THE SPATIALIZATION AND RACIALIZATION OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION.
THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FORMATION OF "GYPSY GHETTOS" IN ROMANIA
VIEWED IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Project description

Scientific context and motivation

The project addresses the issue of spatialization and racialization of **social exclusion** as it is manifested in **the social and cultural formation of "Gypsy ghettos"** in Romania viewed in the broader context of the European Union. The motivation to study this topic is based on the recognition that during the last two decades marked by privatization, pauperization and institutional discrimination against Roma, but as well as by the lack of governmental policies on the domain of public housing, a large number of disadvantaged Roma communities in urban areas of Romania (but as well as in several other EU member states) experienced residential segregation/ ghettoization and related sub-standard housing conditions as a form of social exclusion. Parallel with this, while concentrated slum-areas within the cities or at their outskirts were conceived as "Gypsy neighborhoods", the dominant public and everyday discourses justified their formation by making appeal to explanations based on anti-Gypsy racism. By this project we aim at deconstructing and reconstructing the controversial term of "Gypsy ghetto" connecting it to other concepts, such as disadvantaged and hyper-segregated housing areas that might acquire racial meanings regardless of the ethnic self-identification of its tenants. Our analysis focuses on the role that different actors and forces play in the spatial and symbolic construction of the "Gypsy ghetto", it emphasizes its multiple meanings, variations and dynamics, and it interprets the material and symbolic work of social exclusion in terms of multiple deprivations and lack of opportunity to belong to the societal life.

This project analyzes the proposed topic in the scientific context of the so-called **spatial turn in social sciences**, which focuses attention on space as an important dimension of inquiry and recognizes that "position and context are centrally and inescapably implicated in all constructions of knowledge" (Cosgrove, 1999: 7). Recent works in many fields assert that "space is a social construction relevant to the understanding of the different histories of human subjects and to the production of cultural phenomena", and that spatiality matters "not for the simplistic and overly

used reason that everything happens in space, but because *where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen" (Warf and Arias, 2009: 1). The ghettoized space embodies processes of differentiation between "insiders" and "outsiders", between those who "deserve" belonging to society and those who don't, or between the middle class and the pauperized social categories. Ghettoization is a terrain on and through which – after the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the crises of the Western welfare states – social actors negotiate from unequal positions of power on the shared understanding of who is to be included to or who is to be excluded from societal spaces considered as "adequate".

On the base of the literature about **social exclusion**, we sustain that it is not reduced to poverty, and it happens "when social isolation occurs for reasons that are beyond the control of those subject to it" (Barry, 1998: 14). Social exclusion is "about the inability of our society to keep all groups and individuals within reach of what we expect as a society. It is about the tendency to push vulnerable and difficult individuals into the least popular places, furthest away from our common aspirations. It means that some people feel excluded from the mainstream, as though they do not belong" (Power and Wilson 2000). We subscribe to the observation of Mayes, according to whom "social exclusion is not just the description of the adverse consequences of disadvantage, but of the processes by which people become distanced from the benefits of participating in a modern society" (Mayes et.al, 2001: 1). A policy paper set forth by the Council of Europe asserts that social exclusion should be understood as a "dual risk" (for individuals facing it as well as the entire society, which become fragmented), and as "a result of structural processes (…) not individual failure", which needs a dynamic and multidimensional approach of investigation (CE, 2001: 16). According to Sen, the main virtue of the concept of social exclusion resides in "its practical influence in forcefully emphasizing – and focusing attention on – the role of relational features in deprivation" (Sen, 2000: 8).

Works on social exclusion of Roma emphasize that this "is a complex problem of people living excluded from the mainstream society symbolically and/or economically". They stress that "ethnic categories … are not only target groups of social exclusion but they may be actual results of the very processes of exclusion and inclusion, and "there are social contexts in which being *Ţigan or Rom,* as identified by the majority population, means being excluded (Fleck and Rughiniş, 2008: 6). As far as Roma housing conditions are concerned, recent studies assert that "the Romanian legal framework in the area of housing indirectly discriminates against the Roma by simply not taking into account their special situation as most Roma, due to historical conditions, do not own land or are too poor to pay for authorizations or have been forcefully settled without property documentation and have been living in a place for years" (Niţa 2009). Moreover, community

studies conducted in Romania draw attention to the salience of the cumulative, mutually reinforcing links between residential segregation and reduced access to school education, decent jobs, healthcare and other public services of ethnic Roma (Kiss, Fosztó and Fleck 2009; FRA 2009; Berescu 2010; Magyari-Vincze 2006; Vincze, Harbula and Magyari 2010; Magyari-Vincze and Harbula 2011). Despite the EU directives regarding the reduction of poverty and social exclusion, a recent comparative analysis observes that "many Roma and Travellers in the EU live in substandard conditions […], often in segregated and environmentally hazardous areas, with poor access to public services, employment and schools […], "sometimes as a result of government policy and sometimes as the result of economic pressure, local government or private action or the hostility of non-Roma populations." (FRA, 2009: 92-93). This situation makes our project not only scientifically, but also socially relevant in the contemporary Europe.

We use the term **"Gypsy ghetto"** as an analytical construct for discussing the spatialization and racialization of social exclusion, respectively the different variations in which economic deprivation, racial stigmatization and spatial isolation intersect each other. Following Whitehead (2000), we are rejecting those views that discuss about ghettos "in terms of the behavioral and attitudinal shortcomings of their residents", and do not "provide a contextual analysis of the broader structural factors that contributed to the creation or conditions of the ghetto". Accordingly, we subscribe to the approach of Hannerz, according to which "much of what should concern us about ghetto life has its ultimate determinants in much larger structures, beyond the reach of the ghetto dwellers" (Hannerz, 1969: 13). That is why our multi-sited ethnography of "Gypsy ghettos" aims at the analysis of their social and cultural formation.

Consequently, we will not only focus on their internal life, but as well as on larger processes, which spatialize and racialize social exclusion (including structural and cultural forces, such as socio-economic inequalities, urban policies and administrative practices of public housing, and public discourses). Furthermore, following the analytical tradition of anthropologists conducting fieldwork on marginalized communities (such as Okely 1983; Stewart 1997; Day, Papataxiarchis and Stewart 1999) we aim at interpreting the everyday practices of ghetto tenants as responses to social exclusion, and at identifying their agency as a way of both creatively accommodate to and change their given condition or practicing a socio-cultural and political critique towards the system that produces them as racialized ghetto dwellers.

Objectives

The main scientific objective of our project is to develop an empirically based novel approach towards social exclusion as a spatialized and racialized phenomenon. For this reason we propose exploring the analytical potential of the concept of "ghetto", addressing it by a processual approach (as "ghettoization") that enables us to describe the formation of socially, culturally and physically isolated spaces of housing characterized by deteriorated living and environmental conditions, economic deprivation, reduced contacts with the outer world and cultural stigmatization. By investigating the role of space in producing and maintaining social exclusion, we will bring a significant contribution to the spatial turn of social sciences.

The proposed comparative and interdisciplinary research addresses how exclusion functions through the social and cultural formation of "Gypsy ghettos" both as localized social settings (places in the physical space) and discursive conceptualizations of social divisions (commonplaces in public discourses). We will focus on understanding how different actors are creating and using the space (of ghettoized housing) in order to create and maintain socio-cultural distinctions in concrete/ local contexts shaped by forces and processes of the broader political economy. In particular, we aim at understanding how and why is the space of housing used in order to create and sustain social and ethnic boundaries, or differently put, what is the social, cultural and political function of residential segregation in the (re)production of differentiations and inequalities created at the intersection of social status and ethnicity. Moreover, we also propose addressing the impact of physical isolation on social contacts, (self)-identifications and generally on people's life expectancies and trajectories. By this we will be able to understand the ways in which the stigmatized physical space is inscribed into people's bodies, minds and relations, and in which, as such, it symbolically justifies their exclusion. Following the tracks opened by the comparative analysis of Wacquant about the African-American hyper-ghetto and the Parisian marginal neighborhoods (Wacquant, 2008), our research aims as well as at identifying variations of ghettoization sustained by different degrees to which poverty, racial stigmatization and physical isolation cumulate in the process of social exclusion. Wacquant (2004) also inspires us to analyze how is the "protective function" of the ghetto relating to its "oppressive role" according to the extent to which its inhabitants cease to be of economic value for the dominant group.

The innovative nature of our proposal also consists in the fact that it addresses its subject on the base of a multi-sited ethnography conducted in Romania and of an analysis on public discourses related to and studies about ghettoization, poverty and anti-Gypsy racism from several EU member states (Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Great Britain, Italy and France), and as well as on the base of an investigation about EU policies targeting social inclusion and housing for disadvantaged

communities. The latter components of the analysis will enable us to develop a comparative frame for studying our topic, and to produce a policy paper with relevance across borders.

The project's goal is to produce the following outcomes:

- scientific articles to be published in peer-reviewed and internationally indexed academic journals;

- a collective edited volume with selected studies undertaken within the project to be published at an academically recognized publishing house;

- a policy paper with recommendations regarding the studied topic to be distributed at relevant governmental bodies, non-governmental stakeholders, European institutions with responsibilities in the fields of social exclusion, human rights, social policies and regional development, and also to academic institutions;

- a documentary film linked to the empirical research that can be useful for civil society organizations, academic institutions, governmental and EU institutions working in the fields of social exclusion, human rights, social policies and regional development;

- participation on international conferences (for example with a joint panel at the conference from 2014 of the European Association of Social Anthropologists);

- participation on international film festivals with the documentary film produced by the project;

- public conferences in Romania (with the aim of disseminating project results).

Work packages

The main scientific objectives of the project stated above will be fulfilled through interlinked **Work Packages** (WP). They include preparatory and organizational activities, the accomplishment of the comparative interdisciplinary research, and the dissemination of the project results as described below:

WP1: Elaboration of the conceptual frame, the research methodology and tools (result: working papers) – 3 months (M2-4)

WP2: A multi-sited ethnography conducted by the means of participant observation and in-depth interviews within communities subjected to ghettoization in five urban localities from Romania (Cluj, Bucharest, Ploieşti, Târgu-Mureş, Miercurea-Ciuc) and within their broader local context (results: preliminary and final reports) – 14 months (M5-18)

WP3: Documentary film-making about ghettoization as it is experienced by the members of the communities addressed by the means of the ethnographic research from above (shooting, film concept and script, video-editing and English subtitle) – 11 months (M15-25)

WP4: The analysis of the Romanian governmental policies on the domain of public housing, and as well as the implementation of housing policies at local level targeting poor (Roma) communities that increase social exclusion or to the contrary, which are aimed at eliminating racialized residential segregation (including document analysis and interviews with central and local public authorities, resulted in a preliminary and a final report) – 7 months (M5-11)

WP5: Documenting studies conducted on ghettoization related to poverty and Roma, in Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Great Britain, Italy and France (annotated bibliography presented in the form of a report) – 4 months (M5-8)

WP6: The analysis of media and political discourses about ghettoization, segregation, poverty and marginalized Roma communities in the context of Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Great Britain, Italy and France (content analysis) – 9 months (M9-17)

WP7: The analysis of EU policies targeting social inclusion and housing for disadvantaged communities (document analysis and interviews with EU stakeholders, resulted in a preliminary and a final report) – 7 months (M12-M18)

WP8: Writing a policy paper with recommendations – 4 months (M29-32)

WP9: Team workshops (a preliminary workshop organized at the beginning of the project, and the intermediary workshops hold during the implementation will ensure the joint development and adjustment of the conceptual and methodological tools of the research, and as well as the sharing of the project's intermediary and final results) - M1, 12, 24, 36

WP10: Dissemination:

- WP10.1: Writing and submitting articles for academic journals – 4 months (M19-22)

- WP10.2: Preparing the joint volume. Writing, editing and submission – 14 months (M23-36)

- WP10.3: Participation at international conferences – the occasions determined by the dates of the targeted conference in the last year (for example M35)

- WP10.4: Participation at international film festivals – the occasions determined by the dates of the targeted festivals at the end of the project (for example M33 and 36)

- WP10.5: Organizing public conferences in Romania – 3 conferences to be organized at the end of the project (for ex. M33, 34 and 36)

Project team

The international and interdisciplinary project team is composed of members, whose experience in scientific research related to the topic and academic positions guarantee the fulfilling of the project objectives in due time, and ensure the human resources for producing results of high quality.

Team members are going to be involved into specific project activities (work-packages) as mentioned below and they also will take part in the project workshop and project dissemination activities:

1. Principal investigator and project coordinator (PI): Dr. Enikő Vincze, professor, BBU Cluj (all WPs)

2. Senior researcher (SR1): Dr. Cătălin Berescu, architect Bucharest (WP1, WP2, WP3, WP5, WP6, WP8)

3. Senior researcher (SR2): Dr. Cristina Raţ, university lecturer, BBU Cluj (WP1, WP2, WP4, WP7, WP8)

4. Senior researcher (SR4): Dr. László Fosztó, researcher, ISPMN, Cluj (WP1, WP2)

5. Senior researcher (SR5): Dr. Michael Stewart, professor, University College London (WP3)

6. Senior researcher (SR6): Dr. Michal Buchowski, professor Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland & European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder, Germany (WP5, WP6)

7. Senior researcher (SR7): Dr. Norbert Petrovici, university lecturer, BBU Cluj (WP1, WP2)

8. Junior researcher (JR1): Dr. Giovanni Picker, Post-doctoral research fellow, ISPMN, Cluj, visiting teaching assistant University of Milan, Italy (WP5, WP6)

9. Junior researcher (JR2): Drd. Camelia Moraru, teaching assistant BBU, Cluj (WP2)

10. Junior researcher (JR3): Drd. Hajnalka Harbula, BBU, Cluj (WP2, WP5, WP6)

11. Junior researcher (JR4): Drd. Adrian Dohotaru, BBU, Cluj (WP2, WP3)

12. Junior researcher (JR5): Drd. Tibor Schneider, cameraman at the Romanian public television, WP3

13. Junior researcher (JR6): Dr. Anca Simionca, university assistant, BBU Cluj (WP2)

14. Junior researcher (JR7): Drd. Iuliu Kozák, ISPMN researcher (WP5, WP6)

15. Tehnicians (T1, T2, T3): Administrative/financial matters; Transcribing the interviews and English film subtitle; English proofreading of the collective volume

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Impact, relevance, applications

The project proposal has both a theoretical and practical relevance. As such – on the one hand – it will contribute to the conceptual developments related to our field and topic, and – on the other hand – it includes the application of the research result with the aim to improve public policies that reduce social exclusion, and to raise public awareness about ghettoization.

Through fulfilling its main analytical objective (the investigation of the ways in which social exclusion is manifested in and reproduced by the spatial arrangements of urban housing and underlying anti-Gypsy racism in the contemporary EU) – by publishing the resulted studies in scientific journals and a joint volume, and presenting them at international conferences – we expect that our project will have an impact on the larger scientific field due to its innovative outcomes, such as: analyzing the collected empirical data on Romania in a broader European context; approaching the issue of social exclusion at the intersection of several phenomena, such as impoverishment, anti-Gypsy racism, and ghettoization/ residential segregation; developing the concept of spatialization and racialization of social exclusion.

But the expected impact of our proposal is not limited to a strict scientific field. On the base of our research reports resulted from ethnographic fieldwork, policy and public discourse analysis, we are going to formulate policy recommendations regarding spatial integration and the improvement of the housing conditions of disadvantaged (Roma) communities. In this way our proposal will have a contribution to the discussion on social exclusion that undergoes within the larger framework of the Open Method of Coordination in the domain of European social policies (Tsakloglou and Papadopoulos, 2002). Furthermore, the applicative character of our project consists in using the produced documentary film in order to raise awareness within a broader public about the social consequences of ghettoization.

Conceived to be implemented by a team consisting of senior and junior researchers from Romania and from abroad, the proposal will also have an impact on the institutional development of our local academic community. By producing internationally visible and competitive results at Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj on topics that concern today's European societies and scientific communities, the project will increase the latter's capacity to successfully apply for further international research funds.