Geographica 26
Dwelling on Substandard Housing
A multi-site contextualisation of housing deprivation among Romanian Roma

Dominic Teodorescu
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Abstract

This thesis explores the housing situation of Romanian Roma in recent times. Many Romanian Roma are relegated to inadequate living conditions, and this thesis seeks to further our knowledge of the spaces this group inhabits. This is done by focusing on postsocialist urban segregation, institutional intervention inertia, and local efforts made and strategies deployed by Roma to appropriate decent living conditions.

Paper I examines the postsocialist relegation of poor Bucharesters to the impoverished southern parts of Ferentari, a neighbourhood in Romania’s capital. The paper proposes a theoretical understanding of Romania’s postsocialist production of urban space by drawing on the housing trajectories of residents of various housing types, ranging from small apartments to newly built slums.

Paper II brings the perspective of Bucharest’s local officials to the fore, analysing institutional dynamics and policymaking in Bucharest’s poorest administrative division, where Ferentari is situated. In this article, political inertia is highlighted as comprising a problematic pairing of political disregard of welfare provision and racialised understandings of Ferentari’s citizens. As a result, no concrete and rigorous efforts are made to address the neighbourhood’s obvious problems.

Paper III examines the narratives of Romanian Roma who travel to Sweden to earn more income, but where they are also exposed to an unwelcoming context and homelessness. The study helps clarify how certain groups in Europe can be both homeowners and homeless at the same time. This article disputes the assumption that homeownership is a more stable tenure form than for example decommodified rental housing.

Paper IV examines two different and highly mobile housing and earning strategies of two related Boyash-Roma communities in two countries: Argentina and Romania. The Argentine case concerns Romanian-speaking Roma involved in street-vending throughout Argentina. The Romanian case concerns Rudari from Vâlcea County, who travel to Sweden primarily to beg. The cases illustrate how two groups have managed to improve their housing conditions in post-crisis and xenophobic contexts.

In combination, this multi-site research advances our understanding of the problems Roma face in finding adequate housing. Although continuously marginalised and excluded, Roma still find ways to cope with their situation and even improve their housing.

Keywords: Roma, Romania, Racialisation, Postsocialism, Housing, Community-led strategies

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Voor Valentina,
mijn allerdierbaarste druktemaker
Cover: Dan Perjovschi, „Acasă suprapopulată” (2013). Designed by Laura D’Have.
All pictures: Dominic Teodorescu, unless otherwise stated.
Nais tuke! ¹

Met een gevoel van weemoed zet ik deze laatste woorden als promovendus op papier. Het waren in totaal zes noemenswaardige jaren, waarin ik niet alleen het voorrecht had om mijzelf op een geweldige universiteit verder te mogen ontwikkelen, maar ook in alle rust de rol van vader onder de knie heb kunnen krijgen. In de acht maanden aan vaderschapsverlof heb ik met Valentina de wondere wereld mogen ontdekken! We hebben in die maanden de eerste hapjes genomen van een belegd broodje, de eerste stapjes gemaakt zonder hulp en zelfs hele spannende dingen aangeraakt, zoals sneeuw, de geiten van de plaatselijke kinderboerderij en al die gekke winkelartikelen. Hoewel ik nog pagina’s vol kan kladden met de eeuwige herinneringen aan deze prille levensfase, doe ik dat natuurlijk niet. In de pagina’s die hier volgen, zet ik mijn bevindingen na jarenlang onderzoek uiteen. Om op dit punt te komen, heb ik de steun genoten van een grote groep mensen, die ik daarvoor eeuwig dankbaar ben.


¹ Nais tuke means thank you in Romani, the language spoken by various Roma groups.
Draiu din Argentina. Draiu este un ludar care în continuare vorbește o română arhaică în comunitatea lui, ce se numește ludărește. În lunile în care am stat în Buenos Aires am avut norocul fantastic să mă întâlnesc frecvent cu Draiu și familia lui. În afară de interviuri am stat de vorbă, am mâncat o varietate de mâncări românești și m-am simțit extraordinar de binevenit. În plus ador momentele în care primesc un „voice message” pe whatsapp care începe cu „hola frateeee!”. 

În afară de respondenții mei vreau să mai mulțumesc și grupului minunat de la Policy Center, Valeria Răcilă pentru sprijinul ei în București, Mădălina Florea pentru corectarea textelor și traducerea interviurilor din Uppsala, și cei mai mișto și simpatici geografi din România: Cătălin Berescu și Liviu Chelcea. Apoi mai este bineînțeles și familia mea fantastă și extraordinară. Mama mea dragă, bunica/oma lui Valentina, a fost mereu prezentă când aveam mare nevoie de ea. M-a sprijinit prin a fi alături de mine, prin a mă înțelege și mai ales prin încrederea ei necondiționată. Scopul meu rămâs în viață este să transmit astfel de sentimente profunde lui Valentina și să devin și eu astfel de părint. Mulțumesc mami! George la fel, ești tare, ce l mai bun frate, vioi și un tată extraordinar! Sunt sigur că Manoa este de acord cu mine! Și să nu uităm bunica Gina, mai bine cunoscută ca Regina Constantina. Îmi aduc aminte cât de mândră erai de mine în 2013 că mă „făceam doctor”. Pare că chiar am reușit.

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an impressive professional career in Sweden. Without your courage and determination it would have been much harder.

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Mulțumesc, Cheers, Tack, Gracias, Dank!

Uppsala, August 2019
List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers:


II  Teodorescu, D. Racialised postsocialist governance in Romania’s Urban Margins: housing and local policymaking in Ferentari, Bucharest. *A version of this article has been submitted to an internationally refereed journal.*

III  Teodorescu, D. & Molina, I. Roma beggars in Uppsala: racialised poverty and fallacious homeownership in Romania and Sweden. *A version of this article has been submitted to an internationally refereed journal.*

IV  Teodorescu, D. Homeownership, mobility, and home: a reflective housing study of Argentine Ludar and Romanian Rudari. *A version of this article has been submitted to an internationally refereed journal.*

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Abbreviations

ANL  Agenția Naționala pentru Locuințe (Romania’s National Housing Agency)
CEC  Casa de Economii și Consemnațiuni (Romania’s Deposits and Consignments Bank)
CNCD Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării (Romania’s National Council for Combating Discrimination)
EU   European Union
EUR  Euro
ETS  European Treaty Series
FEANTSA European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless
FHP  Federal Housing Plan
GBAR Greater Buenos Aires Region
GDP  Gross domestic product
INS  Romania’s National Institute for Statistics
NGO  Non-Governmental Organisation
RON  Romanian New Leu
ROL  Romanian 1952-2005 period Leu
SEK  Swedish Crown
SGP  Stability and Growth Pact
SOU  Statens offentliga utredningar (State public reports)
USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Prologue

On a hot summer day in July 2015, I visited Monica and Marian in their small one-room apartment in Ferentari, Bucharest. The apartment is situated on the second floor of one of the city’s most notorious blocks of apartments – or as Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi has depicted it, the “phantom block” (Figure 1). During the interview, I tried to grasp what it was like to live in such a decayed dwelling and, above all, how the couple ended up living in this poor part of the city. Marian explained:

The death of Monica’s brother truly depressed my mother-in-law. She decided to sell the house in which we all lived in Rahova [i.e., a neighbourhood next to Ferentari]. She moved back to Alexandria and certainly did not think about the consequences for us.

Marian was still visibly frustrated by the sudden sale of the house in 2002. His mother-in-law suggested they follow her to Alexandria, but “what on earth can we do in Alexandria?” wondered Marian. He had a point. Alexandria, a small town some 100 km away from the capital, characterises the postsocialist economic transition that rendered many small industrial towns economically unviable. “There are no jobs there, nothing to do!” Monica and Marian therefore chose, like many
others, to search for housing in Bucharest, near the thriving informal labour market. They saw no other option than to move to Ferentari where rents were relatively cheap. Without any financial assets from Monica’s mother, and due to the recent birth of their son, the household was relying solely on Marian’s income from day labour. The next spring, Marian failed to earn enough to make ends meet and their landlord subsequently evicted them. Their son Alex, now a toddler, was sent to Alexandria, while Monica and Marian stayed with Monica’s cousin – or, to be more accurate, in the backyard behind the house: “We tried to sleep two nights in their house, but there were too many people, many fights, everything was filthy”, Marian remembered. Instead, the couple slept out in the open on a blanket, continuing to live in this way through the autumn: “In the morning we woke up with dew on our faces. September, October, even November”, Monica recollected. The cold pushed them once again to Ferentari, but this time to the local slumlords, the Ștoacă family. This family profited mainly by lending money (cămătărie in Romanian) to impoverished households in Ferentari in need of cash. Their loans came with usurious interest rates of up to 100% per loan, and apartments and other valuable assets were claimed when debtors could not repay their debts. In this way, the Ștoacă clan (clanul Ștoacă) acquired a large number of dwellings in the neighbourhood.

The apartment that the Ștoacă clan offered to Monica and Marian had been illegally expropriated and sublet by one of the Ștoacă moneylenders. They paid rent of RON 300 (around EUR 65) per month and did so until legislation was passed to control the illegal moneylenders. First, the local district municipality issued a decree that stipulated new conditions for “unclaimed” public housing. Specifically, people could be granted tenancy rights to such dwellings if they could prove that the dwelling had been vacant. Second, an “anti-cămătărie act” was adopted (Law 216/2011) forbidding money lending by unauthorised persons, with all assets obtained through this form of money lending (împrumut cu camătă) being subject to confiscation. Monica and Marian decided to go to the local government office to try to obtain a first-hand contract (repartiție). Monica remembered: “We were already in the queue, but there were no available homes. But one day they mentioned something about the repartition of unclaimed dwellings and I thought, ‘This is my chance!’ We got this first-hand contract because the dwelling had indeed not been claimed by anyone else, which made sense: it was now part of the Ștoacă’s network”. The new public rent was only RON 50 (EUR 11), but they continued paying the rent to the Ștoacă family as well, as they were terrified of the
consequences: “Although we had the first-hand contract, we couldn’t do anything”. Then one day, right after the new anti-cămătărie act was adopted, a member of the Ștoacă family knocked on their door with some “great news”. Monica explained: “He said, ‘Listen dear lady [maică], if you want I’ll help you by going to the district municipality and obtaining a first-hand contract. For that you’ll give me RON 1000 (EUR 210). That’s the amount of money I paid to the former tenants when I obtained it, and I need to recover the cost somehow’. That’s exactly what he said, and even though I already had the first-hand contract, his point was clear: he wanted that RON 1000 as final earnings. Marian didn’t earn so much, so we offered him RON 500. He rejected that and became violent and started to threaten all of us – that he’ll kill us – really serious threats. I was in shock and, with the children, took refuge with my sister”. Meanwhile, Marian was left alone to deal with the Ștoacă clan. He turned to his boss for help, but was informed that all the salaries had just been paid and that there was no option to lend him the RON 500. Instead, the boss offered to let him sell all the scrap that they had collected at the company’s most recent construction site. The night before the Ștoacă clan’s deadline, he transported all the scrap to a local salvage yard, secured the remaining RON 500, and was able to pay it to the infuriated clan enforcer.

The Ștoacă clan member did not go to the municipal housing office, but at least left the family alone and allowed them to live without the imminent threat of being evicted from the “phantom block”. Phantom buildings contain registered social and owned housing units, form a network of various economic activities, and provide shelter for Romania’s poorest citizens. A phantom is something seen, heard, or sensed but without physical reality: an illusion. What Dan Perjovschi alludes to by this name is the institutional gaze, which stops at the entrance of this building. What happens behind it is apparently no longer of interest to the local authorities.
Introduction

At the national level, Romania is clearly struggling with an enormous postsocialist housing crisis. Whether this concerns younger people, older Romanians, or the Roma minority, large parts of the population are confronted with a system that fails to provide much-needed affordable and adequate housing. Consequently, social housing is practically nonexistent, slums are being built throughout the country (Berescu, Petrović, and Teller, 2013), and overcrowding is a reality for roughly one in three Romanians (Eurostat). Such housing and socio-economic dimensions are central to this thesis, since they indicate the main topic of this thesis: housing research within spaces of exclusion.

This is an article-based thesis in the field of urban social geography. The empirical cases range from Bucharest to remote villages in the Romanian countryside, the urban landscape of Uppsala, and ultimately the suburbs of Buenos Aires, Argentina (see Figure 2 for maps and Appendix 1 for visual impressions of the researched cases). The Bucharest case allowed me to study the simultaneous physical deterioration of the built-up area and the increase in the number of poor residents, consisting largely of Romanian Roma attracted to the city by the cheap substandard housing. The Bucharest case also allowed me to reflect on local officials and their role in the reproduction of urban segregation and dire housing conditions. The cases of the Roma travelling to Sweden and the Romanian-speaking Roma (the Ludar) in the Greater Buenos Aires Region (GBAR) provided an opportunity to study local strategies for coping with societal marginalisation and substandard living conditions in general and precarious housing in particular. Additionally, I want to stress that the existence of the Ludar came as a surprise to me, as there are no extensive accounts written in English about this group. A particular contribution of my thesis is that it presents new findings regarding this under-examined group of Roma.
Figure 2. Researched areas in Romania (upper map), Sweden (left), and Argentina (right).
Research objectives

Although the Roma are presumably\(^2\) the largest and most deprived ethnic minority in Romania, only recently have a growing number of geographers started to study their housing and socioeconomic difficulties. This thesis seeks to contribute to this growing scholarship and further our knowledge of the spaces that Romanian Roma inhabit, the efforts they make and strategies they deploy to appropriate decent living spaces, and the institutional intervention inertia in this poignant context.

This thesis consists of four separate articles and this comprehensive summary, called a *kappa* in Swedish. This summary is divided into several chapters and serves to link the different papers to the overarching aims of this thesis. Three research aims and corresponding research questions guide this thesis (see Table 1).

The thesis first seeks to explore Romania’s postsocialist impoverished neighbourhoods by answering the question:

*What processes have resulted in (and reproduced) the relegation of many Romanian Roma to substandard housing in Bucharest, and how can we understand these processes theoretically?*

The answer to this question is vital to the thesis, because it identifies the marginal space and substandard forms of dwelling to which many Romanian Roma – but not only Roma – are relegated. The first article seeks to understand the particulars of this variant of urban marginality and its ongoing reproduction in some of the harshest urban environments of Bucharest – including the infamous neighbourhood of Ferentari, the studied case. Ferentari was selected to gain deeper understanding of its housing issues, which are unique even in Romania. As such, studying Ferentari proved to be a good opportunity to theorise about the extremes of postsocialist housing decay and segregation.

Second, I investigate the positions, roles, and strategies of local government officials in negotiating the local political system that has tolerated the hardships identified by the first research question. This is done by answering the question:

\(^2\) According to the most recent census (2011), at roughly 1.2 million people, Hungarians are Romania’s largest ethnic minority, making up 6.1% of the total population. Roma would come second at 620 thousand people or 3.1% of the total population. However, the actual number is believed to be much higher, and estimates range from one to two million. Moreover, a considerable number of ethnic Hungarians are believed to be Hungarian-speaking Roma.
What role do local governing institutions in Bucharest play in the reproduction or mitigation of urban decay and severe socio-economic deprivation?

My specific focus here is also on the neighbourhood of Ferentarlı, located in Bucharest’s Sector 5. Bucharest is divided into six administrative units, called sectors. Each sector has its own council and mayor. The neighbourhood’s socioeconomic problems and poor housing conditions have received insufficient political attention over the past three (postsocialist) decades. Consequently, the second article seeks to establish how local officials understand and negotiate the degradation of this neighbourhood.

Third, the thesis investigates the opportunities seized and decisions made by Romanian Roma in their attempts to appropriate decent housing. Therefore, the thesis seeks to answer:

How do the various Roma groups themselves understand and negotiate their segregation in and relegation to substandard housing?

Here the focus is on the agency of the Roma in finding ways to improve their current housing or to access better housing. Within this aim, I follow in addition to my research participants from Ferentarlı, two groups that, in the face of retrenched welfare support and ongoing Romaphobia, have developed strategies to improve their housing and secure homes. The groups concern Romanian “EU beggars” that travel to Sweden and the highly mobile Ludar-Roma from Argentina. The answers to this research question are presented in Papers I, III and IV.

The Uppsala case was selected because I felt I could not simply study impoverished Roma in Romania when some of them had travelled to Uppsala and were literally begging outside the supermarket beside the entrance of my previous apartment. When carrying out the Uppsala fieldwork, the begging practices of Romanian Roma in Sweden were arguably at their peak, involving some 4–5000 Roma, according to official statistics (Hansson and Mitchell, 2018). This focus allowed me to find respondents very easily and ask them about their housing experiences, and I was told that their begging practices were closely linked to their housing conditions in Romania. Most respondents told me that they beg in order to, among other things, improve their dilapidated houses. As a result, I visited all the places of residence in Romania mentioned by the respondents in Uppsala.

Finally, the research conducted in two suburbs of Buenos Aires was an unforeseen addition to this thesis. Just as I did not expect the Uppsala case to take me to remote villages in the Carpathians and Moldavia, I did not expect to meet distant relatives of the inhabitants of these same mountain villages in Argentina. Although my initial aim
in visiting Argentina was to work as a visiting scholar at the Human Geography Department of the University of Buenos Aires and explore Roma-related housing issues in general, I soon made contact with a Romanian-speaking Roma community, who call themselves Ludar.

Outline of this comprehensive thesis summary

The thesis is largely modelled on the principles of critical urban theory, historicising urban development, exploring the political implications of uneven development, rejecting partial knowledge gained from bureaucratic or technocratic urban analyses, and seeking new ways to combat exclusion and inequality. This research stream tries to capture the antagonistic relationship in space between the politico–ideological imposition of forms and behaviours (e.g., as consumers, homeowners, and obedient citizens), and the societal contestations against such orders (Brenner, 2009; Marcuse, 2009; Lefebvre, 1991; Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas, 1996). On the ground, space is accordingly seen as simultaneously shaped, enforced, contested, rejected, and reconstructed. Empirics, as in this study, help demonstrate that space is malleable. Various approaches are required to capture this complexity. This comprehensive summary engages with the methodological considerations and most important concepts and theoretical approaches used in the articles. However, before introducing the methods used and literature consulted and before discussing the empirics, the first chapter presents the housing contexts of the studied cases. The second chapter then delves into the history of Roma persecution and marginalisation. Knowing this history is essential in order to critically assess the making of the marginalised Roma. A strong tendency exists to racialise the Roma as a welfare-dependent, poorly integrated, and idle group (Crețan and Powell, 2018; Lancione, 2017; Maestri, 2014; O’Neill, 2014; van Baar, 2017) without acknowledging the oppression and persecution they have faced over time.

The third chapter introduces the main concepts and theories that guide the analyses of the empirical material. This chapter explores concepts that help clarify how the process of spatial production is simultaneously imposed and contested. On one hand, powerful resources are mobilised, such as planning codes and laws, labour, ideological discourses of progress, and, of course, capital. Simultaneously, the forms that materialise from these mobilisations are contested and even subverted through all kinds of local practices (Iveson, 2013). These attempts to re-claim space, which can take the form of, for example,
squatter movements, new slum formation, and occupations of streets and public spaces, demonstrate the plasticity of space.

The fourth chapter describes the methods used in and the methodology guiding this study. In the fifth chapter I provide a summary of each of the thesis articles. Thereby, this findings chapter exposes how Romania’s marginal space has been reproduced through different political eras and how people make homes and live in the present-day spaces of dereliction. Moreover, the chapter also addresses decentralisation in postsocialist Romania in order to expose the downsides of this process for impoverished administrative units.

Table 1. Research objectives and questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Thesis Papers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To propose a theoretical understanding of Romania’s postsocialist production of marginal urban spaces</td>
<td>What processes have resulted in (and reproduced) the relegation of many Romanian Roma to substandard housing in Bucharest, and how can we understand these processes theoretically?</td>
<td>Paper I: The modern mahala: making and living in Romania’s Postsocialist Slum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand the institutional dynamics in the context of Bucharest’s poorest administrative division</td>
<td>What role do local governing institutions in Bucharest play in the reproduction or mitigation of urban decay and severe socio-economic deprivation?</td>
<td>Paper II: Postsocialist governance in Romania’s urban margins: an institutional case study of Ferentari, Bucharest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To study local housing and home-making strategies deployed by Romanian Roma and Romanian-speaking Roma in Argentina</td>
<td>How do the various Roma groups themselves understand and negotiate their segregation in and relegation to substandard housing?</td>
<td>Paper I: The modern mahala: making and living in Romania’s Postsocialist Slum. Paper III: Roma beggars in Uppsala: racialised poverty and fallacious homeownership in Romania and Sweden. Paper IV: Home-ownership, mobility, and home: a reflective housing study of Argentine Ludar and Romanian Rudari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Overview of the studied national housing contexts

This thesis draws on case studies conducted in different countries, though not with the intention of comparing cases. The studied contexts were selected for the presence of Romanian Roma or Romanian-speaking Roma, as in the Argentine case, but it was of particular interest to have cases that could provide new insights into housing-related struggles in Romania’s postsocialist period. This chapter will present an overview of the national housing contexts in the different cases, though with a clear focus on Romania.

The geographic dispersion of these cases meant that the research design had to be gradually adjusted and expanded. Whereas I was first primarily interested in theorising about marginal housing production and (racially driven) institutional lack of interest in Romania, I soon expanded my research to encompass the study of local housing agency among Roma. Although these cases are driven by a personal and subjective interest in this field, this does not mean that the papers that followed are unrelated to one another. On the contrary, the studied cases add up to a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the housing precarity Romanian Roma face (or used to face, in the case of the Romanian-speaking Roma in Argentina).

This chapter continues by examining the general characteristics and dimensions of the Romanian postsocialist housing market, before touching briefly on the Swedish and Argentine housing markets.

General overview of Romania’s postsocialist housing market

The overall outcome of three decades of post-socialism is that a large part of Romanian society has seen a gradual increase in housing quality. Most Romanians have become homeowners, been increasingly able to improve their homes, and seen their average living space expand. At the same time, contradictions have also become evident in a society in which not every Romanian can find work, while formal
work is no guarantee of a decent livelihood. In fact, roughly 20% of all employed Romanians are at risk of poverty (Eurostat).³

The Romanian housing context changed dramatically after 1989, reflecting growing income inequality. Public housing provision declined in comparison with socialist times, and private housing construction has produced very divergent outcomes. Compared with other former state-socialist EU members, Romania’s housing market has performed poorly over the last three decades (Șoaită and Dewilde, 2019). The fragmented ownership of former public housing estates has impeded the proper functioning of maintenance schemes, leading to severe degradation of the housing stock in numerous cases. Due to limited financing, many new dwellings have been of poor quality, and overcrowding has not been averted even in new dwellings. By the start of this decade, just over 80% of the housing stock dated from socialist times and 8% from before (INS, 2011; Șoaită, 2012). Numerous scholars (e.g. Șoaită, 2012, 2014, 2017; Tsenkova and Turner, 2004; Tsenkova, 2006 and 2009) have described the processes that unfolded during the transition. Five of the most significant processes were: 1) the great increase in homeownership and virtual disappearance of social housing; 2) lower construction output; 3) lack of rental and mortgage structures that are sensitive to demand or quality; 4) cuts in housing-related spending by the state; and 5) chaotic transition procedures. These processes greatly contributed to the diversification of the Romanian housing market, but did not result in sufficient social housing or other forms of affordable housing. The following subsections expand on these processes.

Housing privatisation

In the first postsocialist decade Romania became, so to say, a “super homeownership state”. This was mostly the result of a government decree (No 61/1990) that promulgated the privatisation of state-built housing to sitting tenants at low prices and backed by advantageous loans. The down payments were only 10–30% of the price, whereas loans could be obtained at the national savings bank (CEC) for a period of 25 years at an interest rate of 2–4% per annum. With the extreme devaluation of the Romanian currency, these apartments were practically given away (Amann, Bejan, and Mundt, 2013). The share

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³ Eurostat’s threshold for “in-work” poverty is set at 60% of the national median equalised disposable income. By 2016, 18.9% of Romania’s working population was categorised as in-work poor – almost double the EU average of 9.6%.
of homeownership thus increased from just over 65% in 1989 to 95% and even to 99% in the large socialist-era housing estates. This left authorities without manoeuvring room to help the households in need of housing, such as young or low-income families. Although the completion of housing construction that started before 1989 resulted in some relief in the early 1990s, it was still far from sufficient to house all the Romanians in need of dwellings (Amann, et al., 2013; Marin and Chelcea, 2018). Moreover, the deindustrialisation after 1989 and the hyperinflation impoverished many Romanians. The cost of housing, however, increased: In 1989, an average apartment cost 40 years of average earnings, but this rose to 120 years of earnings by 2000 (O’Neill, 2014). Nowadays, the share of low-income or unemployed people is relatively high at 25% of the population (INS, 2016), while welfare provision is often insufficient. To mitigate this situation, Romania established a new national housing agency, Agenţia Naţională pentru Locuinţe (ANL) in 1998. This agency was charged with the task of providing housing to certain disadvantaged groups with fewer chances on the housing market and that had not benefitted from the earlier large-scale housing privatisation. The planned dwellings were to be sold with convenient mortgages, while the rentals were also to be subject to right-to-buy schemes in the future (Amann et al., 2013). With only 31,000 new public housing units built, 300 of which were for poor Roma households, ANL failed to increase housing affordability. Housing privatisation was thus not accompanied by an effective non-profit housing construction agency or scheme (Tsenkova and Turner, 2004). Whereas in the last year of socialism, 88% of newly constructed houses were publicly funded, this figure dropped to 6% in 2010 (Amann et al., 2013). Unsurprisingly, only 1.2% of housing units (and only 0.8% in Bucharest) are still considered social housing (INS, 2016).

Housing provision

The postsocialist transition was inadequate in terms of encouraging housing construction by the private sector. The two main issues identified by Şoaită (2014) in Romania’s housing sector are overcrowding and “under-occupancy”, both of which quickly rose in the postsocialist era in its lower-end segments. Overcrowding is mainly an issue in socialist-era housing estates where multigenerational households share single dwellings without a chance to increase the floor space (Şoaită, 2017). Under-occupancy, in turn, is an issue in newly built suburban quarters. Self-construction is an incremental process, and financial
burdens often limit the construction progress. This incrementalism in housing construction explains why relatively big houses are often left unfinished for many years; a household can therefore occupy only the small portion of the house that is liveable. Şoaită (2014) has argued that the construction of large houses is a reaction to the relatively small spaces that Romanians used to live in during socialism. Many chose to build big, without taking possible financial risks into consideration.

Moreover, lack of financial support and planning enforcement has resulted in an increase in informal housing construction, which consists mainly of houses built without any building permission or of unauthorised extensions. Over a quarter of all newly constructed postsocialist housing is (partially) without building permission, leading to a quality gap with other new output. It is believed that most of this unauthorised housing dates from the first postsocialist decade (Grădinaru, Iojă, and Onose, 2015; Şoaită, 2014; Suditu and Vâlcianu 2013). After the 1990 abolition of the socialist territorial planning act (No. 58/1974), Romanian municipalities developed without a legal zoning and planning framework in place. For marginal settlements, this meant that their further development was not impeded by new urban regulatory schemes, nor were the houses in them legalised. This era lasted until 2001, when most municipalities finally adopted zoning plans to restrain further uncontrolled expansion. Ever since, policymakers have tended to apply the principle that anything that was ever built illegally should not be mentioned in legal documents. This has obstructed the integration of areas of such construction into existing urban structures, resulting in several cases in the perpetuation of sub-standard housing conditions (Chelcea and Pulay, 2016). Lack of access to urban infrastructure (e.g., gas, water, and sewerage), for example, is still a major problem in municipalities where local authorities argue that the municipality is not legally bound to service unauthorised construction (Suditu and Vâlcianu, 2013).

Mortgage and rental structures

Although Romania is often described as a super homeownership society, with presumably the world’s highest homeownership rates, a more nuanced interpretation is merited. Official data state that over 95% (Eurostat) of Romanian housing is privately owned, but unregistered rentals might account for 10% of the total housing stock (Amann et al., 2013) and mortgage-financed housing comprises only 2% of the total (Şoaită and Dewilde, 2019). Broadly, it seems as though Roma-
nians are not wealthy enough to take out mortgages, and only a relatively small number of homeowners can sublet their properties. To start with the first issue, Chelcea and Drută (2016) have argued that the high homeownership rate is, unlike in other (mainly Western) countries, not the final aim of national housing policies but rather the outcome of a policy collapse. The Romanian housing market is not financialised and, according to Șoaită (2017), most Romanians decided to stay put after they profited from the cheap housing privatisation in the 1990s. This give-away privatisation went hand in hand with the dismissal of claims to adequate housing by less-affluent classes in Romanian society. Housing became a privilege instead of a right.

When we consider postsocialist rental structures, we identify a massive change as well. Under socialism, rents were regulated and kept at low levels; after 1990, however, deregulated rental mechanisms were re-established (Lux and Sunega, 2013). This “conservative” approach is understood by Lux and Puzanov (2013) as a way to avoid applying rent allowances in the private rental sector to support low-income households. A rent allowance could potentially stimulate concrete and sustainable demand, which could also stimulate housing construction in lower-price segments. As applied in several Western European countries, the idea is to close the gap between the normatively set rent levels and the financial capacities of households. This would cost the Romanian state a great deal, however, so this did not happen. As a result, rent allowances are only applied in the social housing sector, which, as stated earlier, represents only 1.2% of Romania’s housing market. The social housing sector is kept off-market and is almost entirely in municipal hands. The maximum that tenants need to pay for a social housing dwelling is capped at 10% of a monthly income and new rents are set every January. However, the rules are fuzzy and rents can be even further subsidised by local authorities.

Restitution policies

Another thoroughgoing policy change was the adoption of the housing restitution act in 1995 (Law 112/1995). This act was intended to restore property rights to all dwellings and other assets that dated from the pre-World War II era. Before the adoption of this act, close to a million Romanians who resided in pre-war housing were kept in uncertainty (Stan, 2010). Sitting tenants in this housing, unlike those residing in socialist-era housing estates, were in many cases not allowed to buy their homes – though they were also not allowed to be
evicted. There was, after all, an increasing housing shortage and the state had no means to build new dwellings and move the tenants to state-owned apartments (Stan, 2006). As a result, many former owners who regained ownership of their properties could not evict the sitting tenants and had to accept low regulated rents. To complicate matters, some sitting tenants did manage to acquire such pre-war dwellings in “good faith” (Stan, 2013, p. 27). A common explanation for this tardiness in carrying out the reforms is that the communist elite were not replaced in the first years following the war. The former nomenklatura resided in nationalised houses and were not keen to give these up.

The problem with Law 112/1995 was that it never fulfilled its promise, i.e., to restore pre-war property ownership, find a solution for sitting tenants, and legalise post-1989 acquisitions by sitting tenants. In the years to follow, the Law was amended several times and heavily obstructed by the Social Democratic opposition in parliament. Unsurprisingly, the former owners complained about not having their dwellings restored to them. This impasse was slowly cleared when Law 10/2001 was adopted. Arguably, this was done under high pressure from the European Union, which wished to see this problem solved before starting the accession negotiations. The Law not only restored pre-war properties to those still residing in Romania; it also allowed non-residents (even relatives of original owners) to claim properties (Dawidson, 2004), promised to offer financial compensation for destroyed housing, and reversed tenant acquisitions of pre-war dwellings carried out after 1989.

The former owners and their relatives were given a period of two years to reclaim their properties, after which the state had to respond within 60 days. What was perhaps most problematic about this new law was that sitting tenants were now forced to sign new contracts with the former owners after the restoration of ownership. The rents they paid were still subject to rent controls, but as soon as the owners decided to sell their reclaimed buildings, tenants lost any right to the housing. Following this period of ownership restoration, many evictions were carried out, and of the evicted tenants, only 4000 were provided with new dwellings by the ANL (Șoaită, 2012). The pre-war housing was perhaps not attractive to the heirs of the original owners as places to live, but was much more valued as assets for sale or, if the buildings were of no value, for the land value. This particular episode is still under-researched, but what can be said is that the number of evictions increased dramatically starting in 2001, disproportionately affecting poor Romanians, including a large number of Roma (Dawidson, 2004; Lancione, 2017, 2019b; Zamfirescu, 2015).
Sweden’s unwelcoming spatial state of affairs

A second context that merits additional attention is the housing market of Sweden, a popular destination for large numbers of impoverished Romanian Roma. Unlike most rich countries in the EU, over the years Sweden has been reluctant to criminalise begging (Domergue et al., 2015). Nonetheless, this situation has recently changed dramatically, with local municipalities trying to ban begging within their administrative boundaries. Once in Sweden, many Romanian Roma collide with Sweden’s unwelcoming housing market, which has been increasingly commodified since the 1990s.

Christophers (2013) has sought to highlight how Sweden’s housing model became a divisive element in Sweden’s recent, neoliberal era. While he objects to the idea that this model is one of the most neoliberal ones, he also clarifies that the (mainly international) image of an inclusive Swedish housing-for-all model is far behind us – if it ever existed at all. To start with, Sweden’s public housing model was initially set up by post-war governments that sought to secure tenure equality on Sweden’s housing market. This meant that the state guaranteed that all tenure types (i.e., rental, ownership, and cooperatives) would be equally attractive. This was done by ensuring that housing sizes, geographic locations, and financial considerations were not leading determinants of tenure type (Haffner, 2003). As a result, the state greatly subsidised the production of public rental housing, with the “Million Programme” as its cornerstone. Nevertheless, socially deprived households were always overrepresented in public housing developments, which were mostly located in peripheral areas. It is therefore debatable whether tenure neutrality ever truly existed (Christophers, 2013; Grundström and Molina, 2016). What is clear is that since the 1990s, the share of public and affordable housing has dropped, declining from 25% in 1990 to 17% in 2010 (Christophers, 2013). Municipal housing corporations have been incentivised to be more profit oriented and sell off their most valuable assets. Also, they are now allowed to increase rents and pass on construction expenses to tenants. Rights to rent allowances were reduced and, as a result, tenants saw a much bigger increase in costs than did homeowners over the 1985–2005 period, i.e., 122% versus 44%, respectively (Christophers, 2013).

In addition, many immigrants have entered Sweden’s housing market over the last three decades. Although many have managed to integrate well, difficulties obtaining housing are disproportionately affecting this group. The remaining, relatively cheap, public housing units are inaccessible due to endless rental queues. Black markets have
responded to the housing shortage by illegally subletting overpriced dwellings, and “slumlordism” has reappeared in Sweden at a large scale. Lind and Blomé (2012) exposed the case of Rosengård in Malmö where private landlords capitalised on long housing queues elsewhere and on the Swedish legal system in which a tenant is held responsible to take action when problems arise in a dwelling or apartment building. This situation is exploited, and the landlords can choose not to invest in the housing stock while charging higher rents than in the neighbouring and much better-maintained blocks of public-housing apartments. Tacit agreement with local sub-letters (“no-questions-asked policy”) has led to a situation in which many apartments are inhabited by large groups of (often undocumented) immigrants, while other tenants are under threat if they report any housing-related issue to Sweden’s Tenant’s Union.

The point is that even if the Romanian Roma were to obtain right of residence in Sweden and become employed, they would likely continue struggling on a housing market marked by shortages, racial segregation, and high rents in the private and black rental markets.

The Argentine housing market

Argentina is where I met and studied the Ludar. This group lived mostly as nomads until the 1960s, after which they were forced by the state to live in permanent housing. The Argentine housing in which they settled has developed in a varied and chaotic way from that moment onwards. Three major developments characterise Argentina’s housing market: 1) privately funded housing construction, 2) poorly functioning public housing schemes, and 3) the rapid proliferation of slums, called villas miserias.

First, most housing developments are private initiatives. In central areas these consist of high-rise or mixed areas, whereas in urban peripheries, low-density housing dominates. The large housing projects are primarily financed by pre-funding schemes (Monkkonen and Ronconi, 2013), whereas the low-density marginal developments are incrementally financed. The latter encompass most of Greater Buenos Aires’ developments and are called loteos populares in local planning vernacular. These lots are sold very cheaply, are located on undeveloped lands, and are serviced with minimal infrastructure. Van Gelder (2009) and Van Gelder, Cravino, and Ostuni (2016) have argued that the regularisation of loteos populares is the principal reason why Argentine cities have averted the much larger-scale slum construction
seen in neighbouring countries. The mortgage market is marginal in Argentina, however, and only recently have attempts been made to financialise it (Socoloff, 2019a, 2019b). A third type of private initiative is the dystopian gated communities that have rapidly expanded throughout the country. These projects are largely driven by fear of crime and the pursuit of affluent lifestyles (Coy and Pöhler, 2002; Roitman, 2005; Thuillier, 2005).

Second, several national housing policies have been implemented with the intention of increasing the amount of affordable housing. Argentina urbanised rapidly in the 20th century, and since the 1940s, several Peronist4 governments have emphasised public housing developments. This was done in two ways: first, the country funded council housing construction; second, it established a public mortgage bank that enabled poor Argentineans to take out loans and subsidised affordable private housing construction. The first approach was largely discontinued within a decade due to insufficient returns on investments. The second approach, of providing low-cost, secured loans and subsiding affordable housing construction, proved much more successful, prompting the state to abandon its role as builder (Aboy, 2007). It instead only funded the construction of housing and infrastructure and later, starting in the 1990s, made local governments responsible for selecting the lands for such housing. Much state-subsidised housing is cheap, targets lower-income citizens, and is located on cheap peripheral lands (Di Virgilio, 2017). Still, under 10% of the entire Argentine stock is publicly subsidised housing (Moya, 2012).

Nonetheless, much of Argentina’s population cannot commit to mortgages – not even to the cheap state-funded instalment payments. Most of them are therefore relegated to the private rental market. Argentina’s housing crisis has become particularly visible in the rapid increase in informal housing, particularly through the construction of villas miserias (Muñoz, 2017; Van Gelder et al., 2016). Everywhere in and around Argentina’s large cities empty lots are claimed and filled with shanties. By 2010, 5.5% of Buenos Aires’s population lived in slums, and the proportion is believed to be around 10% at the national level.5

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4 Peronism or Justicialism is a political ideology based largely on the ideals of the movement initiated by former Argentine president Juan Perón. His movement was based on three “flags” or pillars: social justice, economic independence, and political sovereignty.

Concluding remarks

We have seen three dramatically different housing contexts in a time of a common global trend of exacerbated neoliberalism. Nevertheless, the purpose of this brief background section is not to make a formal comparison. In fact, as we will see in the articles, these housing market contexts do not explain the situation of the Roma communities at each location analysed in this dissertation. Housing conditions among the Roma communities are the best in Buenos Aires and the worst in Uppsala. The differences and similarities (as the trends of deregulation and marketisation are present in the three cases) instead indicate that social exclusion from the housing market can be expected to worsen in contexts of specific institutional anti-Roma racism. The following chapter provides an overview of anti-Roma racism in Romania.
Chapter 2: Historical overview of Roma persecution

As this thesis focuses primarily on one group, the Romanian Roma, it is important to stress that “group” should not be interpreted as homogeneous in this case. The Roma, both in Romania and elsewhere, are characterised by diversity in customs, religion, language, and culture. The only thing that unites the group is a presumed common origin: northern India (Fraser, 1992). From there, it is believed that the centuries-long process of displacement started, scattering Roma across the world. One way to conceptualise all Roma groups is as a diaspora. However, in the more traditional meaning of the word, “diaspora” poorly describes current Roma groups. As there is practically no “homing desire” to return to the Indian Peninsula (Brah, 1996), Webb (2019) argues that we can instead identify a “detrimentalised” Roma diaspora with different historical experiences and without “conventional territorial reference points” (p. 4). This non-essentialist definition, which does not generalise the Roma as one uniform group of people, is particularly useful for this study, as it allows for the recognition of the societal rejection of the Roma in different locations.

By taking this non-essentialist perspective, this chapter does not claim to clarify the societal rejection of the Roma beyond that experienced by the Romanian Roma in particular, which is a very diverse group on its own. In doing so, I will highlight three different eras in Romania’s history. These will touch, among other matters, on the enslavement of the Roma, the Roma genocide, and failed recent attempts to uplift the group from societal exclusion. This historical contextualisation helps clarify why, up to the present, strong racialised preconceptions have been projected on the Roma body (Lancione, 2017). A body that had been exploited, beaten, expelled, and even burned in the past and that is nowadays left in the Scandinavian cold to fend for itself.
From the early arrival to slavery (1300s–1864)

One of the most cited works on the history of Roma is Angus Fraser’s *The Gypsies* (1992). This reference study provides great insight into the possible origins of the Roma language, Romani, the various theories of the arrival of Roma in Europe, and the persecutions that followed. The following quotation from Frazer (1992, p. 44) captures what preceded their arrival:

> In being up-rooted from India and maintaining a mobile existence, a changing identity had become inevitable. Their ethnicity was to be fashioned and remoulded by a multitude of influences, internal and external. They would assimilate innumerable elements which had nothing to do with India, and they would eventually cease to be, in any meaningful way, Indians; their identity, their culture would, however – regardless of all transformations – remain sharply distinct from that of the *gadžé* who surrounded them and on whom their economic existence depended. They had no promised land as a focus of their dreams and would themselves, in time, forget their Indian antecedents and, indeed, show little interest in their early history, leaving it to *gadžé*, centuries later, to rediscover and pursue obsessively their past and their lineage.

In this section I focus mainly on the persecution of Roma in Romania. The arrival of Roma in present-day Romania started in the 1300s (Achim, 2004; Fraser, 1992). The root cause that likely sped up the drift of Roma towards the Balkan Peninsula and the territory of present-day Romania was the outbreak of the Black Plague in Byzantium (Bunescu, 2014). The earliest document that mentions their arrival also implies they were enslaved soon after. This document dates from 1385 and was written on behalf of *Voievod* Dan I of Wallachia. By that time, present-day Romania was already inhabited by Romance-language speaking people, called Vlachs, but was divided into three regions also called the Danubian principalities: Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania (see Figure 3). Transylvania had been under Hungarian, Ottoman, and Habsburg control between the 11th century and 1918. Wallachia and Moldavia, on the other hand, were loosely governed by regional powers (mainly the Ottoman Empire) and were often granted sovereignty over domestic affairs (Boia, 2001, 2012).

Dan I’s warrant stated that a local monastery in Wallachia was granted the right to enslave “40 families of Gypsies (atsiganî)” (Fraser, 1992, p. 58). Initially, only churches and monasteries were granted the right to enslave Roma (*țiganî mănăstirești*), but this right was

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6 Non-Roma. I will expend on the meaning of *gadžé* in the next chapter

7 Romanian for ruler.
later extended to the boieri\(^8\) (members of the old aristocracy of the Danubian principalities). The presence of Roma gradually became vital to the local economies. They were appreciated for their craftsmanship (as smiths, carpenters, etc.) and farming skills. Their working and living conditions were harsh, families were sold off separately from each other, women were used as prostitutes, and the kidnapping of hardworking slaves (to be traded illegally elsewhere) was reported in documents dating from the 17\(^{th}\) century (Fraser, 1992). Their conversion to Orthodox Christianity – the main religious affiliation of the local population – did not necessarily improve the status of Roma in Moldo–Wallachian society.

Figure 3. Historical regions of Romania within the present (post-1944) boundaries (source: original by author).

The enslaved Roma consisted mainly of vârăși (Chelcea, 1944). According to Fraser (1992, p. 223), this group was composed of slaves “in the ordinary sense of the term”. They worked in the vatră (archaic word for house in Romanian), were placed in service of the master, and likely lost most of their cultural and linguistic Roma heritage (Achim, 2004). Next to the vârăși, a second group of enslaved Roma inhabited the Moldo–Wallachian principalities: “Roma of the Crown” or țigană domnești. The third group of enslaved Roma paid annual

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\(^8\) I am using the Romanian “boier” instead of the Anglicised “boyar” because, according to the *ODE*, “boyar” means “a member of the old aristocracy in Russia, next in rank to a prince”.

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contributions to local boieri but were not forced to settle. This group travelled throughout the country and usually camped near villages where their services were in demand (Achim, 2004; Fraser, 1992). This latter group were not “țigani de vatră” (belonging to a house) but “țigani de șatră” (a community of nomadic Roma who lived in tents). The situation of Roma in Transylvania was slightly better. They were regarded as irreplaceable workers in weapon and metal production and their status was partially characterised by serfdom. Especially skilled Roma were appreciated, and if needed, forced by the Hungarian king to work in any given area or field. Nonetheless, in contrast to Moldo–Wallachian Roma, Transylvanian Roma had more freedom of movement, even the ones falling under serfdom (Fraser, 1992).

Slavery continued in the Moldo–Wallachian principalities until the end of Ottoman rule. Although several groups managed to escape the principalities, most had to wait until 1864 when slavery was entirely abolished (Chelcea, 1944; Fraser, 1992). The emancipation process was enforced during the Russian occupation (1828–1843) of the Moldo–Wallachian principalities (Fraser, 1992). Under the pressure of Tsarist Russia, local leaders had to reconsider their interpretations of slavery; at the same time, the demands of the often powerful slaveholders – the boieri and the egumeni (heads of the monasteries) – could not be ignored either. Estimates of the total number of Roma who lived in the Moldo–Wallachian principalities in that period range between 100,000 (according to Kogălniceanu, former Romanian statesman) and 300,000 (according to Neigebaur, a 19th-century German jurist and historian), and to this number, one can add another 50,000–60,000 Roma who lived in Transylvania by that time (Chelcea, 1944). The powerful families and monasteries that needed to be beaten in the fight for Roma emancipation resisted and often continued trading slaves illegally. A good example is the case of the abolition of mănăstirești slaves in 1847. Several monasteries continued selling slaves in the 1850s. Nonetheless, the new Romanian reformers, the pașoptiști (Romanian name for the Forty-Eighters), were mainly interested in modernising the country along Western- and Enlightenment-inspired lines. As such, they were also increasingly preoccupied with the opinion of Western European powers and man-

9 The population of the Moldo-Wallachian principalities was by 1860 4.5 million and in Transylvania this number was just over 4.2 million in 1869.
10 Pașoptiști is a combination of patru (four) and opt (eight) – combined thus a Forty-Eighther – and indicates a person that participated in the revolution of 1848 in the Moldo-Wallachian principalities. The Forty-Eighters sustained democratic and liberal ideals similar to the protesters in other countries during Europe’s Spring of Nations.
aged, under the leadership of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, to abolish all forms of slavery in both Moldavia and Wallachia between 1855 and 1864 (Boia, 2001, 2012). In Transylvania, serfdom was abolished in 1848, which meant that all remaining Roma servants were no longer tied to the villages or towns they worked in (Fraser, 1992).

Hope, deception, and disaster (1865–1944)

The Roma had been enslaved for almost 400 years and their status in local society could not simply be changed by modifying the law. They continued being seen as slaves-by-birth, so mental slavery was a major challenge from which Roma needed to be freed in the period following emancipation. Moreover, the same powerful boieri families continued to be important power brokers in the country’s politics. In fact, by the 1850s the boieri were not against abolition as such, but mainly advocated for gradual abolition. As Achim (2004, p. 104) explained:

Unlike the young liberals, who wanted the emancipation of the Gypsies to take place immediately, the boyars considered that the process should take place gradually and that attention needed to be given to the future of this population. The landed aristocracy was in favour of moderate reform that would not undermine the structure of society. In their view, the emancipation of the Gypsies should be preceded by a period in which they were prepared for life in freedom so that they would be capable of earning a living and of integrating into rural communities.

Although it was beyond dispute that slavery was objectionable, its abolition was resisted by the economic elite for whom emancipation could have been problematic, especially in an era of changing economic structures. As Romania started its process of industrialisation in the second half of the 19th century, demand for traditional Roma occupations weakened as local occupational monopolies were lost or taken over by Romanian craftsmen and industrialists. Roma had to adapt to seasonal work to ensure their subsistence, which had a two-sided impact. On one hand, traditional forms of cultural expression were lost. Groups that had traditionally been involved in, for example, the production of wooden products or local entertainment had to give up their professions due to competition with much cheaper standardised industrial products or because of the advent of the record player and radio. Achim (2004, p. 149) even went as far as to state that, in fact, complete tribes of Roma “disappeared as professional groups and even their communities disintegrated” under the impact of modernisation.
On the other hand, the relative idleness and nomadic lifestyle that resulted from this occupational loss led to new condemnations and stereotyping (or racialisation) of Roma by Romanians (Achim, 2004; Fraser, 1992).

In addition to their economic marginalisation, the Roma were rendered “invisible” by means of new nation- and state-building processes that commenced around the time of Romania’s independence wars (1859–1877). Examples of these processes were the standardisation of the Romanian language, investments in a national education system, and the advent of a centralised State. This also resulted in the proud self-image of the Romance-language speaking, brave, and pious Romanian, forming a counterweight to the neighbouring nations that claimed culturally and militarily more glorious pasts (Boia, 2001; Hitchins, 2014). Little room was left for the formerly enslaved Roma. A relatively large number (exact figures are unavailable) of free Roma left Romania during the first decades after abolition in search of better lives in Western countries. To this day, Romanian-speaking Roma can be found in the former Yugoslavian republics and far beyond, for example, in Argentina.

After the First World War, when Romania’s territory grew significantly and, according to some, an economic and cultural Golden Époque (epoca de aur) dawned, Roma continued to be sidelined. Many Roma failed, for example, to profit from the agricultural reform of 1921. This reform was intended to improve the material conditions of local peasants by distributing land among them and decreasing the share of the boieri’s rural property. Arable land owned by large landowners (boieri owning more than 100 hectares) dropped from 25% to 13%, while land owned by small peasants (owning one to five hectares) grew from 48% to 65% of all arable land (Hitchins, 1994, 2014).

The other side of this story is that only roughly half of the Romanian peasants entitled to receive agricultural land were included in the programme. The new agricultural proletariat that failed to profit from this favourable interwar policy included many Roma (Achim, 2004). Many landless Roma were simply not creditworthy and, as a result, were forced either to rent land or carry on with their day labour activities. Moreover, peasants owning fewer than three hectares could not prosper (Boia, 2015; Hitchins, 2014, 1994). Chelcea (1944) specified how, in several cases, landowning Roma decided either to lease out their newly acquired lands or to combine agriculture with other, more mobile and seasonal activities. Achim (2004, p. 150) even pointed out that in Bessarabia (the present-day Republic of Moldova):
the social division of the village … still bore elements from previous centuries. The Gypsies formed a kind of fourth social class after dvoreni (boyars), mazili (petty boyars) and, fărani (peasants).

Even for Roma living in larger villages and small towns, their situation was not on par with that of the majority society. A significant number of Roma were relegated to small houses in “their marginal quarter”, the mahala (Achim, 2004; Majuru, 2003). Nonetheless, it can be argued that the interwar period truly enabled a large group of Roma urban dwellers to integrate into Romanian society through acculturation. This involved sending children to Romanian schools, forgetting about ancestral traditions, and not speaking Romani.

Before the Second World War, several Roma associations advocated for the rights of their community and were tolerated by the political establishment. These organisations even openly advocated the rejection of “gypsy” in official usage and instead favoured the word Rom. Their fight for acceptance came, however, to a definite stop in 1938 when the interwar democratic system was replaced by a royal dictatorship. The royal dictatorship was led by Marshal Antonescu and fascist legionary movements, such as the Iron Guard, and can be seen as the most grotesque part of the “Romanianisation” process. Romanianisation started shortly after the First World War when Romania doubled in size and incorporated many ethnic minorities. During the interwar period, mainly educational (favouring Romanian-language schools in the newly gained territories), religious (counteracting the Greek Catholic rite church), and ancestral (declaring many Hungarians, with supposedly Romanian roots, ethnic Romanians) strategies were deployed to increase the share of Romanians and the influence of Romanian culture in the country (Boia, 2015; Ionescu, 2015). The Second World War, however, added much more dramatic elements to the Romanianisation process. While the animosities involved mainly targeted Romanian Jews, powerful actors from pseudoscientific circles expressed a desire for a Roma-free Romania (Achim, 2004, p. 163).

After Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, Nazi Germany was the first country to explicitly declare Roma an “alien race” that, ultimately, needed to be annihilated. Pseudoscientific studies were carried out in Germany to substantiate that Roma were mentally backward, incapable of good citizenship, and antisocial (Fraser, 1992). In Romania, which started to adopt Nazi-style policies in the late 1930s, such annihilation rhetoric was less coherent (Achim, 2004). Also, in contrast to Germany, within Romanian society, there was considerable opposition to the deportation of Roma. Unfortunately, eugenics-inspired studies increasingly dominated the public discourse in Romania by the begin-
ning of the Second World War. The dominant rhetoric embraced by the Antonescu military dictatorship (in power September 1940–August 1944) and its short-lived partners – the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael – argued that Roma could not be assimilated. In this line of thought, assimilation of this group would imply that the Romanian nation would incorporate estranged, promiscuous, and pauperised elements (Achim, 2004). The outcome of the legionnaires’ and Antonescu’s racist and discriminatory ideas concerning the “Roma Question” was that, for the moment, only “antisocial and nomadic Roma” had to be deported. The land that was chosen to absorb these “unwanted elements” was Transnistria. Due to the changing geopolitical context, the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact (1939), and the Second Vienna Award (1940), Romania had lost much of its territory to its neighbouring countries, Bulgaria, the USSR, and Hungary. In 1941, Nazi Germany, ironically, offered Romania the chance to regain Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, the Soviet-occupied territories. It was even granted the “right” to control the area between the rivers Dniester and Southern Bug. This area, called the Transnistria Governorate, was not incorporated into Romania’s national territories, however. As such, it was chosen as the “perfect site” for new “Gypsy (and Jewish) colonies”. After victory on the Eastern Front, which was expected shortly, it was envisioned that Transnistria would be ceded to Nazi Germany (or to a Ukrainian puppet state), so these colonies would be located outside Romania’s territory.

The consequences of the Porajmos in Romania were brutal. Somewhere between 25,000 and 40,000 Roma were ultimately deported to Transnistria, corresponding to 10–20% of Romania’s Roma population (Achim, 2004; Bunescu, 2014; Fraser, 1992; Ionescu, 2015). This group was selected through a census carried out in 1942 by the Romanian gendarmerie and police. Achim (2004, p. 171) clarified what this census was intended for:

[It] recorded, together with their families, nomadic Gypsies as well as those sedentary Gypsies who had criminal convictions, were repeat offenders, were unable to support themselves or who lacked a clear occupation on which they could make a living … In total, 9471 nomadic Gypsies and 31,438 sedentary Gypsies who fell into the aforementioned category were registered.

Porajmos means “the destruction” in Romani and denotes the genocide against the Roma in World War Two, initiated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. The total death toll is believed to be well over a quarter million (Fraser, 1992). Other terms used for the Roma genocide are Pharrajimos (fragmentation) and Samudaripen (mass killing).
The actual number of deported Roma who perished in Transnistria remains unclear. Achim (2004) argued that at least half died, and Fraser (1992, p. 268) said that “most of them succumbed to typhus”. The reason for the high death toll lies mainly in the poor conditions in which Roma were living. Some reports from the gendarmerie suggest that Roma “colonies” were not provisioned with food for several weeks. In particular, the colonies that were not located next to agricultural collective farms suffered from inhuman conditions. Ironically enough, Roma were accused by the gendarmerie of “dodging work”, “being unproductive”, and preferring, once more, to roam the region. However, in contrast to Romanian Jews deported in Transnistria, no evidence suggests that Roma were massacred by firing squads or other forms of intentional slaughter. Instead, they likely died of “hunger, cold, disease, and poverty” (Fraser, 1992, p. 178). Moreover, their most valuable belongings, such as gold, were confiscated, and in Transnistria the Roma were forced to “change their Romanian lei at an extremely disadvantageous rate into the special German occupation currency” (Ionescu, 2015, p. 133).

Political reticence was the main reason why more Roma were not deported. Antonescu’s regime never implemented specific laws and policies aiming for the total annihilation of “unwanted Roma” (Ionescu, 2015). Instead, Antonescu circulated “secret” and “unsigned” directives to local authorities containing arrest warrants and ordering the confiscation of the property of so-called antisocial and nomadic Roma (Achim, 2004; Ionescu, 2015). The fate of Romanian Roma thus lay in the hands of local officials. Local reluctance to comply with these secret directives can be explained by the fear of societal disapproval of deportation. Many Roma registered in the Roma census were often integral members of local rural and urban communities (Ionescu, 2015), and Roma who owned property, had jobs, and whose relatives were serving in the army were not to be deported. All over Romania, cases are reported of Romanians opposing forced deportations, this being especially prevalent in the “second wave” when women, children, and sedentary Roma were also deported (Achim, 2004; Ionescu, 2015). Achim (2004) even referred to accounts of Romanian Roma soldiers who discovered close relatives in Transnistria. All this suggests that on top of general reluctance to deport, serious “mistakes” were also made that clashed with the secret directives.
Failed integration, assimilation, and renewed marginalisation (1945 and onwards)

The introduction of state socialism entailed drastic change in the lives of many Roma in Romania. Every citizen of Romania became a tovărăș (a comrade) and was expected to accept a pre-ordained lifestyle. In certain ways, this meant significant improvement in the living conditions of many Roma, some of whom were even employed in high ranks of the Communist Party. Some outcomes of the central planning of the economy and land use ameliorated the conditions of previously marginalised groups of Roma, such as landless Roma, though this progress was not directly noticeable in material terms. For example, housing construction output remained rather low in the first two decades of socialism. To overcome this issue, many privately owned houses were nationalised and subdivided into smaller units. This increased the total number of houses available for rent in the first years of socialism but also meant a significant decrease in average dwelling size. The housing shortages were apparent to many segments of society (Chelcea, 2012), but Roma were especially badly affected by this process. From the 1960s onwards, much of the Romanian population was gradually housed in newly constructed socialist high-rise neighbourhoods or microraioane. The microraion was a basic planning unit for socialist-era neighbourhoods and intended to undo class segregation. However, many poor Roma remained stuck in the earlier nationalised dwellings. One can argue that for many Roma, state socialism only signified a spatial transfer from rural shanties to sub-standard housing conditions in towns and cities (Zoon, 2001). Examples of these new concentrations of substandard and small dwellings were to be found in the centres of cities such as Bucharest, Pitești, and Constanța and in Transylvanian villages and small towns where Roma were placed in houses formerly inhabited by Romania’s German-speaking minority, which migrated to West Germany after the Second World War.

Also, the forced sedentarisation process in the 1970s and 1980s of “Romanian nomads” did not necessarily improve the housing conditions of those Roma groups (Suditu and Vâlceanu, 2013). This sedentarisation policy was part of Romania’s systematisation and aimed at settling the remaining nomadic Roma. This involved two major operations: on one hand, local authorities had to provide work and new housing for Roma; on the other, forced relocations of Roma to other counties was done when no employment could be created. As such,
enforced nomadism arising due to racism and discrimination “virtually ceased to exist [under state socialism]”, Achim (2004, p. 191) argued. The ṣatrā – i.e., the group of tents and caravans that forms the temporary lodging of nomadic Roma – thereby disappeared from the Romanian landscape.

The assimilation of the Roma under state socialism also entailed a change in the official interpretation of this ethnic group. No longer were Roma enslaved, categorised, or deported; rather, they were now officially ignored as a “co-inhabiting” minority group (Achim, 2004; Fraser, 1992). The rejection of special minority status for Roma meant that no minority policies were designed for them. Furthermore, no Roma minority organisation was allowed to assess state policies and raise issues related to specific discrimination against the Roma. Examples of issues that needed to be raised were the poor educational performance of Roma children and the relatively low-ranking positions of Roma adults in the labour market (Bauerdick, 2014; Troc, 2002). Many were forced to carry out hard labour in heavy industry, work in municipal cleaning services, or join the newly formed agricultural collectives.

As a result of these major spatial and occupational developments under socialism, many Roma found themselves in a precarious position at the beginning of the 1990s. On one hand, the socialist state had failed to move a large number of Roma out of substandard dwellings (Zoon, 2001); on the other, the state had also failed to prepare low-skilled workers for the new economic realities of deindustrialisation and agricultural reforms. Furthermore, state retrenchment caused a decrease in social benefits, which also disproportionately affected Romanian Roma. Structural unemployment, a gradual decline in housing quality, and little to no welfare support have characterised the lives of many Roma households in the past three decades (Berescu et al., 2013; Berescu, 2011). To make things worse, poor Roma continue to be racialised because of their poverty: they are described as work-shy, idle, and welfare-dependent subjects and thereby separated from the majority non-Roma society (van Baar, 2018; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy, 2017). Theories of present-day racialisation are further elaborated on in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Theoretical points of departure

After the brief history of the Romanian Roma and the national housing contexts of Romania, Sweden, and Argentina presented in the previous chapters, this thesis continues with an overview of the theoretical points of departure that guided the analyses of my empirical work. As this thesis is informed by multiple fieldwork methods and campaigns, I chose various theoretical foundations to inform my understanding and analysis of the empirics. Essentially, the theoretical foundations highlight various perspectives from which the right to inhabit was interpreted. First, I present the literature that addresses the production of unequal spaces. The key lessons from this literature explain how complex power geometries shape and reshape cities in accordance with dominant ideologies (Iveson, 2013). Second, this chapter introduces theories of everyday actions and struggles to resist and even subvert the imposed forms and uses of space. The third section discusses urban politics in the age of European integration, decentralisation, and the (inherent) responsibilisation of socioeconomic policies. The final section presents an overview of recent racialised politics that opens a window of opportunity for differential practices throughout Europe.

The nature of spatially fragmentary urban space

Given this dissertation’s focus on the postsocialist relegation of Romanian Roma to spatially segregated housing, I take a critical approach to the production of space. I draw on some of Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) main thoughts in explaining the compartmentalising and segregating capacities of modern urbanisation – all under the guise of “coherence”. However, urbanisation also creates latitude for local resistance contesting imposed plans and usage. The “trialectical” process of urban production and the “double process” of industrialisation and urbanisation are leading concepts in Lefebvre’s theorisation of ever-segregating cities. These Lefebvrian concepts help theorise im-
important issues closely connected to the right to participate in the city and in appropriate spaces, based on their use value and social functions. I started to see the relevance of Lefebvre while conducting research in Bucharest. I was trying to understand Bucharest’s fractured urban reality, which is reproduced while being concealed beneath the logics of progress and accumulation and in compliance with the city’s zoning and development plans. While the imaginaries of progress and development find expression in certain models and certain parts of the city, they also allow fragmented and impoverished spaces to persist and reproduce. In this section, I explain the concepts from Lefebvre’s work used in this thesis.

To start with the first, the trialectical process – “in which conception, perceptions, and lived experiences interact” (Iveson, 2013, p. 944) – Lefebvre argues that spatial planning enables abstract political and economic orders to materialise. It is in abstract space that the urban is conceived as an empty container into which planners and architects can add fragmentary contents, i.e., “disjointed things, people, and habitats” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 309). This is not a philosophical space but one that becomes real as it is enacted. Merrifield (2006, pp. 111–112) has pointed out that, like abstract labour, in Lefebvre’s view, abstract space “gains objective expression in specific buildings, places, activities, and modes of market intercourse over and through space. Yet its underlying dynamic is conditioned by a logic that shows no real concern for qualitative difference. Its ultimate arbiter is [exchange] value itself … (money)”.

Two things come to the fore in the materialisation of such abstract space: first, the “peopleless” or conceived production and, second, the perceived organisation and use of the abstract space. Lefebvre argues that dominant actors seek to materialise, control, and manipulate space through dictated representations of space. This is the realm of conceived space, which is expressed through specialised interpretations: zoning plans, criminal and civil laws, the construction of physical objects of control (e.g. ministries, local governments, police stations, and other institutions), and the control of movements through ever-expanding infrastructure.

Second, everything that takes place in space is reduced to prescriptive spatial practices. These are the perceived actions of daily life that are guided into reproducible and profit-making actions. Here, developers, retailers, and transport companies populate the conceived world in an attempt to profit from the market (West, 2010). If one desires to relax after a long day of work, one is directed to consume leisure. The capacity to procure a place to live is shaped by one’s ability to rent or
obtain a mortgage (Lefebvre and Stanek, 2014). The virtual citizen is enacted in space because most of us accept these imposed and prescriptive actions (Carrier, 1998). The physical world looks increasingly like the conceived one because the “consumer’s behaviour comes to mirror the virtual behaviour and the virtual consumer becomes real” (West, 2010, p. 699).

According to Lefebvre (1991; Iveson, 2013; Lefebvre and Stanek, 2014), dominated spaces also contain plasticity. Lefebvre believed that the spontaneity of daily life explored this plasticity, challenging the spatial productions and imposed behaviours of capitalist urbanisation, even though social and everyday life “more and more shrank into a decaffeinated and deerotized private life” (Merrifield, 2006, p. 24). The lived space in the modern city was therefore a major fascination of Lefebvre, completing his “trialectical” understanding of spatial production (as conceived, perceived, and lived). The idea is that the acceptance of the imposed use of space is what allows abstract space to become concrete. At the same time, the order is not totalised, as there are always openings for counterhegemonic movements to challenge the order from below.

However, this trialectical process mostly identifies how governance and society negotiate spatial production (O’Neill, 2009). Lefebvre’s second important determinant that informs the actual direction of spatial production in modern cities is the double process of industrialisation and urbanisation (Lefebvre, 2003, 1976; Lefebvre et al., 1996). The creation of wealth leads this process, while the productive forces also need to be housed “somewhere” (Lefebvre et al., 1996; Merrifield, 2006). Urbanisation not only co-evolves with and enables industrialisation; it even surpasses it as the dominant expression of capital (Harvey, 1985, cited in Merrifield, 2006). In other words, commodities are produced in space and space itself has become a commodity. Spatial production, as the second nature of capital (after the initial alienation of labour from production processes), allows numerous new uses of space to be informed by potential profits. Money is thereby the common denominator of spatial production and spatial use, determining who can consume space and how it is consumed. As long as all this ensures positive economic prospects, the facilitating planning interventions and political support are deemed rational – even if use value is opposed to exchange value and large groups in society are as a result excluded from social functions and material needs.
The segregating logics of housing

Housing plays a vital role in both industrialisation and urbanisation: it accommodates the productive masses that sustain economic productivity, at the same time as houses themselves become spatial commodities (Lefebvre et al., 1996). The inability to be housed has from the beginning of modern times been a cruel reality for the masses (Lefebvre, 2016). These are the people who produce commodities but earn too little to “consume” adequate housing. The ruling classes understood that if they did not create a system that provided enough affordable housing, they risked urban unrest that could ultimately result in the rejection of the dominant system and in revolt. Planning thus became a political tool to facilitate capitalist accumulation and to provide housing that could pacify the masses (Lefebvre, 2016, 1991, 1976; Lefebvre et al., 1996). Housing was absorbed into “urbanised habitats” that signify, in Lefebvre’s view, a simplified and even caricatural functioning of the “human being” in modelled spaces. The “lived experience” is reduced to a “handful of basic acts[, such as] eating, sleeping, and reproducing … [which are allowed] to be enclosed in boxes, cages, or ‘dwelling machines’” (Lefebvre and Stanek, 2014, p. 81). In that way, dwelling can increasingly be quantified as a practice and an object according to which classes are hierarchised and divisions are reproduced (Stanek, 2011).

First, Lefebvre identified the planning of developers. The housing construction that follows from privately-led development is, in his eyes, the most sincere type in that it interprets the urbanisation process through speculation with property and plots (Lefebvre, 1991). In this quest for profits, developers promise to produce fulfilled (or fulfilling) lifestyles. These are the lifestyles of the “Olympians of the new bourgeois[ies]” (Lefebvre et al., 1996, p. 159), in which people’s consumption is not limited to their immediate neighbourhood. The “spatial practices” are easily acquired (e.g., petrol for one’s car, mortgage payments, and holidays) and grant access to privileged urban consumption.

Second, and more important, Lefebvre identified the production of decommodified and, in not rare cases, overpopulated housing estates. The residents of these areas are trapped in the urban fragments of daily routines – of labour and housing. The produced habitats are large-scale semi-public and public housing initiatives that made suburbs proliferate far from the thriving parts of the city all over post-war Europe. In these habitats live the productive masses who travel from their dwellings “to the station, near or far away, to the packed underground train, the office or factory, to return the same way in the even-
ing and come home to recuperate enough to start the next day” (Lefebvre et al., 1996, p. 159). In other words, they became the homes for the reproduction of the labour craft. Such “daily miseries” stand in contrast to the lifestyle described above and characterise the coercive rationality of planning. These big housing estates aim at providing the largest number of housing units at the lowest possible cost. By “possible” is meant the point after which social unrest will quickly arise. Hence, the way of pacifying the peripheral fragments of urban space is by meeting the aspirations and demands of the masses at the lowest acceptable point still perceived by the masses as “progress” (Lefebvre, 1976). In Right to the City (1996), Lefebvre called this the “pure form of habitat”, whereas later he reformulated this in The Production of Space as “the threshold of tolerability” (1991). This thesis understands the socialist-era peripheral housing estates of Bucharest as being at the “threshold of tolerability”, which is further clarified in Paper I and the following subsection.

Whatever falls outside these two types of habitats is largely excluded from both planning and direct state support. These are “the edges of the city, shanty towns, the spaces of forbidden games, of guerrilla war, of war” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 373). The power of the state to render these spaces illegal depends in part on the legitimacy of the state. It is merely a matter of time before resistance in these excluded spaces is also “normalised” by coercive state interventions (e.g., evictions, new imposed spatial functions, and “slum pacifications”). Dominant housing production processes have thus impacted urban production, bringing about unequal and fragmented forms. Roma in particular have experienced the downsides of often being relegated to substandard habitats or, even further, to “excluded zones of shanties”. This situation is further analysed in Papers I, III and IV. The following subsection clarifies how Bucharest’s urban space has been transformed in the modern era.

Romania’s habitats

I regard these broader Lefebvrian determinants of urban and housing production as insightful because they help clarify much of Romania’s unequal development. When we consider Bucharest, it is clear that after Romania’s independence (1877), the new rulers sought to modernise and industrialise the new capital city (Cinà, 2010; Turnock, 1990). Its chaotic centre and village-like peripheral neighbourhoods were gradually replaced by a coherent urban plan. Especially the northern and central districts developed rapidly with modern and gar-
den-town inspired quarters. However, this modernisation had its limits and marginal quarters continued to characterise considerable parts of Romanian cities (Cinà, 2010; Majuru, 2003). As such, the limits of wellbeing generated by industrialisation were translated into the urban fabric. Urbanisation replaced old, medieval forms with modern expressions, and these were, in turn, the outcomes of interpretations of what “modern Bucharest” ought to look like according to the new ruling elites. However, complying with the new “perceived” use of space proved impossible for Bucharest’s growing proletariat. This proletariat was instead relegated to the peripheral, unplanned (unconceived), and disregarded shanties, the *mahalas* (Majuru, 2003; Turnock, 1970).

In post-war Bucharest, the authorities wanted to include these shanties in a new “socialist city”. For that, the scale of Bucharest’s conceived space needed to expand in order to reconstruct the marginalised and excluded areas. These areas were ultimately turned into large housing estates, the *microraioane* (Maxim, 2009). Here, Bucharest’s new urban reality was constructed to house its labourers. No longer were they condemned to shanties but were instead to be housed in planned habitats. The socialist Romanian state “declared war” on marginal and substandard housing and started to “de-mahalise” (*demahalaizare*) Romanian cities. In that sense, *virtual* socialist citizens were enacted by granting them access to the city, including them in the modes of production, and letting them consume the socialist city as planned and conceived (Lefebvre, 1991; Stanek, 2011). Lefebvre (1991) saw in socialist countries capitalist models of spatial production being reinterpreted but not rejected, and the *microraioane* were certainly not contradiction-free spaces. The cities and industrial sites were, according to Lefebvre, nothing more than “strong points” needed to secure the industrial outputs and labour required to reproduce support for the system. Beyond these strong points, pre-modern backwardness and stagnation remained the reality for millions of Romanians in Romania’s countryside. Even in Bucharest, the everyday reality of the *microraioane* dwellers contrasted sharply to the newly built civic centre. Insufficient financial means and resources (see Verderey, 1991, and O’Neill, 2009, on economies of scarcity) prevented the construction of a socialist utopia. Modernist, high-quality urban landscapes were only expressed in the centre, on the large boulevards of the *microraioane* (Marciniaczak, Gentile, Rufat, and Chelcea, 2014; Maxim, 2009; Petrovici, 2012), and through megalomaniac projects initiated by Ceaușescu. Behind these pompous urban developments
lay, as outlined above, the vast spaces of microraioane and industrial lands.

In the period after 1989, Bucharest’s spatial governance moved from a top–down model to a decentralised entrepreneurial and neoliberal one (Nae and Turnock, 2011). The large socialist microraioane still comprise most of Bucharest’s housing stock but are almost entirely privatised (Marin and Chelcea, 2018). Moreover, in the postsocialist period, private actors again took charge of housing production. In this new reality, land and housing prices were once again subject to speculation and established by the market. The outcomes – however unequal and chaotic – do correspond to the conceived new urban order. This is shown by studies carried out by Grădinaru et al. (2015), Ion (2014), and Nae and Turnock (2011), who established that Bucharest’s contemporary urban developments are private and “exception led”. This exception-driven private urbanism implies that private actors can oppose Bucharest’s zoning plans whenever these obstruct their plans – i.e., zoning plans are “moulded by private interests” (Nae and Turnock, 2011, p. 217). As a result, the last three decades have been characterised by large-scale and chaotic urban sprawl and unequal development. In central parts of Bucharest, numerous new and expensive condominiums were built on former public parks or lands previously occupied by heritage buildings. On the margins, however, many impoverished Bucharesters tried to find affordable dwellings or cheap plots of land. Those who failed ended up in new shanties or informal rentals. The spatial practices of the postsocialist virtual Bucharester are thereby, in comparison with those of the previous socialist era, to a much larger extent constrained by purchasing power.

Throughout the modern history of Bucharest, the realisation of planners’ ideas has resulted in a fragmentation of the city that restricts the ability of certain individuals to access the whole city. Whether the principles of inhabiting have been market based or state allocated, in all instances the cruel limits of fragmentated urban space are evident. Through official means, people are allowed or even forced to dwell in substandard conditions. Simultaneously, these forms are interpreted as rational and maintain the dominant form of space: one in which capitalist and bureaucratic social relations continue being reproduced. This thesis examines the struggles and limited choices of Romanian Roma when it comes to being housed.
Spaces of contestation: re-appropriation or diversion?

In the previous section, I pointed out that planned and dominated habitats segregate cities. In studying the housing careers of Romanian Roma, this thesis also engages with the literature on counterhegemonic movements that – from below – contest the imposed forms and substandard conditions. This struggle is a daily reality for many marginalised Romanian Roma, a considerable number of whom are contesting the dominant use of space out of despair or to improve their own conditions. In describing radical contestations, there is a tendency to use Lefebvre’s concept of “re-appropriation” – reclaiming space for its use value and social functions, claiming the “right to the city” (Lefebvre et al., 1996). However, I agree with Iveson (2013, p. 944) that Lefebvre is more nuanced in various other works (Lefebvre, 1976, 1991; Lefebvre and Stanek, 2014; Merrifield, 2006) and am “not entirely convinced that experimental [or spontaneous] appropriations [of space] would coalesce into radical transformations” in the long run. This nuance is important, and in various works Lefebvre indicates that practices of resistance can instead be interpreted as short-term events rather than the pure re-appropriation and transformation of space. This temporariness particularly applies to the various housing and coping practices I discovered during my fieldwork.

Lefebvre also calls such temporary claims on space détournement or “diversion”. However important such contestation is, he reminds us that diversion can only really evolve into re-appropriation when the logics of space are transformed as well. The question that remains unanswered in all such attempts is what ultimately undermines the dominant (capitalist) uses of space. Lefebvre’s answer is that it is when the state (or other powerful actors) accepts that people (or communities) make different uses of space that signify a permanent rupture with the previous uses (Lefebvre, 1991; Lefebvre and Stanek, 2014; Merrifield, 2006).

Diversion is not, however, the creation of new spatial uses; it is the mere adaptation of the actual use of space and might, indeed, herald re-appropriation. It insists on an alternative to the actual use, and this can occur when the “raison d’être which determines … [a space’s] forms, functions, and structures” outlives its purpose, and the space can become vacant and be “put to a use quite different” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 167). Diversion can take radical forms when despair pushes people towards aggressive stands against current orders and uses of space. However, in every diversion lies the risk that the state will undo
the diversion. In that case, the former use is restored or new uses will crush the diversion.

Iveson (2013) has shown how these moments of diversion can challenge spaces of commercial advertising and reconstruct them as alternative expressions that reimagine the city as a place of de-commercialised use instead of over-consumption. The diversion that takes place can be illustrated as follows: urban billboards are repeatedly covered with blank or political messages, activists are policed and subpoenaed, billboards are then re-used in their original way, after which the process of diversion can begin again.

More dramatic diversion events are found in squatting. This act inverts the notion of private or state ownership and unleashes hopes among those excluded from housing. By enacting such unorthodox and radical claims, people perform a politics linked directly to place, making people “think and rethink what they once thought” (Merrifield, 2006, p. 34). Examples of such diversions seek to provide housing for poor people, preserve (or promote) the architectonics and use-based values of a place, set up informal commercial establishments, and even build the power to counter state-led housing. Examples of the last case, of anti-system squatting, include squatting in cheap social housing in the Netherlands and Germany. Here, several political movements went further than simply considering squatting an alternative to conventional housing. They justified squatting in public housing as a means to expose the pacification of home-seeking members of the working class (Pruijt, 2013). However, in the case of many squatter movements, the diversion of space seems not to be followed by re-appropriation. In the Netherlands, squatting was initially accorded legal status, but this was ultimately revoked in 2010 when large numbers of earlier squats were vacated and squatters were penalised.

Other obvious forms of diversion were the various popular movements, such as Occupy Wall Street or Indignados, that turned large city squares and avenues across the globe into fora for public debate or solidarity actions, enacting affective realities for excluded groups (Duff, 2017; Lancione, 2019a; Gerbaudo, 2017; Purcell, 2014). A main feature of these political mobilisations was the claim that urban citizenship had to be rethought and remade. Decision-making over the use of space and public affairs required, in the eyes of these counter-hegemonic movements, increased popular control. Against the background of these wider movements, smaller communities also took control into their own hands. Examples of this include the Argentine factory workers and neighbourhood assemblies that self-managed deserted factories and organised social services in the years following
the 2001 economic and political crisis (Farias, 2018; Purcell, 2013; Vieta, 2010), or the factory workers from the Romanian city of Cluj-Napoca who, in the months after 1989, appointed their own managers and decided on schedules, quotas, and earnings (Petrovici, 2012). Nonetheless, even in these cases the popular movements ultimately retreated from the squares or factories while the systems were kept in place. The self-managed factories in Argentina or Romania, just as elsewhere, were incapable of competing with “regular” industries due to the lower outputs and lack of funds for maintenance (Vieta, 2010).

However, if one understands diversion as a powerful trope that “scupper[s] accepted … [dominant] behaviour and received ideas about places and people” (Merrifield, 2006, p. 34), one also must be realistic about the aftermath. In the case of Bucharest, this harsh aftermath became evident when squatter protests were ultimately crushed by the local police (Lancione, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). When houses became vacant and were reclaimed by people in need of housing in postsocialist Bucharest, new formal plans were also being made for the same spaces, and the planned new uses initiated by the legal owners proved dominant. Once more, abstract understandings of space – space of consumption and private ownership – ruled out the common and use-value-based claims. In other words, the highly uncertain outcome of diversion is a serious concern for the right to inhabit and appropriate the contemporary city. Struggles might succeed initially, but likely not in the long run. What diversion as a concept does, however, is to highlight the dissatisfaction with daily life and the chagrin at being excluded that will always keep the possibility of protest and action alive and imminent in space. This thesis seeks, in part, to clarify how these moments of diversion are generated, maintained, and experienced by Romanian Roma.

New logics of governance in marginal space

This section focuses on the subordination of local governments to centralised power. In understanding this process, I draw on Lefebvre’s theoretical discussion of the tension between ideology and specificity in the city.

As clarified above, the social order of space is imposed in modern societies through ideological and reductivist strategies such as zoning plans. This imposition is a complex process in which several institutional levels operate and collaborate. At different scales, there are representations of power that signify and concretise institutional inten-
tions. Lefebvre (2003; Lefebvre et al., 1996; Lefebvre and Stanek, 2014) illustrated this by talking about levels of institutional reality – i.e., there are far and near orders. The general, grand structures of the far order are, for example, stipulated by national ministries. The local, or near, political orders, such as municipalities, ought to reflect the far orders through daily institutional practices. This also applies to the Church, which as a global institution formulates religious and societal standpoints that are ultimately echoed by, for example, neighbourhood parishes or religious NGOs (Lefebvre, 2003; Lefebvre et al., 1996; Lefebvre and Stanek, 2014). The interaction between the two orders is not always self-evident. Certainly, national impositions of order are often upheld by local administrations and carried out without too many objections. As a result, peripheral municipalities take up the role of functioning as planned habitats, industrial centres, or infrastructural hubs. However, local agencies do not always “readily allow themselves to be absorbed” into larger structures (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 379).

Lefebvre argues that the struggle between the far and near orders can bring about more inclusive and democratic cities (Attoh, 2011; Lefebvre et al., 1996). However, this thought can be turned upside down, and it can be argued that local disobedience worsens things. I connect the idea of disobeying near orders to Purcell’s (2006) local trap theory, which suggests that the local scale of policymaking is vital for urban democracy and for formulating politics that enable inclusion and improved living conditions (i.e., the right to the city). However, action at this scale in isolation is not necessarily enough; it has no pre-determined positive outcomes and should therefore not be understood as a means to an end. It is dangerous to imply that good outcomes, such as local democracy and more inclusive governance, will automatically flow out of decentralisation.

Purcell’s insights into the local trap are arguably helpful for understanding Romania’s problematic decentralisation process. The EU’s idea of decentralisation was that national states and the associated bureaucratic procedures would be left out of the picture; instead, local, democratically elected officials would articulate the demands of local communities (Savy, Pauliat, and Senimon, 2017). In the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122/1985), which according to the second article “shall be recognised in domestic legislation”, it is further argued that, through decentralisation, “greater unity” between Member States can be realised and democratic will can be exercised “more directly” and “effective[ly]”. It states that local assemblies are to be composed of “freely elected” members (article 3) and “shall be able to determine their own internal administrative struc-
tures in order to adapt them to local needs and ensure effective management” (article 6). This also concerns autonomy to determine expenditures and budgets, and the Charter also states that external grants are in principle not “earmarked for the financing of specific projects” (article 9). In that way, it can be argued that the EU, or the far order, assumes through its European Charter of Local Self-Government that the “local scale is preferable to other scales” (Purcell, 2006, p. 1921) and that local authorities can operate as “independent entities with pre-given characteristics” (p. 1921). These characteristics are, in turn, conflated with “the good” (Purcell, 2006, p. 1924) as they, for example, are effective, are closest to the citizens, and enable common heritage ideals; local officials are thereby constructed as the responsible and passionate advocates of locally expressed demands.

The territorial governance of Romania shifted gradually from socialist top-down planning towards devolved governance (Smith, 2002). This can be seen as part of a much larger process initiated by the Council of Europe that, in the early 1990s, saw decentralisation as a requirement for well-functioning democracies and the efficient administration of nation-states (Savy et al., 2017). The devolution of state responsibilities was a prerequisite for Romania to enter the EU (Dobre, 2010). Likewise, the commodification of most national state assets and the abandonment of monetary sovereignty in favour of the European Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) were important prerequisites for EU accession13 (van Meurs et al., 2013). Among the terms of this decreased financial sovereignty were that candidate and Member States should maintain a maximum budget deficit of 3% of GDP and a maximum debt-to-GDP ratio of 60%. Furthermore, in 2009, the Băsescu Administration accepted a EUR 20 billion deal with the IMF, World Bank, and EU, and in return adopted a package of anti-crisis measures: government employees’ wages were cut by a staggering 25%, VAT was increased from 19% to 25%, labour law was reformed, welfare provision decreased even further, and the power of trade unions diminished (Chelcea and Druță, 2016; Stoiciu, 2012). Perhaps unsurprisingly, some three million Romanians have decided to migrate over the past three decades and another one-third of the population lives in poverty (INS, 2016). Still, these major reforms were what Žižek (2013) has called the paradoxical “free choices” imposed by non-state actors – the far orders. In other words, the technocrats of non-state institutions dictate the appropriate options. If a country

13 The Copenhagen Criteria, adopted in 1993, defined the economic and political criteria for EU membership. These criteria were intended to ensure the successful integration of new Member States into the existing Union.
chooses a different direction, in Žižek’s view, it is perceived by the EU as an erroneous choice. Consequently, great political and economic pressure is exerted on disobedient states to rethink their choices. In Romania, we see a country that moved from once being the “neoliberal Badlands of neoliberal Europe” to being one of its “bustling frontiers” (Clapp, 2017, p. 5). In that vein, Romania followed the far orders and reformed its institutional structures accordingly, but doing so required massive sacrifices by its population and greatly reduced social welfare expenditures.

Decentralisation was not carried out in a uniform manner, and Romania’s first two postsocialist governments (1990–1996) even opposed many of the reforms suggested by the EU and the World Bank. For example, the Romanian state opposed the devolution of political and fiscal autonomy to local authorities (Profiroiu, Profiroiu, and Szabo, 2017) and, as set out in the first chapter, initially refused to return nationalised housing to private ownership. However, this resistance rapidly changed after 1996, when plans were made to amend the 1991 constitution to accelerate the EU integration process. The amendment prompted rigorous change in the administrative territorial organisation and was ultimately adopted in 2003. This time, the local and regional governments were ensured sufficient financial resources and budgetary autonomy. Municipalities became accountable for urban planning and the management of social housing, health care, public spaces, infrastructure (e.g., roads, water supply, sewage, and street lighting), education, and public transport (Dobre, 2010; Ion, 2014; Profiroiu et al., 2017). The remainder of this section clarifies how European far orders changed the functioning of Romania’s local authorities.

Romania’s changes during the Europeanisation process

The EU was aware of the socioeconomic difficulties that rigorous reforms and strict compliance with the SGP brought about in Eastern European countries. Starting in 2000, the EU devoted around one third of its budget to the European Cohesion Policy Programme, which is intended to facilitate the integration of new Eastern European members. In carrying out its cohesion policies, it divided Europe into development regions. Instead of funding national governments, the aim

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14 The Member States of the EU are subdivided into so-called development regions corresponding to the second-level Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) regions, which are instrumental in the distribution of EU funds.
of the Cohesion Policy was to fund regions and municipalities through “equalisation schemes”. These funds are, ideally, intended to support locally expressed needs. Direct contact between European institutions and the regions was claimed to provide clearer accountability and thereby ensure greater chances of success (Savy et al., 2017; van Meurs et al., 2013).

Municipalities and counties have therefore been responsible for the management of various competences since 2003. Moreover, it became their responsibility to identify investment objectives for socioeconomic and infrastructural projects. Municipalities could also rely on “asymmetrical” decentralisation schemes. These schemes were intended to support municipalities whenever their administrative capacities proved insufficient to discharge the devolved responsibilities. In such cases, central and county-level authorities would extend a helping hand (Profiroiu et al., 2017). Even though the Romanian national government imposed various austerity measures in the following years, local authorities could still increase their public expenditures by applying for European and national development funds (Ion, 2014; Profiroiu et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, decentralisation in Romania has faced several major setbacks. First, the managerial and administrative capacities at the local level are low. Many local authorities have performed poorly and proved unprepared to carry out the devolved competences. Second, many local authorities have failed to absorb the EU and national funds (Ion, 2014). One explanation could be the complexity of applying for vast European grants, but another could be Romania’s postsocialist patronage system. Medve-Balint (2016), Szabo (2016), Tosics (2016), and Ion (2014) have identified major issues stemming from party politics. The political affiliation of a local council determines the chances of being allocated EU and national funds. This is largely the outcome of the complex redistribution of European funds in Romania, which are absorbed by eight development regions with regional development councils that are not democratically elected. These councils are appointed by the county presidents and municipal representatives and make decisions regarding what applications are to be approved and financed. As a result of the patronage system and complex bureaucratic protocols, the estimated contribution of, for example, the European Cohesion Policy Programme will amount to only 2.4% of Romania’s GDP by 2022. This is much lower than Poland’s estimate of 4.1% (Szabo, 2016), while Romania is considerably poorer (Poland’s GDP per capita being 27.7% higher as of 2017\(^{15}\) and thus eligible for great-

\(^{15}\) World Bank data.
er funding. Third, so-called beautification and infrastructural projects are favoured over more complex socioeconomic ones.\(^\text{16}\) This arguably represents a panicked reaction to the EU’s critique of Romania’s low absorption rates of EU funds (Ion, 2014; Szabo, 2016). Beautification and infrastructural projects not only leave pressing needs unmet but also create new local problems. In Bucharest, for example, externally funded projects have led to mass evictions and the destruction of national cultural heritage buildings (Calciu, 2016; Ion, 2014). The poor performance of local authorities and development regions illustrates an important discrepancy between the far and near orders; it also highlights the shortcomings of local policymaking. This situation is well aligned with Purcell’s concept of the local trap. Paper II explores how local decision- and policymaking in Bucharest may influence the social and housing policies for impoverished areas of the city.

### Racialisation in public discourses

While Chapter 2 offered a historical perspective on Roma persecution and exclusion, this final section sets out how official discourses around Roma continue being coded by racialised language (Kóczé, 2018). This hegemonic language is instrumental because it enables us to distinguish the Roma from a monolithic local “majority group” (Kóczé, 2018; Kóczé and Rövid, 2017). While the majority group is represented as responsible (Yuval-Davis et al., 2017), stereotypes about Roma “become ‘common sense’ … that obfuscate[s] structural injustice and justif[ies] the exclusion of the Roma” (Kóczé and Rövid, 2017, p. 694). Examples of stereotypes attributed to Roma are laziness, criminal behaviour, fake reasoning about migration, and welfare misuse.

Strong racialised preconceptions nowadays influence many of the Roma-related policies carried out throughout Europe (Tervonen and Enache, 2017; van Baar, 2018). Local authorities mobilise racialised understandings of Roma not so much to improve living conditions but rather to exempt themselves from any responsibility or to justify ongoing poverty as something “inherent” to the Roma (van Baar, 2011). In Eastern Europe, where most of Europe’s Roma reside, several so-called development programmes have even deepened Roma exclusion.

\(^{16}\) In Teodorescu and van den Kommer (forthcoming), we set out how in Romania’s Danube Delta, vital infrastructure and socioeconomic investments are largely ignored, while European funds are directed to questionable tourism development projects.
and poverty. Berescu et al. (2013) and Berescu (2011) reported on cases in Romania, Serbia, and Hungary in which new “Roma housing” was of substandard quality and built in remote areas. Van Baar (2018) identified EU-funded exploitation programmes through which Roma were first fired and later hired through the new EU-sponsored hiring programme at only 60% of the minimum wage. This programme was used by various public and private employers that sought to reproduce cheap and subsidised labour. They justified the proletarianisation of local Roma communities as an effort to get them “at least to start working”. Vincze (2018) substantiated this point, clarifying that the poor economic and material conditions are operationalised to force this pauperised group of Romanians into poorly paid and informal work activities.

In Western Europe, the racialisation of Roma in political discourses is increasingly used to fight “irregular” movements of “EU migrants”. As a political (and racialised) trope, “irregularisation” allows politicians to separate Roma from regular migrants because of their supposedly destabilising impacts on receiving societies. These destabilising impacts are linked to the misuse of welfare services (Humphris, 2018; Vermeersch, 2017) and insurgence of organised criminality (Tervonen and Enache, 2017; van Baar, 2011, 2018). This racialisation process has allowed several types of racist politics to be obscured (Humphris, 2018). Such politics entailed, for example, the deportation of “criminal” Roma from France and Italy (Kóczé, 2018; Parker, 2012), the removal of personal belongings and makeshift housing (Tervonen and Enache, 2017), and the sudden discontinuation of social policies (Humphris, 2018; Manzoni, 2017). All these politically motivated practices add to the boundaries and borders that separate a constructed Roma other from the majority groups. In that sense, national borders represent only one aspect of keeping “irregular” EU migrants out. Much more effective are the racialised everyday bordering politics (Yuval-Davis et al., 2017) that seek to keep Roma away from Western Europe and that are grounded in racist preconceptions.

This thesis explores in various ways how Roma are affected by racialised politics. Paper II explores racialised practices at the local administrative level in Romania, connecting these to the unwillingness of local politicians to enable the expansion of social expenditures and the increased participation of local residents in decision-making. Second, Papers III and IV link racialisation to various politics that seek to prevent “irregular” movements of Roma. These papers also clarify how Roma deal with the borders and boundaries intended to deter their movements and earning strategies.
Chapter 4: Methodology

In this chapter, I first describe the fieldwork done in the different locations to collect the empirical material of the thesis. Second, I explain the role of gatekeepers, who were central actors in my research. When discussing the gatekeepers, I pay special attention to how I approached them and gained their trust. Moreover, I reflect on the researcher’s positionality. Subsequently, I describe the main methods used: observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analyses. Lastly, I reflect on the applied sampling strategies.

General description of the fieldwork

Recently, there seems to be increased interest among geographers in studying housing-related issues concerning Romanian Roma (e.g. Berescu et al., 2013; Crețan and Powell, 2018; Lancione, 2017; Vincze, 2018). This growing body of literature deepens our understanding of the difficulties many Roma households have faced in accessing adequate housing in the liberalised market of Romania. The issues that arose in connection with this liberalisation were already known shortly after the fall of socialism (Troc, 2002; Zoon, 2001). One of the topics addressed in the present research is overcrowding. While in 1992 the average number of individuals per room was 1.29 in Romania, for Roma this number was 3.03 (INS, Romanian census 1992). Also, according to a survey carried out in 1998, houses inhabited by Roma were 20% smaller than those of non-Roma (Zoon, 2001). By 2011 (the year of the most recent census), little had changed for the better: still over half of all Roma lived in segregated and impoverished neighbourhoods (Vincze, 2018).

Given these quantitative dimensions, I intended to make theoretical contributions deriving from case-specific contexts. The study was therefore driven by exploratory research questions and qualitative research that embedded local realities within larger structures. Each case was approached inductively to generate well-grounded and rich insights from the field. On my first three fieldwork visits to Bucharest,
I sought to record personal housing trajectories. In the initial stage, I
was particularly interested in gathering answers to the questions “Why
did they end up here?” and “What is it like to live in Ferentari?” Dur-
ing the course of the fieldwork, I adjusted my questions in light of
observations and input from interviews. Although my main aim was to
study housing conditions among the inhabitants in the visited areas,
interactions with the participants let me obtain a situated understand-
ing of meaning-making in Romania’s postsocialist urban slums.

In addition to the fieldwork in Ferentari, I also interviewed local
officials there. This fieldwork was also guided by exploratory ques-
tions. Notably, the sector where Ferentari is situated is infamous for
the opacity that the local authorities have created around it. For exam-
ple, many documents and minutes from weekly council meetings are
not made public, even when requested in line with Romania’s Free-
dom of Information Act. Furthermore, locals from Ferentari com-
plained about being turned away whenever they approached the mu-
nicipality with a complaint or request. The issue was not only the
willingness of local officials to agree to be interviewed, but also that
very little is known about their political responsibilities or about their
views on socioeconomic issues and ongoing and proposed housing
policies.

During the fieldwork in Uppsala (and the Romanian villages\textsuperscript{17}), I
was interested in empirically understanding the personal housing ex-
periences of a highly contested and debated group in Sweden, the so-
called EU beggars. Initially, I wanted to understand how the group
organised their housing in Sweden, where they were not entitled to
any welfare benefits. Subsequently, I studied how their position as
slum-dwellers was being transformed back in Romania. These two
studies show that these people, after having been in Europe doing
simple jobs or begging in public spaces, were not only able to upgrade
their houses, but also did this by transforming themselves into a highly
contested new actor group in the European migration debate.

In the Argentine case, the initial line of inquiry was exploratory. I
had heard that Roma communities were relatively common in some
Latin American cities, though they apparently have been scarcely
studied, as I could find very few studies of these groups. Eventually,
after some guidance from researchers from the University of Buenos
Aires, I made contact with the Romanian-speaking Ludar in Buenos
Aires. From that point onwards, I was primarily interested in the local

\textsuperscript{17} In Vâlcea County, I visited the villages of Lunca, Valea lui Stan, Răul
Băiești (not shown on the map), Valea Urii, and Cornetu; in Bacău County I
visited Valea Seacă.
housing performance of this Roma minority. This fieldwork ended with fifteen very exciting interviews, providing an image that clearly contrasted with preconceived notions of Roma communities: these families were not poor and their housing conditions were significantly better than those of their distant ancestors in Romania. I return to this matter in Paper IV. Table 2 provides an overview of my fieldwork activities.

Table 2. Summary of the fieldwork activities and methods used in Bucharest, Uppsala, the Romanian villages, and Buenos Aires.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ferentari</th>
<th>Experts in Bucharest</th>
<th>Uppsala</th>
<th>Villages in Romania</th>
<th>Buenos Aires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant observation</strong></td>
<td>Volunteered at local school; participated in several meetings of local residents; took notes describing noteworthy events</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Visited three sites where the interviewed beggars lived</td>
<td>Took notes describing interesting remarks during interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semi-structured interviews</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surveys</strong></td>
<td>An entire apartment building (Bloc 36) in Ferentari: 87 households</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100 households, including structured interview questions(^\text{(18)})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus groups</strong></td>
<td>Three, of which one was with six female residents, one with four male residents, and one with an entire floor of an apartment building (Bloc 36), including six permanent residents (four female and two male)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{18}\) Seventy-eight of the 100 surveys/structured interviews were conducted in the Rudari villages of Vâlcea County; the remainder were conducted in Valea Seacă in Bacău County.
The role of gatekeepers

The beginning of the fieldwork was defined by gaining access. Before starting my PhD studies, I had spent five months in Ferentari (2011–2012) conducting my master’s thesis fieldwork and therefore already had contacts in the field. These contacts, mainly consisting of residents of the Ferentari neighbourhood, became the gatekeepers for my PhD dissertation fieldwork later on. Besides the gatekeepers in Ferentari, I also needed to continuously search for gatekeepers in the other study areas.

First we need to define the meaning of gatekeepers in fieldwork studies. Broadly, gatekeepers play an essential role in enabling initial access to the research area (Crowhurst, Roseneil, Hellesund, Santos, and Stoilova, 2013), though as Campbell, Gray, Meletis, Abott, and Silver (2006) have argued, the role is more complex than that. Even after the first contact with some members of a studied community, gatekeepers continue to be indispensable for securing ongoing access. Especially in slightly hostile or chaotic contexts, gatekeepers might be required to ensure the legitimacy of the researcher’s presence (El-dridge, 2013). Furthermore, the role of gatekeepers is fluid, as they can support a researcher during interviews and help analyse the data. In other words, a gatekeeper can greatly shape the research process, both directly by influencing the questions and indirectly by selecting informants. In the remainder of this section, I describe how I made contact with several gatekeepers, how these gatekeepers supported my fieldwork, and how the researcher–gatekeeper relationship evolved in the different studies.

First, in Bucharest, in November 2011, I contacted various NGOs. One of them, the Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities, which organises activities in the studied neighbourhood, invited me over for a chat at their office in the city centre. They stressed that they were happy when researchers and undergraduate students showed interest in the socioeconomic issues of the neighbourhood. They allowed me to visit their location in Ferentari, where they organised informal education for children with learning disabilities and special needs. There was always a need for volunteers, so I started the first stage of this fieldwork by volunteering. Most of the other volunteers lived in some of Ferentari’s poorest areas and were as a result my first interviewees; as well, they also started taking me to their streets and homes after work. In particular, Olga, Rodica, and Maria were important gatekeepers in the initial stage of the first fieldwork campaign. They were helpful, patient, and keen to introduce me to their neighbours and other people they knew in Ferentari. This approach was in line with
Miller and Bell (2002), who claimed that “much qualitative research relies upon gatekeepers as a route of initial access to participants” (p. 55, quoted in Crowhurst et al., 2013).

After that initial stage I became better acquainted with Maria’s husband, Doru, who was thrilled by my interest in his neighbourhood and daily realities. As a long-time inhabitant of Ferentari, he knew many germane locations and people and could provide a wealth of information about the neighbourhood and its issues. With him at my side, I spent many days in the field making observations, organising focus groups, having informal chats with locals, and planning long interviews. Strong trust developed between us, and it is fair to say that we became friends. Doru was aware of my academic objectives, and I never lost autonomy over my own research – he never intervened in interviews, for example. In the last fieldwork stage in Ferentari I was mostly acting autonomously: I knew many more people, had a multitude of phone numbers, and was, so to say, street savvy.

In the Uppsala case I made no use of a gatekeeper, but simply approached the people begging in front of the supermarkets. Most were Rudari Roma and originated from Vâlcea County in Romania. I agreed to contact one of the Rudari interviewees, Tiberius, once I was in Romania. I told him that I wanted to visit the home villages of the interviewees later that year, and he confirmed that he would be back in Romania by that time. As agreed, I called him upon arrival and we visited all the villages in Vâlcea County that had been mentioned during the interviews in Uppsala. With the help of Tiberius, I managed to access remote places and had 78 questionnaires completed in only one week. Without him, this would likely have been impossible, primarily because most of the villages and their access roads do not appear on maps. An additional 22 questionnaires were completed in Valea Seacă in the County of Bacău, where three of the 15 interviewees in Uppsala originated and where, without support from a gatekeeper, it proved more difficult to reach the same number of potential interviewees.

During my fieldwork in Buenos Aires, I noticed once more how important the gatekeeper role was for finding interviewees who met my newly emerging criteria for participation. As stated earlier, after the first orientation phase of my research in Argentina, I discovered that a group of Romanian-speaking Roma still lived in Greater Buenos Aires. Negotiations over access to this group required additional scrutiny, as “their neighbourhoods” were situated far from Buenos Aires and the nearest train stations. In other words, I needed to establish ways by which I could be certain that I would actually meet them. Before contacting them, I had an initial interview with Jorge Nedich, a
Ludar—Argentine novelist who now lives in the capital. He still maintains contact with people from several Ludar communities in the surrounding suburbs and provided me with their contact details. Moreover, the people I contacted determined the outcome of the fieldwork. One way this became obvious was in the over-representation of evangelical Ludar. In the 1990s, many of the Ludar converted from Catholicism and Orthodoxy to charismatic Protestantism. As a result, initially one of my gatekeepers, Draiu, intentionally prevented me from meeting Catholic Ludars. Once I realised this—he made a remark when passing a group of Romanian-speaking women on the street—I was able to intervene and clarify that I did not wish to apply such a selection criterion. It turned out that he, as a preacher, found it difficult and inappropriate to interact with people who lived what he considered a “sinful lifestyle” (including the practices of fortune-telling and alcohol-abuse). This example illustrates one of the potential limitations of the use of gatekeepers.

**Positionality: to be or not to be gadzje**

When reflecting on positionality, geographers tend to mention a list of (according to them) usually fixed and essentialised identities of gender, race, religion, and class, pointing out the necessity of reflecting on these aspects in one’s fieldwork. Certainly, being a white male, academic, and non-Roma influenced and layered my position in relation to the Roma participants of this study. Lomax (2008) has argued that, due to long histories of rejection and persecution, Roma tend to be suspicious of non-Roma guests visiting their communities, usually referring to them as gadzje (Fraser, 1992). Engebrigtsen (2011) has claimed that Roma–gadzje relations in Romania are driven by two dynamics, each taking place at different scales. On one hand, at the local level, there is much interaction and trade between Roma and non-Roma families. Parallel to this peaceful daily interaction there is, on the other hand, an essentialist and stigmatising discourse. This discourse is primarily driven by the public media and the same Romanians who otherwise get along well with their Roma neighbours. What is more at stake in the second discourse is not the neighbour but the general characteristics of the Gypsies, the ţigani. They are racialised as lazy, thieving welfare parasites who are preferably avoided. Simultaneously, among Roma, Engebrigtsen also identified certain generalising discourses about the gadzje. Apparently, Romanians are blamed for being immoral, stingy, and not respecting family values.
I want to reflect on this imaginary binary between Roma and non-Roma by presenting some of my experiences. This allows me to illustrate how fluid the initial roles are and how intensive engagement with Roma can even make one into an outsider (or rather a “weirdo”) among the non-Roma majority. Furthermore, I argue that intensive engagement with Roma as a gadzje requires reflection not so much on race or nationality, but rather on class and one’s intentions as a researcher. Regarding my own ethnicity, it is worth pointing out that I have Romanian ancestry. I am fully proficient in Romanian and can engage in nearly all conversations and discussions. Ethnicity itself was, as will be shown below, never the issue and I never felt snubbed as an intruding Romanian.

According to the strict meaning of the word, gadzje are people without a Roma background, but it can also be applied to ethnic Roma who no longer identify with Roma culture and lifestyle. Its origins are unclear, but in Romanian, where it is spelled as gagică or gagiul (the former is feminine, the latter masculine), the word has evolved to acquire more meanings. The most prevalent meaning in modern Romanian is that of guy (gagiul) or girl (gagică), from which the ethnic connotation has faded. Nevertheless, in local argot it is still used to denote the landlord or an ethnic Romanian in general (DER: Romanian Etymological Dictionary).

However, during my studies I have never been called gagiul or Romanian. This can largely be explained by the huge diversity of Roma groups in Romania and the fact that many Roma no longer even self-identify as Roma. This was the case in Ferentari. Here, many Romanian-speaking Roma preferred to call themselves Romanian or even pocitură, which would translate as “deformation”. Pocitură embodies a certain inferiority complex towards the majority society and the self-identified traditional Roma. Also, one of the more traditional groups I encountered in the villages in Vâlcea County, the Rudari, did not self-identify as Roma. They often felt the need to emphasize they were not Roma because they did not speak Romani. Although this is a fair point, historically the Rudari or Băiești (Boyash) were identified as Gypsies owned by the crown and who worked in mines (Fraser, 1992, p. 223).

The only time ethnicity really surfaced was during my fieldwork in the villages, which I visited in a rental car. I picked up the car at the airport in Bucharest, and after approximately 10 kilometres, a symbol that I did not recognise lighted up on my dashboard. I stopped at the first big petrol station on the motorway between Bucharest and Pitești and looked at the manual. The symbol indicated that I needed to check
the *anvelope*. I had no idea what *anvelopă*[^19] meant, and got out of the car to ask two employees. They taught me the meaning – it is a fancy word for tyres – and quickly helped me replace the cracked tyre. I continued on my way to the first village, and there I called the car rental company. The person on the phone informed me that the car in question had only recently been introduced to the Romanian market and that they could not find a spare tyre. They would instead drop by the next day with a new car – she promised an upgrade. So, the following day, while filling in surveys in Valea lui Stan, I was called by Avis: “Hi, where are you? Our guy from Sibiu is on his way to you, can you meet him at the petrol station in Brezoï?” I agreed and told the people in Valea lui Stan that I would return as soon as possible to continue with the surveys. An older man, wearing an Uppsala IF[^20] sweater and who had begged in Uppsala, came to me and implored me to promise to return. I promised to do so, and the next moment the man asked if he could come along to the petrol station. I was unsure how to answer, but at the same time I could not see why I should refuse him. Subsequently, three other people asked to join me, and I ended up driving to the petrol station accompanied by three adults and two children. The Avis employee was already waving to me when he suddenly froze. He realised that I was not alone and found himself in an unusual and, arguably, awkward situation. He handed me some forms to fill out while my Rudari companions were standing in a circle around us. His shaky hands and stuttering voice revealed his discomfort. I do not want to discredit the Avis employee by telling this anecdote. Rather, I want to illustrate how in that particular and unusual situation only the majority group is expected to show up, i.e., ethnic Romanians. I was expected there but my companions were not, and I was suddenly the Romanian whereas, ironically, I was the only one without Romanian citizenship.

Race played a role mostly when discussing my research with friends and family in Romania. Some were terrified hearing I was spending several months in places such as Ferentari. They were obviously concerned about my wellbeing, but on top of that also cast doubts on the value of my research. Often these doubts were based on the same ingrained Roma racialisation that Engebrigtsen (2011, 2017) discussed. The usual formula was often applied. First, all the stereotypes (e.g., idleness, lack of work ethic, and untrustworthiness) were mentioned and illustrated with personal anecdotes. This was followed

[^19]: Singular = anvelopă, plural = anvelope.
[^20]: A multi-sports club based in Uppsala. See appendix 1 for a picture of the sweater.
by the conclusion that any serious interest in this group was a waste of time and energy. “Se complac in mizerie” – they take pleasure in living in squalor – was often the final remark. If there were moments when I felt like a gagiu, it was among Romanians when talking about my research.

Having said all this, I remained aware of my outsider position in the field and of my ability to combine these insights with personal theoretical and policy-based knowledge. In that way, I agree with Haraway (1996, cited in Jensen and Glasmeier, 2011) that my knowledge did not come “from nowhere” and that it constituted a particular combination of “researcher and place” (Jensen and Glasmeier, 2011). Indeed, before my field research, I engaged with the relevant theoretical concepts and with the history of Roma exclusion, which helped me construct a context for the researched areas. The fieldwork campaigns themselves added new insights to my theoretical views. While I was in the field, several local actors, who truly live in substandard and segregated communities, displayed a certain discomfort and suspicion regarding my interest in “their place”. “What is so interesting about our misery?” several informants asked, followed by “How can you help us?” Especially in my first field period, I had to remain silent in the face of these questions. It is, simply put, very difficult to formulate answers to such reasonable and straightforward questions. The only answer I could give was that I was an outsider who wanted to gain knowledge of “their misery”. This power imbalance is troublesome and to a certain extent irreconcilable.

The only thing I could offer in return was sincerity, ongoing contact with a selection of informants, and openness about myself and the aims of the study. Also, I always sought to avoid positioning myself as the omniscient academic. When entering into discussions or when people disagreed, I often preferred reticence. Furthermore, by answering most questions they had and demystifying my own person, I think I convinced most of the respondents of my academic and non-exploitative intentions – even though, in essence, the study “of them” has secured my livelihood for the last few years.

Description of the multi-method approach

To a great extent, the methods used were ethnographic. In particular, the research in Ferentari was intended to link a detailed understanding of the everyday experience of housing precarity to a broader postsocialist context (marked by privatisation and deindustrialisation) and
globalising processes (marked by deregulated markets, European integration, transnational migration, and citizenship forms). Using observations, interviews, and focus groups does not make a study ethnographic; rather, it is intensive and sincere participation, as both researcher and human, that does so (Watson and Till, 2011).

In striving to understand the unequal production of space in relation to the housing conditions of Romanian Roma, this study explored several locations, intending to obtain thick descriptions of housing-related processes. Lomax (2008) has argued that ethnography or iterative and intensive qualitative research is vital when studying Roma communities: first, it allows the development of trust between the researcher(s) and the community; second, it permits careful negotiations over access to the community; and, third, it avoids the “injustice of engagement”. This injustice refers to the tendency to study more easily accessible groups within the Roma communities – as I inadvertently did when initially interviewing only Pentecostal Ludar. The remainder of this section explains how the methods used were adjusted to the local contexts studied.

In studying the complex postsocialist housing situation of Romanian Roma, I agree with Sayer (1992) and Perkins, Thorns, and Winstanly (2008) that multi-method approaches need to be designed when a situated understanding of the context cannot be generated through quantitative or less intensive and non-iterative qualitative methods. I used four qualitative and one quantitative method. The qualitative methods were participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and visual documentation. These methods were applied iteratively in order to reach data saturation. Certain concepts and understandings that gradually emerged from the research were subsequently scrutinised. The only quantitative method used was the survey. I designed two of them, which were completed by 100 households in the home villages of the interviewed beggars from the Uppsala study and 87 households in Bloc 36, the “phantom block” mentioned in the Prologue. In the case of the Uppsala beggars, I was primarily interested in identifying links between housing improvements and migratory movements. The survey of Bloc 36 was primarily intended to establish the levels of overcrowding.

Conducting participant observations

According to Watson and Till (2011), participant observation is what distinguishes ethnography from other qualitative methods. In such observation, notes and records of interactions can be taken in various
ways. I documented my findings primarily by jotting down what I saw, heard, and discussed with people on the streets and by photography. This approach is explicit and works only when everyone accepts the approach. I end this subsection with a comment on this method.

My notes and visual impressions were often analysed the same day or week, helping me both increase my knowledge of the field and focus my research objectives. They proved a useful first stage before commencing with interviews in Ferentari, for example. The knowledge I gained from observations was subsequently translated into questions in interviews.

What is most vital in ethnography, after asking about and exploring the right things and obtaining the “facts”, is also to ensure that the fieldwork data are collected in an ethical way. While the ethnographer is allowed to observe and capture images of intimate aspects of life, she or he also needs to be sensitive to how observations and other methods are carried out (Geertz, 1995; O’Reilly, 2005; Watson and Till, 2011).

Several points became clear during my intensive engagements with the people in the field. First, successful participation requires sufficient time, flexibility, and transparency of the study aims for the research participants. Only in this way can a researcher gain access to the intimate social spaces where the “lived” truly unfolds. Watson and Till (2011) have accordingly pointed out that interviewing alone is not enough to constitute ethnography. Asking respondents, in interviews or questionnaires, to explain what they “do” is inadequate, as many of their acts are performed unconsciously. However, in attempting to participate in and represent others’ lives, it is vital to “do so with care, and in ways that do not reinforce the inherently uneven power relations that privilege the researcher rather than the researched” (Watson and Till, 2011, p. 130). Especially during my stays in Bucharest, I managed to clarify my intentions and create a situation in which my presence was largely accepted. The residents knew what I was researching and above all knew I had no money or short-term solutions to offer.

Something that truly helped to increase my acceptance in the field was to share my personal joy at becoming a father. By that time, my partner was in Bucharest and underwent a 10-week ultrasound, and I showed the resulting image the following day to people I knew in the neighbourhood. This decision was inspired by Lindeborg’s (2012) ethnographic approach, in which she shared her motherhood with the community she was studying in Laos. In her case, this openness re-
sulted in broader acceptance due to the higher status of mothers in the local kinship model. I continued applying this strategy of openness, which often meant that, as well as in observations and interviews, I was also spending considerable time in local activities such as playing football, helping with homework, and drinking coffee (or beer) with locals.

Second, I realised that participant observation also requires that the researcher stay in touch with respondents once the fieldwork is nearly over. In ethnography, the endpoint of research is very flexible, and intensive engagement can entail ongoing contact with some research participants. On my first holiday to Romania after I returned from Argentina, I had to buy a Romanian-language bible and self-study manual for two Ludar preachers. They asked me on several occasions to do so, because they wanted to read “God’s Word” in their own language. Communication apps, such as WhatsApp, allow relationships to be maintained, and people from Ferentari and Buenos Aires still occasionally send me messages using them. Moreover, interviewed beggars keep returning to Uppsala, and I find it personally unethical suddenly to ignore them. All these considerations have forced me to interweave research with my private life.

In summary, participant observation should generate insights into theory that are co-generated with and approved by local communities. Such approval was usually granted, but there were occasions when it became clear that I was unwelcome. A subtle expression of this disapproval was to postpone interviews or encounters. To illustrate, at one time during my stay in Argentina, I wanted to visit Moreno (in Greater Buenos Aires) with Matías Domínguez, an Argentine anthropologist who studies Argentina’s Roma. The Ludar were the last group he had never managed to interact with and, on hearing my stories from the field, he was keen to join me. On various occasions I asked whether I could come with a guest, and finally the gatekeeper from Moreno told me: “Dominic, you can come, we know you, you and your family are always welcome here, but please do not bring others”. Another, more abrupt example was in one of the Rudari villages. After I had interviewed several people and started taking photos, I suddenly noticed a group of angry villagers. I was almost done with fieldwork in Vâlcea County, and I asked my gatekeeper, Tiberius, about the last village I wanted to visit. He told me he knew where it was but that he did not have relatives there and that he knew that there were some “mean people”. I persisted in carrying out my research plan in that village, and initially chatted with many people and completed numerous questionnaires. However, at one point, Tiberius came quickly to me and
told me to get into the car and leave the village as soon as possible. Although I had initially felt welcome in that community, my presence was not appreciated by everyone, so I decided not to use the questionnaires that I had completed there. Indeed, the community had rejected me, showing that I should have listened to Tiberius beforehand. Later that night (16 May 2016), I wrote this in my diary:

Unfortunately, my stay in Cornu came to an end when I approached several larger houses. According to the locals, these houses had also been built by active beggars, but these seemingly better-off Rudari were not in the mood to talk to me and were shouting that I was filming them for Swedish television in order to stop them from travelling to Sweden. After I hopelessly attempted to explain I was not a journalist and that I was not working for any kind or media or government agency, we decided to leave. They didn’t allow me to leave the village by the main road, however, and I had to leave by a winding road that reminded me of the Gobi Desert I once crossed by car.

Conducting semi-structured interviews

As well as collecting notes and photos documenting my observations, I also interviewed people in the field, primarily using the semi-structured interview method. There are several types of semi-structured interviewing, and in this research, I often used life history interviewing (see Jackson and Russell, 2011). As Fraser (1992) and Achim (2004) have noted, historical studies of Roma are particularly difficult because so little has been documented. In addition, the personal and situated experiences of Roma and places such as Ferentari or barrio La Perla have been particularly ignored by research, and are therefore difficult to trace through archival studies or other sources. Given this research gap, life history interviewing was an appropriate and effective method for exploring place-based understandings of housing-related experiences over longer periods of time. In that way, I was retrieving information not only about the present but also about its origins in the past.

This approach entailed, however, some additional considerations. Oral accounts from older Ladar, telling of their nomadic experiences and of being constantly on the run from Argentine police, or from nostalgic long-time inhabitants of Ferentari who missed state socialism are not based on “passive depositories of facts” (Portelli, 1991, quoted in Jackson and Russell, 2011). Memories are actively and constantly shaped by current experiences. In that way, nostalgia for socialist times reflects the truth, but it is presumably also romanticised in light of postsocialist comedowns. To illustrate, one interviewee men-
tioned that even before 1989, Ferentari was Bucharest’s *pata neagră* or dark spot. Later in the same interview, she described socialist Ferentari as a place of freshly painted apartment buildings with total silence at night and flourishing flowers in springtime. Similarly, when I spoke with a Ludar woman about her youth spent in a tent, in one interview she said that the house was much cleaner and more comfortable. However, on another occasion, she intervened when I was speaking Spanish with one of her granddaughters and said, “You see how living among *criollos* [i.e., Argentineans] has made us lose our culture, our language, everything … It was good in tents – we had fresh air and we had freedom that we have now lost”. Whichever reflection on her past is more accurate is irrelevant, as both illustrate the complexity of representing the history of a community. Moreover, these examples illustrate how a life history interviewing method allows one to avoid sanitised versions of past events and instead explore the ambiguities of the past (Jackson and Russell, 2011).

Regarding interview strategies, I always tried to use an interview guide to ensure at least some consistency. Consistency sometimes proved difficult to attain, and after an interview I sometimes felt that none of my questions had really been understood or answered, or that I was left with a new set of questions. Lomax (2008) claimed that among Roma, interviews and other conventional interrogating techniques can be deemed unusual and even suspicious. Some guidance of conversation is still needed, though, but is not always productive when applied strictly. Therefore, many of the interviews were somewhere between unstructured and semi-structured in format.

That said, what I was seeking were the long-term housing trajectories of Roma and the conditions for accepting, adapting, or resisting the particular housing situations in which they found themselves. In the case of the people in Ferentari, this concerned extracting the narratives of being or becoming slum dwellers, owners of substandard housing, or (illegal) tenants in Romania’s postsocialist super homeownership society. In my first round of fieldwork, my questions were based on certain general concepts, but these changed over time and so did the questions.

In the Ludar and Uppsala fieldwork, I used much more structured interview guides to obtain information about the construction of their houses. Nonetheless, there were numerous moments when I simply had to improvise. In the Uppsala fieldwork, this was often because of the difficulty, irrelevance, or lack of clarity of certain questions. In the Argentina fieldwork, I quickly realised that there was no need for a Spanish interview guide and that certain questions could not be an-
answered. When I asked about awareness of Romaphobia in Europe or of the Roma exterminations of the Second World War, most respondents remained silent, having no idea of what I was talking about. This proved that my initial interview guide was poorly connected to the history of the Ludar, so I rapidly decided to revise my questions.

The interviews with experts and officials were much more structured. Here, I used lists of both questions and topics that needed to be discussed. With experts, guidance was needed due to their enthusiasm to simply tell me everything they felt was of interest. The interviews with officials needed specific questions in order to get off the ground. On some occasions, answers were not given, in which case the listed topics were helpful to ensure that I could improvise around a particular theme.

Regarding confidentiality, all interviewees were either anonymised or referred to by their real names with consent, though I have chosen not to distinguish between the real and fictitious names. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed. On some occasions, transcribing proved difficult due to the background sounds. In the Ferentari, Argentinean, and Romanian village fieldwork, it proved difficult to find quiet places in which to conduct interviews. This potential drawback is arguably inherent to studies of Roma (Lomax, 2008). In the Uppsala fieldwork, the interviews were conducted in a small room at the university. I offered supermarket coupons worth SEK 200 in exchange for the interviews, to compensate for the time they lost for begging or collecting refundable bottles. The cost of the coupons was covered by the university. These interviews were recorded, and then translated into English and transcribed by a private consultant.

**Conducting focus groups**

Another method I used in the Ferentari fieldwork was the focus group. Compared with interviews, focus groups provide data that are less influenced by the researcher. Moreover, a focus group can give insight into where people’s knowledge and understandings of the issues come from. They are an appropriate supplement to life history interviews because of their exploratory and confirmatory capacity. This alternative to interviews and observations indeed supplied different perspectives on how various social constructions and topics, such as race, housing, work, and welfare benefits, are shaped in smaller communities and geographies (Skop, 2006). A focus group will usually consist of four to eight people who express and discuss their views on a chosen topic (Bedford and Burgess, 2001).
In the three focus groups I organised, I managed to have three main topics discussed by the participants. First, the participants discussed the changes in their neighbourhood in recent decades. Second, I asked them to reflect on the actual housing conditions and how they felt about living in Ferentari, societal rejection, and limited economic mobility. Third, I asked them to reflect on politics, local policymaking, their roles and rights, and what they thought were the right interventions. Now and then, I introduced certain themes previously mentioned in interviews, but I attempted not to “kill” the discussions. Also, on some occasions I was reminded of the difficulties of conducting focus groups (Parker and Tritter, 2006), such as keeping the group united when addressing issues that may cause disagreement. This happened, for instance, when I needed to calm down certain participants as they started to argue – one person even left a focus group because of an argument.

The first two focus groups took place in March 2014. The first one was co-organised with my gatekeepers and held in a school building. This was also the calmest and most effective focus group: I only needed to mention a theme and a respectful discussion followed. The second focus group, with four men, took place later that month during the day in a local pub. This focus group was also largely successful and offered many new insights into the lives of locals living from minimum-wage or informal day labour. Lastly, I organised a focus group with three households residing on the first floor of Bloc 36. This focus group, which started with six participants and took place in the corridor, ended up attracting the attention of many more flat dwellers. Ultimately, it led to unusual scenes (e.g., children playing and screaming or another resident joining in and immediately thereafter taking a dose of narcotics) and agitated discussions. These unforeseen activities affected the quality of the focus group and prevented me from keeping order. Moreover, it was difficult to transcribe and I had to rely solely on the notes I took during the focus group.

Surveys and document analyses

For this thesis research, I decided to perform surveys in study areas that had already been examined in previous interviews and observations. I was not necessarily looking for answers but rather for clarifications concerning the dimensions of insights generated earlier. In the case of the beggars from Uppsala, I wanted to discover how widespread begging-backed housing investment was in their home villages. In combination with this questionnaire, I also took extensive notes
regarding the more detailed answers. In the Ferentari fieldwork, I had already been offered the results of an earlier survey conducted by a local NGO (i.e., the Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities) on Bloc 36. As this rather extensive survey was incomplete and dated, I updated its information and focused primarily on household size. In that way, I was able to compare what is presumably one of the most extreme overcrowding rates with city-wide figures.

When studying documents, I focused primarily on planning reports and master plans for Ferentari. I also analysed legal and Roma-related reports as well as newspaper articles on Roma poverty, and attended several housing and Roma-issue meetups in Bucharest where actual policies were discussed.

Sampling and theoretical saturation

In the fieldwork I used both purposive (Saunders et al., 2018) and snowball sampling (Noy, 2008). The first was applied in the Uppsala fieldwork when approaching beggars on the street for interview requests. Relying on my own admittedly flawed judgement, I chose the members of the community I was interested in. An additional criterion, as well as being beggars, was that they should be from Romania. I thus excluded Bulgarian beggars for the practical reason that I cannot speak Bulgarian and lacked funds to pay an interpreter. I also knew that I would not be able to follow up by visiting their regions of origin because of time and money constraints. This was not a major issue, as I only twice met Turkish-speaking Roma from Bulgaria. I chose not to use other criteria, such as gender or (apparent) age in my selection. The sample nevertheless became varied and I was able to identify some relevant particulars related to gender and age later in the analysis.

In the Ferentari and institutional studies, I made a more practical choice and used snowball sampling. As I wanted to learn more about local dynamics and thus wanted to hear a wide range of voices, I was open to recommendations from interviewees. With locals from Ferentari, this meant that participants recommended that I talk to people they knew or visit notable parts of the neighbourhood, such as certain hidden slum communities. My sample was thus developed together with my informants in the field, helping me move around the neighbourhood and encounter various forms and degrees of informal and substandard housing. To return once more to Lomax’s (2008) concern
about the “injustice of engagement” in Roma studies, I believe that I have covered most housing forms in Ferentari.

In the institutional fieldwork carried out simultaneously with the Ferentari fieldwork, the sampling started purposefully but ended more as snowball sampling. Initially, in December 2012, I visited Bucharest’s City Hall where I wanted to speak with some of the urban planners. Ultimately, I managed to get in touch with two planners with whom I maintained contact in the following two fieldwork campaigns, in 2014 and 2015. Access to Sector 5’s officials proved much harder to gain. In 2012 I was rejected on several occasions, but by chance I happened to meet Sector 5’s Head of Public Works on a train between Eindhoven and Amsterdam. After interviewing him twice, I asked if he could put me in touch with other officials from his Sector, and he was willing to do so. Without this chance meeting, it was doubtful that I would have been able to talk to these people. Concerning the experts (i.e., urban planners, academics, and specialists working at NGOs), I also started purposefully but ended up in snowball sampling. People such as Florin Botonogu (from the Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities) and Liviu Chelcea (professor of sociology at the University of Bucharest) put me in touch with many other people in the field, including Petre Manole, the then director of the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), and Jérôme Richard, the then head of a French–Romanian partnership for the creation of an urban master plan for Ferentari.

In the Argentina fieldwork, snowball sampling again proved an effective way to get in touch with a Roma community I had not heard of before. As stated earlier, Jorge Nedich told me about some large communities of Ludar throughout the country. He gave me some phone numbers, which resulted in 15 interviews and many hours of participant observations in the two communities.

Furthermore, all sampling stages were guided by theoretical sampling. This strategy is helpful when seeking to support newly emerging constructs with collected data (O’Reilly, 2005). Particularly in the Ferentari fieldwork, I often analysed my notes in the evenings, establishing what new questions I needed to ask to clarify aspects that were still vague. This process can be interpreted as a stage of fieldwork coding in which general patterns are identified. I operationalised this by making lists of key open codes for concepts and new questions. I also analysed the photos that I took in order to identify particular matters I wanted to have clarified. Table 3 presents an overview of the sampled interviewees and households.
Table 3. Characteristics of the sampled interviewees and households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ferentari fieldwork</strong>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure status</td>
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<td>Tenant</td>
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<td>Slum dweller/squatter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Iacob Andrei Street</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tunsu Petre Street</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zăbrăuțiilor Street</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other areas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional fieldwork</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional occupations</td>
<td>Urban planning and housing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public works</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NGO and minority specialists</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uppsala fieldwork</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure status</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Squatter or homeless</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homeless shelter</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Argentina fieldwork</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Location of interviewed households22</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Barrio la Perla</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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21 Only interviewees are included; participants in all informal chats conducted during observations are excluded.
It was necessary to maintain a sense of the “big picture” when analysing the sometimes detailed accounts of places and when establishing links between places. To illustrate this, early in my first fieldwork in Ferentari, I heard from flat dwellers that many of their neighbours had been forced to give up even their small apartments due to financial difficulties. Initially, I did not necessarily ask where these people went to, but simply coded these cases as “high tenure insecurity”. Once I gained access to the slum areas of Ferentari, I was particularly interested in whether these people lived in other places in Ferentari. The stories of two interviewees (Dan and Silă) illustrated how misfortune had forced them to sell their apartments and accept even less suitable dwellings. This example illustrated how exploring unusual cases and extending the initial choice of locations for sampling allowed me to capture a detailed postsocialist housing trajectory in a segregated and deprived urban space.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has presented an overview of my positionality and of the methods and sampling strategies used. In total, I spent nearly a year in Ferentari, where I conducted 50 interviews, and I conducted an additional 54 interviews in the other fieldwork campaigns. These interviews were complemented by extensive observations, surveys, and document analyses.

22 On several occasions, interviews were held with one or more household members.
Chapter 5: Findings and presentation of the articles

The modern mahala: making and living in Romania’s postsocialist slum

The first paper of this thesis presents a comprehensive overview of the reproduction of marginal spaces in Bucharest. The key aim driving that paper was to study the relegation of poor Romanians to recently appearing urban slums and deprived areas. In line with Lefebvre’s general theory of spatial production, I argue in Paper I that Bucharest has evolved in unequal, fragmented, and yet planned ways from early modern times onwards. Over the last three decades, Romanian peripheral and deprived urban areas have been repeatedly referred to as marginal areas (zone mărginașe), ghettos (ghetouri), and even Gypsy-land (țigănie). Paper I seeks, however, to reflect on Romania’s postsocialist production of peripheral space from a critical and historical perspective. As a result, I use the Romanian word “mahala”, which over the last 150 years has been used to refer to the space housing Romania’s most disadvantaged groups (Majuru, 2003; Turnock, 1970). Although mahalas were transformed into high-rise housing estates during the four decades of socialist urban planning, they have made a comeback to Romania’s urban space in the postsocialist era.

Interviews with older, long-term residents of Ferentari reveal how the postsocialist mahala contrasts sharply to socialist-era Ferentari. As part of Bucharest’s proletariat, they were housed in small one- or two-room flats in one of Ferentari’s microraioane. These older interviewees are highly nostalgic about this period. Tidy instead of rundown apartment buildings, clean streets instead of mosaics of potholes, grass instead of garbage, flowers instead of syringes used for drugs – these are just a selection of the contrasts described to me by older residents when comparing socialist-era with postsocialist Ferentari. Otherwise, the socialist living conditions had little to do with an inclusive city. Their lives were largely confined to socialist habitats where they resided in monotonous, mass-produced apartments that were several times smaller than those in the prestigious apartment buildings in the
then-new Socialist Civic Centre. They worked hard and accepted their habitats, thereby reproducing the socialist economic model. Ferentari, like many other socialist neighbourhoods, illustrated where the lowest threshold of tolerability lay.

After 1989, many of the one-room apartments were, without any strict allocation policies in place, gradually filled with large households. Gas connections were privatised and as a result heating was no longer central (for postsocialist energy inequality, see Chelcea and Pulay, 2015; Șoiață, 2012). Burglaries also became an issue and drug use started occurring in broad daylight (see also Pulay, 2015, on Bucharest’s “street economy”). Nowadays, Ferentari consists of an eclectic mix of socialist-era apartment blocks, detached houses (diverging in quality), and slums, and is often described by its inhabitants as the last resort when seeking a place to live in Bucharest. This is especially the case because Bucharest has virtually no social housing left (Amann et al., 2013; INS, 2016).

Paper I studied all types of dwelling, illustrating how divergent the meaning of homeownership has become in postsocialist Romania. Without strict socialist-era allocation policies, many of the small one- or two-room apartments were soon inhabited by large and impoverished households of up to 10 members. The lack of financial means meant the quick deterioration of virtually all large housing estates in southern Ferentari. Second, the paper also explored unlawful appropriations of space and houses. The blocks of apartments, for example, are not only inhabited by homeowners and tenants but also claimed by slumlords. Many apartments were confiscated by illegal moneylenders who offered loans to poor residents. Their dwellings were often used as collateral and this led to evictions when terms of payment were not met. This theme, introduced in the Prologue, clearly showed how previous workers’ flats became susceptible to new and illegal rental practices. Some of these flats became illegal slums that occupied public space. Most of the slum communities I studied, however, had been evicted in the previous two years, and a search for unclaimed lands has gradually driven the evictees farther south, where vast barren lands await their future initiatives.

23 This district in Bucharest is where large parts of the historic town were replaced with large and luxurious blocks of apartments that housed the nomenklatura.
24 Nonetheless, in recent years also in Ferentari a part of the housing estates were “retrofitted”. This does not mean that the dwellings were improved. In energy retrofitting only the façade is replaced. This, thus, does not tackle issues around overcrowding or urban infrastructure.
The paper exposes the spatial plasticity and diversions of use in one of Bucharest’s most deprived areas. This is traced in the construction of new slums and in the highly speculative new housing market. Recent times have seen the construction of large houses, which are subdivided into small apartments. These private initiatives respond to the housing demands of “in-work” poor whose regular but low incomes are insufficient to cover rent elsewhere in Bucharest. Such small blocks of apartments are often constructed at the intersection between legal and illegal. Certainly, the lands are usually legally owned, but it is questionable whether the owners obtained building permits for multi-storey buildings and for their subdivision for subletting purposes. The residents of these buildings all mentioned they never received rental contracts or the right to register at those addresses. The latter, in turn, disqualifies them from applying for Bucharest’s social benefits or registering in the Sector’s social rental queue.

Paper I illustrates how the mahala has returned to the city. In the absence of social housing and increased social welfare, the modern mahala allows poor (primarily Roma) Romanians to inhabit the postsocialist city in overcrowded and heavily decayed conditions. Speculative practices only add to the precarity experienced in such places.

Racialised postsocialist governance in Romania’s urban margins: housing and local policymaking in Ferentari, Bucharest

With the hardship of Ferentari in mind, in Paper II I addressed the question: What role do local governing institutions in Bucharest play in the reproduction or mitigation of urban decay and severe socioeconomic issues? Given the rapid economic decline in the 1990s, this paper explored Romania’s near order and its role in allowing urban poverty to persist. By doing so, this part of the thesis builds new understandings of how decentralised governing bodies respond to housing and socioeconomic challenges in deprived settings with high Roma presence. The researched context was Bucharest’s Sector 5, in which Ferentari is situated; more than that, it is also the sector with the highest percentage of Roma and poor households.25

The research on local officials focused primarily on their understandings of local hardship and their mandate to combat housing pov-

25 Romanian Census 2011; INS (2016).
The outcomes pointed to strong indifference to the challenges faced by poor quarters in their sector. Although they had financial control over local taxes and budgets and increased funding possibilities, they largely chose not to change their insignificant roles in welfare and housing provision. There was awareness of European funds, but the officials had, according to external informants, such as a French advisor for Ferentari’s new master plan, no interest in applying for such funds and no idea of how to do so. European and national money had previously been applied for and used to improve schools and the local road and sewer networks, but these applications had been controlled and steered by national ministries and Bucharest’s central municipality. The much-needed renovation of existing housing and the construction of new affordable housing were not considered serious topics and were argued to be “private domains”.

Ideas about housing were shared with me by several local officials, but these ideas were vague, as were the analysed public documents on local urban regeneration. To substantiate this point, since my first talks with officials, in March 2014, I was informed of an upcoming master plan (Sector 5, 2017) intended to provide plans to combat Bucharest’s worst socioeconomic conditions. This master plan was ultimately adopted in 2018, but it is unclear as to how Sector 5 will renovate all the decayed blocks of apartments and regenerate the poorest parts of Ferentari. In the master plan, monies are allocated to fund housing efforts, but the amounts seem improbably small for both renovations and new social housing construction. Nor does the master plan mention anything about the use of EU funds.

As well as such apathy and half-measures, I also highlighted the potential role of racism. Based on my own research results, I argue that racism and particularly the racialisation of Roma as workshy and even deceitful prevents the increased involvement of local officials in addressing segregation and housing poverty. I noticed that the marginal space of poverty and social exclusion has become synonymous with the homeland of the “Gypsies” (cf. Pulay, 2015). The people regarded as such are not necessarily Romanian Roma but rather are those racialised as undeserving, unreliable, and unmannerly subjects to which “Gypsy” is attributed as a status by the political classes. This racialisation process should certainly not be ignored when decentralisation is perceived as determining the highest possible level of democratic control over decision- and policymaking (Purcell, 2006). Indeed, due to the Sector’s control over what funding proposals are ultimately submitted, it is not unthinkable that repudiated “Gypsies” are deliberately excluded. This was never explicitly admitted by the officials I
interviewed, but indirectly the narrative was that whatever effort or amount of money one put into “their areas”, it was always “a waste of public money” (*bani publici irosiți*).26

Given local inability to deal with the large-scale hardship and given the racialised notions of the interviewed officials regarding the poor people in their neighbourhood, this paper argued that Sector 5’s decision-making can be interpreted as an example of Purcell’s (2006) local trap. The paper does not argue that local governance is necessarily the wrong scale, but rather that by uncritically conflating the local with the good (as done by the EU and its enforced decentralisation), local rights are not necessarily recognised and defended.

### Roma beggars in Uppsala: racialised poverty and fallacious homeownership in Romania and Sweden (co-authored with Irene Molina)

Paper III problematises the notion of homeownership through examining a group of begging Romanian Roma who cyclically migrate to Uppsala, Sweden. This group states that their informal earnings are higher in Sweden than in Romania. However, in Sweden they cannot obtain lodgings on the legal housing market. In Romania, on the other hand, they are legal or semi-legal owners of houses, which were, and often still are, in substandard condition. This article proposes the term “fallacious homeownership” to emphasise the precariousness of life for this group of poor and racialised homeowners.

Methodologically, the article is based on 11 interviews with 15 beggars in Uppsala and two fieldwork campaigns in the Romanian home villages of the respondents. The interviews focused in detail on the beggars’ housing situation in both Sweden and Romania, their experiences abroad, and encounters with racism and discrimination.

Their narratives make it clear that the precarity faced in Romania forced most of these Roma to embark on cyclic migration to Sweden. In Sweden they earn money primarily from begging, and most avoid the homeless shelters due to the high overnight fees. This forces many into makeshift housing, such as caravans, forest encampments, or the cars in which they travelled to Sweden. The migrants’ low expenditures in Sweden mean that most of their households in Romania can survive from the remittances they send. Second, various respondents

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26 Interview (March 2014) with the head of public works, which is anonymised as Official C in Paper II.
also stressed that they were able to slowly but surely improve their housing in Romania, although some noted that due to uncertain property rights they were afraid that they could be evicted at any moment. Moreover, their segregation in Romania continues reproducing problems. It keeps most interviewees living far from local labour markets, while their children remain outside schooling due to limited funds to pay for transportation. In addition, overcrowding is still a dire reality, and many interviewees described living crammed in small dwellings.

Above all, the article clarifies how this group experiences strong hostility, racism, and harassment. In Romania their poverty is strongly racialised, and many respondents remembered racist encounters with former employers or state officials. However, in Sweden the group is confronted with anti-Roma racism. On one hand, the respondents described how they were targeted by hatred: “Swedes” spat at them, kicked over the cups in which they collected money, and said nasty things in Swedish – a language they did not understand. On the other hand, although not fully aware why, they were increasingly being ignored on the streets and, as a result, their earnings started to drop. In our 2018 fieldwork in Romania, we heard many complaining about “people not giving any longer”. While the interviewees were uncertain why this happened, we connect this change in societal attitude to recent aggressive mass media allegations regarding the begging Roma. The mass media discourses repeatedly portray the Roma groups as criminal organisations, while givers are increasingly problematised and accused of “reproducing a problem” (cf. Hansson, 2019).

While these societal developments add to their existing precarity, the respondents also reminded us about the “fallaciousness” of homeownership as a secure and ideal tenure form. Some still lack legal rights to their land, others are threatened with flooding and erosion, and most deal on a daily basis with overcrowding, lack of urban sanitary services, and substandard housing conditions.

Homeownership, mobility, and home: a reflective housing study of Argentine Ludar and Romanian Rudari

In Paper IV, I explore the housing and earning strategies of two different Roma groups: the Rudari from various villages in Vâlcea County, Romania, and the Ludar from Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina. This paper is more descriptive than the other ones due to the lack of literature on this particular group in Latin America.
While much has been written about the substandard housing situation and marginalised socioeconomic position of Roma, fewer accounts exist of the local and inventive strategies undertaken by them. The perseverance of the two studied groups has proven vital in the hostile contexts in which they operate. These hostile contexts are first understood through the lens of the national housing policies that, in recent decades, have turned away from active and large-scale public housing interventions. In the same period, the economic situation has worsened in both countries, forcing millions of Romanians and Argentineans to live in substandard and overcrowded conditions. The second determinant of the unwelcoming contexts is the rise of borderscapes, as national and local policies create boundaries that frustrate the migratory practices of these groups.

The Argentine Ludar, who acquired *loteos populares* – cheap former farmlands in the surroundings of Buenos Aires – in the 1960s, managed in the ensuing decades to build large and adequate houses. The Ludar likely arrived in Argentina between 1860 and 1900. These were first- or second-generation freed slaves who left Romania due to the lack of livelihood options. Upon arrival in Argentina, their illiteracy and lack of modern economic skills were arguably important reasons why they pursued the nomadic lifestyle. However, after acquiring the *loteos populares*, a gradual process of housing construction and improvement started. In the first years after the move to Temperley and Moreno (the two researched cases), the Ludar helped one another by offering loans for acquiring land, constructing houses, and purchasing old school buses. With these newly owned buses, the Ludar continued travelling throughout Argentina (now to remoter areas) to sell merchandise on local markets. They specialised in trading cheap kitchenware, tools, and blankets, and argued that their competitive edge was that they sold for well under high-street prices. As a result, many of them succeeded in building houses of good quality. Unlike many of their counterparts in Romania, they have warm running water, are connected to gas and electricity, and experience virtually no overcrowding.

Only recently have the researched Rudari seen improvement in their housing conditions. This group resides in remote and deprived villages, and until a decade ago, all Rudari lived in slum-like conditions. More recently, a considerable number of them have managed to escape these dire conditions by means of remittances of income largely generated by informal activities. The ones who come to Sweden earn money primarily from begging, collecting refundable bottles, and sporadic chores. This context is analysed in more detail in Paper III.
This paper calls for more attention to be paid to the concrete outcomes of the strategies undertaken by the two studied groups. These outcomes are not traceable solely in the improved houses but also in the increased dignity and sense of home that the Ludar and Rudari have experienced since escaping hunger and substandard housing conditions. Finally, this paper argues that acknowledgement of these radical and effective strategies should open up debate about increased political tolerance and decreased bordering and suppression of their activities.
Conclusion

The main contribution of this thesis is to provide locally embedded and qualitative understandings of housing exclusion as experienced by Roma. The thesis sought to theorise about local experiences of relegation to substandard living conditions. These experiences affect, marginalise, and discourage many Roma, but they also convince them to cope with and unmake precarity. The thesis focuses primarily on Romanian Roma, but it also examines an Argentinean Roma case to provide a reflective and multi-site analysis of community-led coping strategies. Accordingly, this comprehensive summary and all the constituent papers of this thesis helped answer the research questions by presenting input from various fieldwork campaigns and unravelling the experiences of the research participants.

Chapter 1 of this comprehensive summary presented an overview of the various housing contexts of the studied groups, but with a clear focus on the Romanian group, as most fieldwork was carried out in their territories. Chapter 2 offers a short historical overview of Roma persecution in Romania. Familiarity with this history is vital in order to understand the ongoing racialisation practices used to rationalise racist discourses and demeaning political actions. This provides the interesting paradox of a nation (the Roma) that continues to be blamed for idleness, deceitfulness, and auto-segregation while stigmatisation, exclusion, and persecution characterise most of their history in Romania. Chapter 3 explores the theoretical points of departure of this research, clarifying how I theorised about the thwarted right to inhabit. First, the chapter offers general insights into unequal productions of space. Second, it presents a theoretical discussion of how local forms of resistance are understood and, third, it discusses works on local governance and decentralisation. Lastly, it ponders the current racialisation of Roma in public discourse and how reproducing racialised narratives affects politics. Chapter 4 describes the methodological considerations and methods of the research. Finally, chapter 5 offers summaries of all four papers and outlines the main contributions of the thesis. With the theoretical points of departure and main findings
presented, I return to the three broader research questions that guided the four articles.

First, by studying Bucharest’s most notorious neighbourhood, I have provided a deeper understanding of how a postsocialist marginal and impoverished neighbourhood materialised. I did this by analysing the housing careers of a varied group of inhabitants. Certainly, Ferentari is not only home to poor Roma, but given their local overrepresentation, this context proves a fitting one in which to address the research question. By explaining how the varied – and even eclectic – mixture of homeownership, illegal rentals, and slums came about in the built-up environment of Ferentari’s southern districts, Paper I furthers our understanding of substandard housing production in postsocialist Romania.

Second, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how poor and ethnically segregated municipalities are governed in an era of decentralisation. It is suggested that decentralisation is one of the root causes of uneven development in Romanian cities, and I connect this problematic outcome to Purcell’s local trap theory. The reason for doing so lies primarily in the fact that decentralisation was enforced by the EU as a means to increase local (supposedly democratic) control and increase the inclusion of marginal areas. However, the EU overlooked the problematic dynamics of local administrations. Several explanations for the failing local politics in Ferentari were identified, two of which I highlight here. First, the actual policies and recent proposals for an inclusive future are insufficient, unrealistic, and not informed or shaped by local demands. Second, I argue that the racialisation of the poor residents of Ferentari prevents the local officials from involving themselves in addressing segregation and housing poverty.

Third, the thesis studies local housing and home-making strategies used to overcome housing exclusion. It examines in depth the cases of urban dwellers in Bucharest, begging “EU migrants” who have arrived in Uppsala in recent years, and the inventive and persistent earning strategies of Romanian-speaking Roma in Argentina. In the case of Ferentari, I describe how impoverished Bucharesters continue struggling for a place in the city to access its proliferating labour market, even if this entails constant relocations, dire living conditions, overcrowding, and the acceptance of unfavourable rental terms from slumlords. In the Uppsala and Argentinian cases, I study the highly mobile earning strategies of two different groups. In Uppsala, the living conditions of recently arrived Romanian Roma are harsh, degrading, and even life threatening. Nonetheless, the money earned is seen by them
as offering a new way out of poverty in their home contexts. The Argentinean case instead illustrates how decades-old mobile street vending strategies have allowed the group to attain middle-class housing conditions. This presentation of these earning strategies and subsequent housing improvements does not call for wider implementation of street vending or begging networks, but rather for increased theoretical and political scrutiny of the radical actions already carried out by Roma themselves.

In this comprehensive summary, I further expanded on the theoretical foundations of the articles. I presented in more detail Lefebvre’s views of spatial production and politics, and how these shaped many of my interpretations in relation to segregation and marginal housing production. For example, in Paper I, the strategy of diversion is explicitly embedded as a spatial concept linked to local practices such as slum and speculative housing construction and illegal rentals. The concept relates, however, to many more of the spatial actions undertaken by the studied groups. Good examples in this case are the migratory practices of the Romanian Roma and Argentine Ludar, which have resulted in various contestations of the dominant use of space. The “EU beggars” in Uppsala reiterated the uses of Sweden’s public space. These actions, however provocative for political actors, have deconstructed and reconstructed public space for a certain period in a way enabling the Roma to earn money and create shelters. Meanwhile, some of their shelters have already been demolished, and it seems only a matter of time before their “active begging” will be banned. In fact, as of July 2019, various Swedish municipalities had implemented provisional laws banning “certain types” of “active begging” in “specific areas” – the so-called “Vellinge Model”. The case of the Ludar instead illustrates how past experiences have made this group constantly search for spaces in Argentina where they are not policed. At a certain time, tent camps were forbidden, ponies and fortune-telling were no longer tolerated in the streets of Buenos Aires, and older Ludar were informed that they were no longer allowed to take and develop tourist photos on Argentina’s most visited beaches at Mar del Plata. The fact that these initial diversions were not accepted and were subsequently opposed or even crushed emphasises the applicability of the Lefebvrian concept. It captures the radical initial activity without losing sight of its potential undoing. However, what makes the situa-

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27 Vellinge is a municipality in Sweden that “succeeded” in getting around the law that permits begging. By specifying the places where begging is forbidden, the Vellinge Model does not counter the law, the Swedish Supreme Court argued in December 2018. As a result, at least six other municipalities followed suit in the first six months of 2019.
tion even more interesting – and hopeful – is that the studied groups are aware of the imminent threats, as apparent in their impressive adaptive capacities.

Additionally, this thesis presented detailed accounts of methodological considerations that could inform ethnographic and qualitative approaches in future Roma-oriented research into marginality and precarity. In the methodology chapter, I focused particularly on the importance of engaging with gatekeepers to establish access to marginalised communities. This is a vital matter for a non-Roma researcher undertaking research on the Roma. I noticed that special attention is required to keep track of the decisions made by the gatekeepers themselves, decisions that could demarcate fieldwork and exclude certain groups. I further highlighted the improbability of maintaining a strict “researcher role” in the field and the difficulties experienced when organising focus groups and gaining access to Romanian authorities. Lastly, it must be said that it is a challenge to engage with impoverished Roma groups in terms of both access and the emotional impact on the researcher. Ongoing methodological debates are therefore required to refine the considerations that impinge on conducting such sensitive fieldwork.

To conclude, the research carried out for this thesis contributes to foundational understandings of ongoing housing segregation, failing policies, and Roma-led forms of resistance. Nonetheless, certain aspects remain unexamined, some of which could have been touched on in this thesis, such as the role of gender and deeper cultural understandings. I find it particularly important to stress that ongoing research is needed (1) to monitor and theorise Romania’s postsocialist urban fragmentation, (2) to keep scrutinising local political unwillingness to advance Roma inclusion, and (3) to redefine how Roma continue challenging their precarity by pushing the boundaries of the margins to which they have been consigned for far too long.
Dutch summary

Dit proefschrift verkent de postsocialistische woonomstandigheden van Roemeense Roma in vier deelstudies. In de jaren na de val van de Berlijnse Muur in 1989 herstructureerde Roemenië in rap tempo de centraal-geleide planeconomie. Een van de ingrijpende veranderingen in deze jaren was de privatisering van nagenoeg de hele publieke woningvoorraad. Deze dramatische transitie trof een groot deel van de Roemenen, maar vooral de al achtergestelde Roma bleken gaandeweg de jaren '90 in een neerwaartse spiraal van structurele armoede te belanden. Nog altijd woont een buitenproportioneel deel van hen in erbarmelijke omstandigheden en kampt het merendeel tevens met discriminatie op de arbeidsmarkt, een slechte gezondheid en grote achterstanden in opleidingsniveau.


Door de kwantificering van vooruitgang is er niet altijd genoeg aandacht voor grondig kwalitatief onderzoek, dat oog heeft voor de lokale context. Zo’n onderzoek is exact hetgeen dat ik eind 2013 voor ogen had en met deze dissertatie uiteindelijk (grotendeels) heb bewerkstelligd. De lokale gevalsstudies die ik heb uitgekozen beschouwen de achtergestelde situatie van de Roma vanuit meerdere perspectieven. Ten eerste heb ik tien maanden veldwerk gedaan in Ferentari om de stedelijke leefomstandigheden beter in kaart te brengen. Feren-
tari is een beruchte buurt in Boekarest waar een groot aantal Roma in armoede leeft. De tweede gevalsstudie richtte zich op de lokale politiek in deelgemeente Sector 5 waarbinnen Ferentari valt. Ten derde heb ik onderzoek gedaan naar de woonomstandigheden van Roemeense Roma die in de afgelopen tien jaar naar Zweden zijn getrokken om geld te verdienen met verscheidene informele (maar geen criminele!) activiteiten. In de vierde studie beschouw ik inventieve en zeer mobiele verdienmodellen van twee Romagroepen: de Roemeense Rudari en de Roemeenssprekende Ludar, die verwant zijn aan de Rudari maar sinds het einde van de negentiende eeuw in Argentinië wonen.

Het proefschrift bestaat dus uit vier kwalitatieve deelstudies die de lokale woonomstandigheden vanuit verschillende oogpunten belichten, maar begint met een inleidend essay. In deze inleiding introduceer ik de woningmarkten van Roemenië, Zweden en Argentinië en ga ik in op de geschiedenis van de Roma in Roemenië. Al meer dan zes eeuwen wordt deze geschiedenis gekenmerkt door discriminatie, verbanningen en vervolgingen. Ook wordt de methodologie geïntroduceerd. De bevindingen zijn gebaseerd op 93 semigestructureerde interviews, 187 enquêtes, 3 focusgroepen en participerende observatie. Ten slotte worden mijn theoretische uitgangspunten geïntroduceerd. Daarin is vooral het werk van de Franse neomarxistische socioloog Henri Lefebvre leidend.

De vier deelstudies

Het eerste artikel gaat vervolgens in op de snelle postsocialistische verarming van Ferentari. De woonomstandigheden variëren van slecht tot mensonterend. Desalniettemin blijft de wijk mensen aantrekken die werk zoeken in Boekarest en elders in de stad geen woonruimte kunnen vinden. Ik noem deze nieuwe ruimtelijke constellatie de ‘modene mahala’. In de vooroorlogse periode werden achterstandsbuurten in Roemenië mahalas genoemd, een woord dat haar oorsprong in het Osmaans vindt. Na de oorlog hebben socialistische planologen geprobeerd om alle Roemeense steden ‘mahala-vrij’ te maken en ze zijn daar ook goeddeels in geslaagd. In Boekarest bijvoorbeeld, zijn alle oude mahalas vervangen door dichtbevolkte woonblokken. Wat Ferentari al vanaf de socialistische periode uniek maakte, was de sterke concentratie aan kleine een- en twee- kamersappartementen van inferieurere kwaliteit. Deze waren voornamelijk gebouwd voor alleenstaande arbeiders, dienstplichtigen en kinderloze gezinnen.

De situatie verslechterde snel na 1989, wat in deze deelstudie wordt aangetoond door de wooncarrières van verarmde Boekaresters uit te
lichten. Daarmee worden de extremen van woningbezit in Roemenië uiteengezet. Daarnaast gaat het artikel in op de snelle toename van het aantal illegale constructies. In openbare ruimtes, die voorheen dienden als plantsoenen of parkjes, zijn krotten en uitbouw verschenen. Tot slot identificeert dit artikel een sterke opkomst van illegale verhuurpraktijken. Zo zijn er in de afgelopen tien jaar veel nieuwe huizen en flatjes gebouwd die zonder vergunning zijn opgedeeld in kleinere appartementen voor verhuur. Deze woningen zijn vooral in trek bij Boekaresters die een inkomen rond het laag inkomen verdienen en daarom de precaire huurvoorwaarden in Ferentari accepteren.

Het tweede artikel belicht Ferentari vanuit een institutioneel oogpunt. Hierin onderzoek ik hoe beleidsmakers en recente beleidstukken de hierboven gepresenteerde woningproblematiek reconstrueren en proberen aan te pakken. Ik plaats deze empirische bijdrage in een bredere academisch debat over decentralisatie van overheidstaken. Sinds de jaren negentig is Roemenië door de Europese Unie in toenemende mate aangespoord om diverse overheidstaken over te hevelen naar provinciale en gemeentelijke besturen. De ideologische beweging hierachter was dat de politiek zodoende ‘dichter bij de burgers’ zou komen te staan en daarmee haar taken beter kon uitvoeren. Hoewel ik niet zozeer sceptisch ben over de lokale bestuurslaag als een geschikt politiek podium voor meer burgerparticipatie, ben ik dat wel over de neiging om decentralisatie als een politiek einddoel te beschouwen in plaats van een mechanisme tot een einddoel (lokale democratie bijv.). Dit laatste wordt door Mark Purcell de lokale valkuil of local trap genoemd. De lokale valkuil kan ertoe leiden dat lokaal en ondergefinancierd bestuur makkelijker ‘gestroomlijnd’ wordt met private belangen. Daarnaast gaat dit artikel ook in op de gevaren van racisme rondom decentralisatie. Daarbij wordt gesteld dat openlijke racisme en afgunst richting lokale Roma de lokale valkuil alleen maar verdiepen.

In deze studie komt duidelijk naar voren dat, hoewel in het eerste artikel duidelijk wordt dat veel verarmde Boekaresters simpelweg geen andere woning kunnen bekostigen, lokale bestuurders hen regelmatig verwijten dat ze te veel verwachten van de staat. Deze redenering wordt helemaal krom wanneer men in ogenschouw neemt dat Europese steunfondsen voornamelijk gebruikt worden om infrastructurale projecten en stedelijk verfraaiing te financieren. Tevens werd pijnlijk duidelijk dat de bestuurders het niet zo hadden op de “zigeuners” van Ferentari. Met “zigeuners” wordt niet zozeer gereferreerd aan Roemeense Roma maar aan de geracialiseerde, verarmde en verachtde Boekarest. Het is daarom niet ondenkbaar dat lokale
besturen grotere overheidsuitgaven simpelweg onttrekken aan deze geminachte bevolkingsgroep.

Het derde artikel bestudeert de woonomstandigheden van vijftien Roemeense Roma. In de afgelopen tien jaar zijn duizenden verarmde Roemeense en Bulgaarse Roma naar Zweden getrokken. Een mogelijke verklaring hiervoor is dat bedelen niet verboden is in Zweden. In het artikel dragen Irene Molina en ik bij aan een kritische interpretatie van de hedendaagse betekenis van eigenwoningbezit. In heel Europa wordt woningbezit in toenemende mate als wenselijk beschouwd en woningaanbod gezien als een aangelegenheid van ‘de markt’. De wrange conclusie die wij in dit artikel trekken is dat de geïnterviewde Roma een daklozenbestaan in Zweden aanvaarden voor een verbeterde positie als woningbezitter in Roemenië. Met andere woorden, de volledige vermarkting van het woningaanbod in hedendaags Europa kan in het meest extreme geval mensen ertoe dwingen mensonterende activiteiten te aanvaarden om van een krot een acceptabele woning te maken.

Het vierde artikel gaat verder in op de thema’s uit het derde artikel en neemt de lokale strategieën van Roma onder de loep, die hen in staat stellen om weerstand te bieden aan institutionele uitsluiting en hen de mogelijkheid geven te ontsnappen aan armoede. Deze uitsluiting wordt op twee manier uiteengezet. Aan de ene kant worden de recente ontwikkelingen op de woningmarkten van Roemenië en Argentinië besproken. Daarbij wordt aangetoond dat de overheidsuitgaven ten behoeve van betaalbare woningbouw in de afgelopen decennia tot een nulpunt zijn gedaald. Daarnaast wordt aangetoond dat represief beleid ten opzichte van ‘onreglementaire’ immigratie en activiteiten in de publieke ruimte in zowel Europa als Argentinië aan een opmars bezig is.. De legitimatie hiervan vloeit voort uit populistische en geracialiseerde vertogen van politici. De twee bestudeerde groepen, de Rudari en de Ludar, tonen aan hoe met deze situatie omgegaan kan worden. Hun onverzettelijkheid leidde tot twee verschillende inkomstenstrategieën. In het geval van de Rudari blijken informele activiteiten in Zweden (zoals bedelen en het verzamelen van statiegeldflessen) meer inkomsten te genereren dan werk als dagloner in Roemenië. Daardoor hebben de meeste Rudari in de afgelopen tien jaar hun situatie weten te verbeteren. Krotten in Roemenië zijn in een aanzienlijk aantal gevallen vervangen door huizen of gemoderniseerd en uitgebreid. De Argentijnse gevalsstudie toont aan hoe de Ludar door middel van een inventief verkoopnetwerk tot de Argentijnse middenklasse wisten op te klimmen.
De belangrijkste inzichten over de uitsluiting van Roma van de woningmarkt die voortkomen uit dit proefschrift zijn dus het resultaat van multi-contextuele en kwalitatieve onderzoeken. Daarbij zijn lokale wooncarrières, beleidsvoering en nieuwe *community-led* strategieën getheoretiseerd. Tot slot kan er gesteld worden dat terwijl de huisvestingssituatie in veel gevallen erbarmelijk blijft en dit door lokale beleidsmakers grotendeels wordt genegeerd, Roma er regelmatig toch in slagen om door middel van migratie en informele overlevingsstrategieën hun leefsituatie te verbeteren. Het geracialiseerde en stigmatiserende imago van de ‘werkschuwe’ en ‘initiatiefloze’ Roma raakt dan ook kant noch wal.
Această teză de doctorat abordează, în patru studii distincte, condițiile de locuit ale romilor din România postsocialistă. În perioada de după Revoluția din 1989, România a fost nevoită să restructureze rapid economia sa central planificată. Una dintre schimbările cele mai drastice din acești ani a fost privatizarea, aproape în întregime, a fondului de locuințe publice. Această tranziție dramatică a afectat o mare parte din români, dar mai ales pe romi, care, aflați deja într-o poziție social dezavantajată, se confruntă, din anii ’90 încoace, cu o stare de sărăcie crescândă. Un număr disproportional de mare de romi locuiesc în continuare în condiții mizere și majoritatea se confruntă cu discriminare pe piața muncii, o stare de sănătate degradată și analfabetism.

Odată cu aderarea României la Uniunea Europeană (2007) a crescut și atenția pentru situația defavorizată a romilor. Acest lucru nu a însemnat, însă, și o îmbunătățire a situației. Prin urmare, în ultimii zece ani, Comisia Europeană (CE) a adresat în mod repetat problemele din România. În plus, CE a stabilit cadre politice în care se așteaptă ca țările membre să opereze, precum și obiective cuantificate, care, odată atinse, reprezintă un progres. Concret, România primește un set de sarcini și trebuie să atingă anual o serie de obiective. Dacă aceste obiective sunt realizate, se afirmă că integrarea romilor merge în „direcția cea bună”. În caz contrar, apar niște rapoarte critice și se organizază conferințe noi. Însă, până în acest moment, nimic riguros nu s-a întâmplat ca urmare a nerespectării obiectivelor stabilite – și realitatea este că România are rezultate foarte slabe în privința incluziunii romilor.

Datorită acestei cuantificări a progresului în perioada post-aderare, nu există întotdeauna suficientă atenție pentru cercetarea calitativă, care are în plan contextualizarea locală și detalizată. O astfel de cercetare este exact ceea ce mi-am dorit eu să fac prin această lucrare doctorală și, în mare parte, am reușit. Studiile de caz alese analizează situația dezavantajată a romilor din mai multe perspective. În primul rând, am făcut o cercetare de teren în Ferentari timp de zece luni, pentru a putea descrie condițiile de viață ale romilor de la oraș. Înfămâul cartier bucureștean are un număr mare de romi care trăiesc în sărăcie.
Al doilea studiu de caz s-a concentrat pe politica locală din sectorul 5, care include și cartierul Ferentari. În al treilea rând, am investigat condițiile în care locuiesc romii români care s-au mutat în Suedia în ultimii zece ani pentru a câștiga bani prin diverse activități informale (dar nu criminale!). În cel de-al patrulea studiu analizez strategii inventive și extrem de mobile care au făcut posibil ca două grupuri de romi să-și îmbunătățească locuințele: rudarii din România și ludarii din Argentina. Ludarii sunt înrudiți cu rudarii, vorbesc în continuare limba română, dar locuiesc în Argentina încă de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea.

Lucrarea este alcătuită deci din patru studii, care descriu condițiile locale de viață a romilor din diferite puncte de vedere, dar începe cu un eseu introductiv. În acest eseu, prezint mai întâi piețele de locuințe din România, Suedia și Argentina, și discut istoria romilor din România. De mai bine de șase secole, această istorie se caracterizează prin discriminare, marginalizare și persecuție. Tot aici este descrisă, de asemenea, și metodologia folosită. Rezultatele se bazează pe 93 de interviuri semi-structurate, 187 de anchete, 3 grupuri țintă și observație participativă. În cele din urmă, este prezentată partea teoretică a lucrării, care a fost în special ghidată de teoretizarea spațială a sociologului neo-marxist francez Henri Lefebvre. În concluzie, cele mai importante idei din această teză de doctorat, privind excluderea romilor de pe piața locuințelor, provin din studii multi-contextuale și qualitative. În plus, au fost teoretizate istoriile locale de mod de viață și locuire, implementarea politicilor și noile strategii locale conduse de comunități de romi. După toate acestea, se poate spune că, deși în multe cazuri, situația locativă a romilor rămâne mizeră, iar acest lucru este în mare măsură ignorat de către politica locală, romii reușesc în mod regulat să își îmbunătățească situația de viață prin migrare și o varietate de activități informale. De aceea, prezentă lucrare subliniază că imaginea rasistă și stigmatizantă a romilor drept „leneșii” și „fără inițiativă” este un nonsens total și absolut!
Denna avhandling studerar i fyra artiklar romernas levnadsvillkor i det post-socialistiska Rumänien. Efter revolutionen tvingades Rumänien att omstrukturera sin planeonomi i hög hastighet. En av de mest dramatiska förändringarna var privatiseringen av allmännyttan. Denna övergång lett till utbredd fattigdom bland rumänerna, och romerna, som redan är missgynnade, har sedan 1990-talet drabbats ännu hårdare. Fortfaraende lever ett oproportionerligt stort antal romer i underprivilegerade områden och majoriteten möter diskriminering på arbetsmarknaden, samt lider av försämrad hälsostatus och analfabetism.


Det kvantitativa förhållningssättet till framsteg har medfört en marginalisering av grundlig, kvalitativ forskning av lokala kontexter. En sådan uppgift var exakt det jag hade i åtanke i slutet av 2013 och som jag har åstadkommit genom denna avhandling. Fallstudierna som utgör avhandlingen beaktar romernas missgynnade situation ur flera perspektiv. Den första studien utgjordes av tio månaders forskning om bostadsförhållanden i Ferentari. Detta ökande bostadsområde i Bukarest har ett stort antal romer som lever i fattigdom. Den andra fallstudi en fokuserade på lokal bostadspolitik i sektor 5, som också inkluderar Ferentari. I den tredje studien undersökte jag och professor Irene Molina bostadsförhållanden för rumänska romer som under de senaste tiotallen flyttat till Sverige för att tjäna pengar genom olika infor-


Sammanfattningsvis kommer de viktigaste ideerna i denna avhandling om exkludering av romer från bostadsmarknaden från multikon-textuella och kvalitativa studier. Dessutom teoretiseras lokala bostadskarriärer, policy-implementering och romska lokalsamhällens egna strategier för motverka kontinuerlig marginalisering. Trots allt kan man säga att även om bostadssituationen i många fall förblir kraftigt undermålig och detta till stor del ignoreras av lokalpolitiker, lyckas romerna regelbundet förbättra sin livssituation genom migration och en mängd informella aktiviteter. Därför understryker denna avhandling att den rasifierade och stigmatiserande bilden av ”lata” och ”overksamma” romer är vanföreställning som snarast behöver kullkas-tas.


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Appendix 1: Visual impressions

A visual guide to Ferentari

Figure 1. “Gatekeeper Doru” in front of Bloc 36 (March 2014).
Figure 2. Ferentari in summertime (July 2015).

Figure 3. Selected apartment blocks in Ferentari (2014 and 2015).
Figure 4. Selected housing extensions in Ferentari. In certain cases these extensions can double or even triple the floor space of the small one-room apartments (August 2015).
Figure 5. Selected images of the poorest living conditions in Ferentari. The man in the lower left photo lives under the pipes (March 2014 and September 2015).

Shelter conditions in Uppsala

Figure 6. “Tibi” guiding me through his shelter under a bridge in Uppsala (February 2016).
Figure 7. Tiberius’ bed in February 2016.

Figure 8. A caravan camp on the margins of Uppsala where many respondents resided (February 2016).
A visit to the “EU Beggars” villages in Romania
Figure 11. Selected newly built houses and housing extensions in some of the villages in Vâlcea County (May 2016).

Figure 12. Not everyone has profited from migratory income strategies and remittances. This photo illustrates how virtually everyone used to live until very recently (May 2016).
A tour through Argentina’s *Ludärime*

*Figure 13 and 14.* Old photos of Ludar travelling in the 1970s and 1980s. The first photo shows four Ludar women on Argentina’s busiest beach of Mar del Plata, where they usually earned money by fortune-telling. The second image shows a group of Ludar on tour with a pony and a newly acquired bus. The photos were provided by Baniel.
Figure 15. Ludar houses in La Perla (August 2018).

Figure 16. Merchandise ready to be loaded onto one of the Ludar-owned buses in La Perla (July 2018).
Figure 17. One of the many ponies in La Perla (July 2018).

Figure 18. A Ludar-owned bus. Moreno (July 2018).

Figure 19. A Red “Dacia 1300-looking” Renault 12 in La Perla (July 2018).
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