ROMA HOUSING DISCRIMINATION AND DEPRIVATION IN EUROPEAN CITIES. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS FROM CITIES, REGIONS, STATES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

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THE STARTING QUESTIONS FOR OUR PROJECT

1. The housing conditions of Roma minorities in most member countries of the European Union are extremely poor, and these minorities suffer from discrimination.

2. The mechanisms and processes of discrimination and exclusion need to be studied in a **systematic** and **comparative** way, in order to be able to target public policy instruments and regulations and improve them to better includes minorities.

Discrimination in housing and sheltering

Recurring observation: a high level of discrimination in access to housing and sheltering for Roma.

There are structural economic poverty cycles that are difficult to break.

→ Studies point to the important role of support and conflict mediation, to forge lasting ties and facilitate long-term settlement in certain neighborhoods.

But this is not enough.

The puzzle

→ What are the mechanisms and policies that can help address discrimination in access to housing?

→ Project hypothesis: anti-discrimination instruments in public policies could be effective in countering stereotypes about Roma and discriminatory behavior by agents in the sheltering and housing sector.

Method

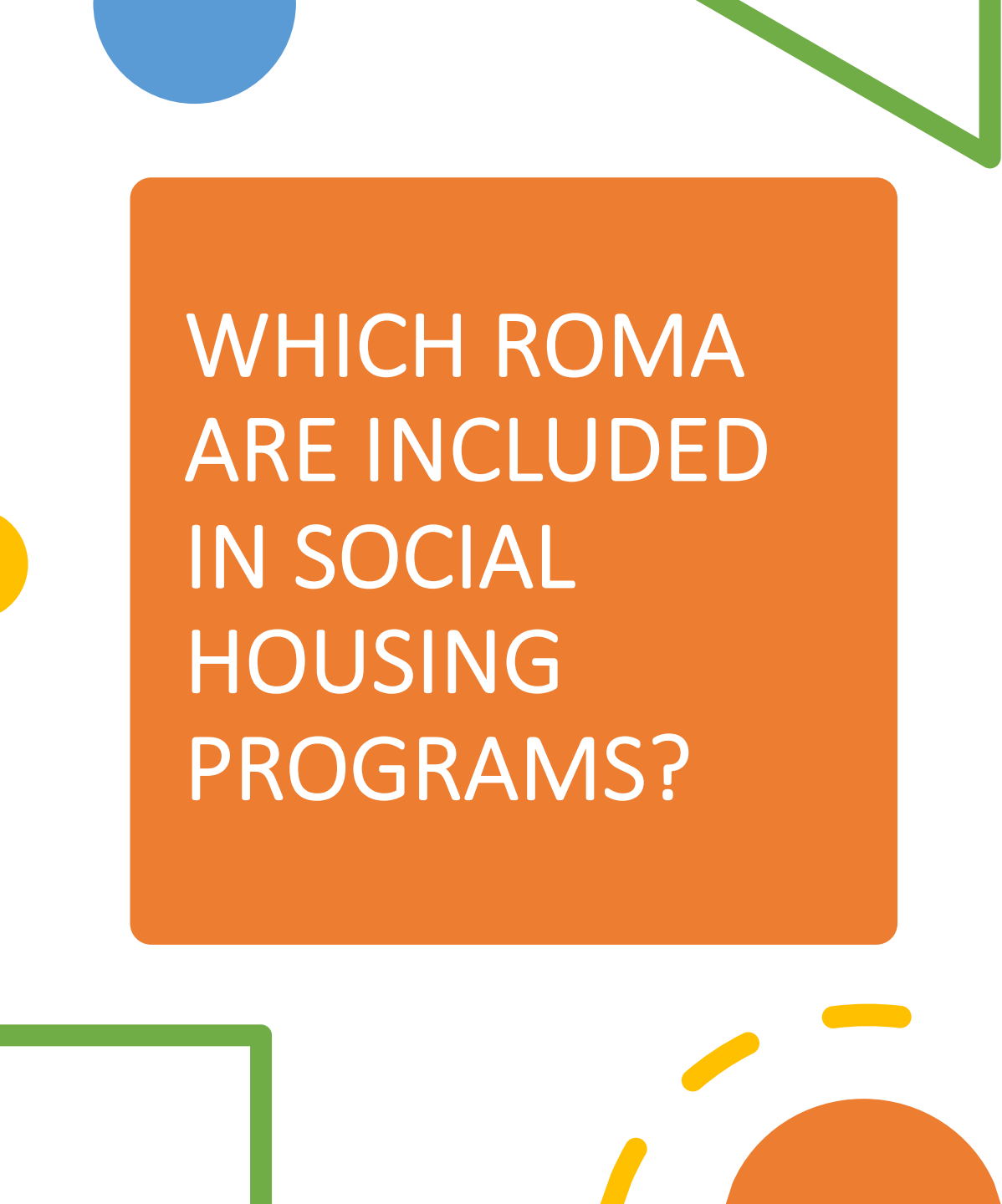A comparison of 5 contexts (France, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Romania)

A survey of existing data

Understanding points of view of policy-makers

A major role of focus groups with staff in administration and associations (2 for each city)

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

WHICH ROMA ARE INCLUDED IN SOCIAL HOUSING PROGRAMS?

➤ Differences between the 5 countries in system of social housing.

➤ Selection for grants/aid is not based on clear, written, objective criteria

➤ Understanding which behaviour is appreciated and granted with success is « work »

➤ **Ongoing-evaluation of deservingness**

➤ Structural factors that become obstacles to access certain programs.

SOME WIDELY USED CRITERIA

Families with children (but not too many)

Presence in the municipality for many years

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

Nice and open to collaborative interactions

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

THE EXAMPLE OF TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Transitional housing is considered by the stakeholders we interviewed as very expensive and defined as the integrated partnerships of social housing and social services.

The intention is to motivate residents, to give them time to improve their situation, the final outcome being their own, independent living.

In this scheme, the household gradually moves forward by meeting predetermined criteria (education, employment, territoriality, etc.)

In the case of some schemes in the Paris suburbs, risk of expulsion. There is no second-chance, and breaking a rule or, worse, not accepting a housing offer is irreversible and has the immediate consequence of expulsion from the programme.

We observed massive selection: those who are able to combine resources and ties and multiple strategies within the household may receive welfare support and access to social housing.

The other are excluded. The weakest are abandoned.

The most resourceful aren't passively locked into certain community-based solidarity.

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

Different contexts, common mechanisms

Ethnic categorization is very strong, even in countries like France where it cannot be openly stated.

Durable selectivity arises because people who control access to resources solve pressing organizational problems by means of categorical distinctions.

Frequently treated as second-class citizens, for local authorities **discretionary power is key:** it is possible to provide *or not* an answer to Roma problems of housing deprivation, it is possible or not to mobilise and defend Roma against discrimination.

In this situation, we can note multiple negative consequences: on the one hand, **corruption**, and on the other hand, **strong competition** and ruptures in solidarity among households.

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

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

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

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

LESSONS LEARNED

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

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Meaningful and continuous social work.

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Prevent financial distress, do not only punish it.

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Beyond communication and cooperation, information and transparency.

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It takes time.

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Variety of policy instruments is key.

Aims

- Elaboration of mutual learning outcomes, suggestions and recommendations based on Roma housing practices
- by collecting Roma housing (best/good) practices in 5 metropolitan areas in 5 EU countries (3-3 projects in France - Paris, Hungary - Miskolc, Italy - Milan, Romania - Targu Mures and 2 projects in Spain - Barcelona), in sum 14 practices

Methodology

- Ensuring comparability across countries, regions and practices
  - Same data collection principles, framework and methods
  - Same time frame (projects from the past 20 years, both finished and running projects)

- Success and transferability: The project should be *at least partially* successful; it would be possible to identify good practice in at least some of their activities and methods, which could be adapted in other places;

- Complexity: the project should not only deal with the infrastructural aspect of housing but other relevant fields of social inclusion

- Data collection: desk research, incl. evaluations (if any), interviews with various stakeholders, field visits, carried out in 2020

Selected projects by metropolitan areas (N=14)

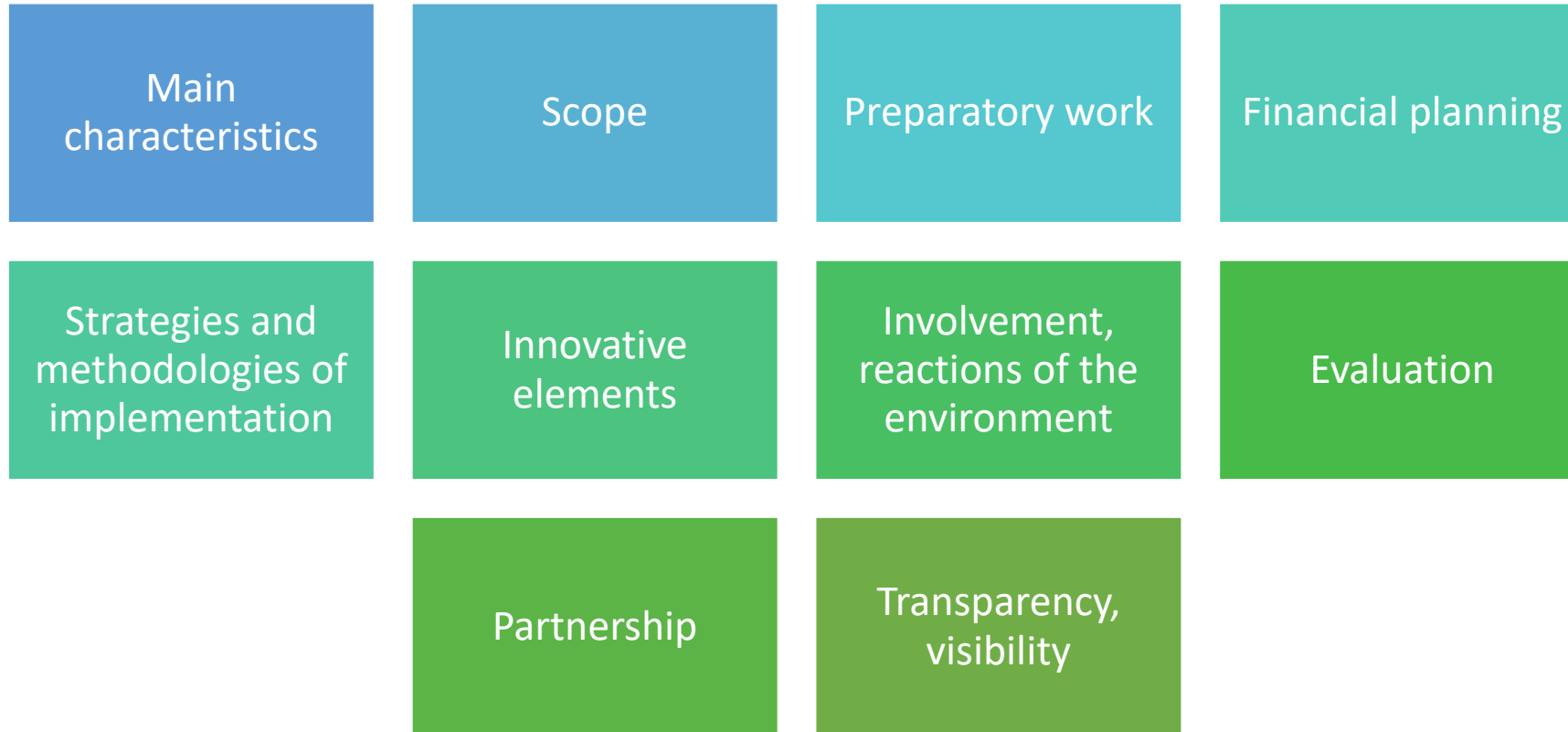| France / Paris	Hungary / Miskolc	Italy / Milan	Romania / Targu Mures	Spain / Barcelona
• Maîtrise d'oeuvre urbaine et sociale (MOUS) de Montreuil (Urban and social project management in Montreuil) • MOUS de Saint-Maur • Village temporaire d'accueil à Orly (Temporary village for reception in Orly)	• Bagázs (Bag) • Gyöngyös complex program • Miskolc számozott utcák lakhatási program (Housing program in Miskolc numbered streets)	• Il Villaggio Solidale (Solidarity Village) • I rom di via Rubattino (Roma people from Rubattino street) • I rom di via Novara (Roma people from via Novara)	• Pata-Cluj - Social interventions for the de-segregation and social inclusion of vulnerable groups of Cluj Metropolis Area • Sepsi-Gal • Extension of the sewerage network in Sangeorgiu de Mures	• Socio-educational intervention program and re-housing -for the Roma community of Lleida • Roma housing project by the Municipality of Cornellà and FAGiC.

Analytical aspects

Main characteristics	Scope	Preparatory work	Financial planning
Strategies and methodologies of implementation	Innovative elements	Involvement, reactions of the environment	Evaluation
	Partnership	Transparency, visibility	

Preparatory work

Project planning

The preparation of the selected practices varies considerably, but only two projects were preceded by thorough, scientifically sound planning.

- In one case it was a condition set by the funder (EU): CLLD (Community-Led Local Development) methodology, in which local development strategies are prepared with the involvement of local action groups, and local resources, problems and actors are carefully assessed.

Assessment of the social context

The risk or experience of a hostility for those moving out of the camp / segregated area into a new neighbourhood and community is a general barrier to the success of these projects

- the organizations had to take steps to mitigate tensions by persuading the locals to reduce prejudices against the Roma or take measures (intensive care for families) which would guarantee the smoother integration of the formerly segregated families

Involvement of the Roma

Roma stakeholders were barely involved into the preparation of the selected projects

Roma beneficiaries should be also prepared for the transition

Financial planning

Part of the preparatory phase is to provide resources for each project, which is predictable and valid in the long run.

- Only a few projects have a long-term and secure funding environment, especially at local or regional level (and only in the French and Italian cases in our sample).
- In the case of Eastern European projects, the typical funding source is the support of the municipalities complemented with EU funds in principle, because they cannot allocate significant resources to these projects. This is especially true in Hungary, where the budgetary room for manoeuvre of local governments has been steadily narrowing in recent years.

The complexity of resource planning and project planning is also strengthened by the nature of long-term development.

- Usually, EU-funded projects are designed for 2-3 years at the most. However, a successful housing project can take 5-8 years until the families involved can be considered successfully integrated and their housing situation can improve.

EU-funded projects are often perceived rigid in terms of the administrative rules of the grant scheme that are not suitable to cover ever-changing costs that require an immediate response.

- It can be overcome if the project is implemented in a civil-church-state/municipality consortium and not relying on EU funds only.

Strategies and methodologies of implementation

Complexity of intervention areas

- All the selected Roma housing projects are highly complex programs; none of them are one-dimension housing initiatives.

- Housing assistance was assigned development activities tailored to local needs everywhere, combined with the followings:
  - Ensuring the education of children;
  - Assisting in obtaining identity documents;
  - Labour market integration initiatives (vocational training, job-seeking, mentoring);
  - Improving access to health care provisions and the health status of the beneficiaries.

Complexity of assistance

- the whole project and budget should be planned after the individual development plans have been summarized,
  - individual assessment and development are indispensable parts of these initiatives, even if there are many identities in the situation of those living in segregated areas.

Financial independence of the beneficiaries

- A prerequisite for successful integration, and thus for retaining the rented housing acquired, is that the families have an independent labour income
  - only this can ensure that they are able to cover the cost of rent in the long run

Involvement, reactions of the environment

Neighbourhood tensions

The relocation of the Roma from segregated to integrated living environment often leads to tensions due to the resistance of those already living there, especially in Eastern Europe

This atmosphere could easily lead to the conservation of segregated areas unless local politicians are committed and brave enough to search for solutions to break the resistance of the locals

→ it requires political will and methodical skills, how to convince the majority population.

→Thus the target group of housing integration programs are both the Roma and the non-Roma living in the same settlement.

Partnership

All but one project were implemented in a consortium framework. The efficiency of mixed consortia and collaborations is clear. The advantages to include these actors are:

Municipalities

- … is essential to help in gaining the support of the locals, which is the legitimacy of the project.

- … can also provide the infrastructural condition for relocation and in the designation of rental flats or properties to be built, or in liaising with local authorities.

Civic and charity organizations

- … can undertake fieldwork and social development, esp. in countries (EE) where the state-municipal social welfare system does not have sufficient (human) capacity to implement a project of this scale.

- … are able to ensure trust in the relationship, as in many cases the families involved do not trust official, municipal actors.

- … have their own and more or less predictable budget, which, esp. with some EU funding, can provide important room for manoeuvre in securing costs that are either ineligible under EU procedures or not included in the budget or were not expected many years earlier in the preparatory phase.

External actors (stakeholders or partners)

- …can provide significant assistance in the preparation of the project by knowing and, if necessary, accurately assessing the social and cultural status of the families to be involved, and having the outlook and knowledge of what measures are adequate in case of a problem

7 lessons - Drivers to success

1. All of the practices were implemented in a consortium: different types of entities (municipalities, NGOs, church, academic actors) form a community of developers, that provided the synergy needed to solve a rather complex social problem.

2. It also leads to diversification of funding sources that includes non-rigid/flexible funding schemes (that is often provided by civilian actors) to respond to changing conditions and compensate the rigidity of EU funds

3. All of the practices were using a comprehensive / complex approach, i.e. expanded their development and integration goals and have not been limited to providing or improving housing only.

4. Development projects were implemented with a thorough service planning after getting know the beneficiaries (families and persons to be assisted) that is later complemented with intensive social work during and after the project implementation.

5. However, it also means, that it is not possible to take over projects per se already implemented elsewhere without any adaptation, but rather to compile the most efficient activities or methods from the projects successfully used.

6. The duration of the program should be long enough to reach the housing and integration goals, but also relevant from the aspect of funding, which is often a shorter period.

7. Involving the local non-Roma people and environment where the de-segregation process takes place is crucial for successful and sustainable housing projects: anti-discrimination policy and measures (e.g. step-by-step relocation, intensive family care, keeping in touch with the neighbours) are essential in a mixed neighbourhood to ensure cooperation rather than conflicts between various social groups.