solving practical issues. We can only hope that this type of cooperation will continue in the future" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016, male).

The institutional co-researcher observed:

"We have a national Roma inclusion strategy, but mechanisms are not moving on in themselves. We need people, and groups of people, such as the Local Action Group that we have created through LERI, which are taking the courage to put pressure on local authorities to take seriously the obligations that they have towards ethnic Roma persons and disadvantaged communities from their localities. Unfortunately, governmental strategies do not apply sanctions on those local authorities who do not implement the measures provided by these strategies" (evaluation meeting, 11 February 2016, male).

6. Conclusions and recommendations

LERI in Cluj-Napoca aimed to engender and promote dialogue between local communities and local authorities (both entities were heterogeneous and also internally marked by power relations), but the intention of the LERI field experts to become neutral mediators between these two major groups of actors was limited. The main reason behind this was the unequal power relations between the groups, which motivated the LERI field experts to focus primarily on the empowerment of the marginalised groups and facilitate the creation of channels through which their issues and concerns could be voiced and put onto the public agenda.

The LERI field experts observed tensions and gaps between the needs of the local communities and the perceptions of and willingness to respond to those needs of local authorities. Throughout the LERI research, the PAR team worked on bridging these gaps through gathering and presenting evidence, evaluating the current system, and mapping possible interventions and measures to shape the social housing policies and more broadly the local housing policies so that

they could respond to different manifestations of housing exclusion (including housing insecurity and deprivation). The empowerment of people living in the targeted marginalised urban areas through these processes formed an integral part of LERI in Cluj. It is important to mention that the project team aimed people's empowerment at placing their needs and rights onto the agendas of public institutions. The Local Action Group for Housing Inclusion especially addressed this need and intended to create a platform where opinions could be exchanged and initiatives could be put forward in the area of housing.

The methodology of participatory observation remained at the core of the activities run during the needs assessment and during the implementation of the local intervention plan both during person-to-person and group gatherings within communities and institutions. The field experts participated in almost all of the activities of the needs assessment and local intervention. The PAR team as a whole brought to the surface a wide range of individual and group experiences and facilitated people's connection to institutions. The main disadvantage of this style of research was that it proved very time-consuming and exhausting.

The Cluj-Napoca LERI local team opted for issue-oriented and action-based participatory research. It was the preparation and submission of social housing files with and on the behalf of impoverished Roma living in disadvantaged urban areas, during which people could discuss their housing histories and housing conditions, as well as local public policies that played a role in their formation, that should have an important function in the housing inclusion of the marginalised. A first recommendation is that PAR, or any other type of intervention shaped by the participation paradigm, should create opportunities for (at least small) actions besides creating opportunities for people living in disadvantaged communities to express their opinions and desires about what needs to be done in order to generate a positive change in their conditions.

The way in which the project team conceived its intervention was to transform the learning of PAR into a social action committed to generating changes in the policies of the local public administration on the housing insecurity and deprivation of the marginalised. It was this action that enabled the team to propose a set of amendments in the allotment criteria of social housing. Additionally, it also allowed us to propose an approach on how to combine increasing the access of marginalised people to social housing with policies of legalising informal housing and preventing forced evictions in order to adequately respond to their historically shaped and complex situations. This seemed to be a well- diverse approach that gives rise to a second recommendation. PAR or any other type of interventions shaped by the participation paradigm which intends to improve the situation of people faced with housing insecurity and deprivation should not be driven alone by a community development approach that nurtures the ideal that the 'community' might be enabled to change their condition. Instead, or at least as complementary to that, participatory interventions should be guided by the intention to generate changes in the structural causes of marginalisation, including housing exclusion and supporting the community to have an influence/change those structural causes. This means, that the community led approach should be combined with actions that may initiate change in the local structures and influence local decision-making controlled by actors and institutions outside of the community.

In Cluj-Napoca, through LERI the local team made recommendations that highlight the accountability of public administration for the assurance of housing

rights to the marginalised. This was done in the spirit of the provisions of the European Social Charter regarding fundamental rights:

"Everyone has the right to housing ... In order to ensure the effective exercise of this right, the Parties undertake measures to promote access to housing of an adequate standard; to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination; to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources"(European Social Charter, 1996, Part II, Art. 31.).

The LERI intervention planned in Cluj-Napoca did not only create an opportunity for action and participation of the marginalised, but also played an active role in translating people's everyday narratives into descriptive documents with proposals for changes that were submitted to the decision-makers. These documents appealed to the decision-makers to respond to this challenge with proper policy actions. The concept which underlies this intervention is that one cannot expect that "simply identifying different 'stakeholders' and getting them around the table will result in a consensus being reached that is 'fair' to all" (Hildyard et al., 2001).³¹ Participatory justice should not replace social justice. The author of this paper considers that civil society organisations and critical scholars committed to social change should not subordinate the latter to the former. In order to put participatory justice into the service of social justice, participation needs to be emancipated from a techniques-based participatory orthodoxy. Moreover, it should be re-politicised to be able to address issues of power and control of resources, and to develop a critical reflective understanding of the deeper determinants of social change (Cleaver, 1999).³²

The LERI activities in Cluj-Napoca have the long-term potential to achieve improvements in needs- and rights-based housing policies as strategic commitments that are binding for the local authorities. LERI, with its findings, launched processes of cooperative thinking and decision-making; its proposals and recommendations fostered public discussions and contributed to the generation of positive changes in social housing policies and in promoting inclusive local politics on housing.

7. Additional Information

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³¹ Hildyard et al, Pluralism, Participation and Power, in *Participation: the New Tyranny?* Edited by Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, 2001

³² Frances Cleaver (1999): Paradoxes of participation: questioning participatory approaches to development, in *Journal of International Development*, Nr 11: 597-612.

expert during the preliminary analysis phase of LERI. Without the contribution of this team, without the administrative, organisational and professional support given by the Desire Foundation during the local intervention, without the involvement of Anna Horváth (deputy mayor) and without the involvement of Roma women and men from the targeted marginalised urban areas of Cluj-Napoca this work would not have been possible.