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“We have nowhere else to go”

A study of urban informality within a Roma settlement in  
Arad, Romania

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# Abstract

The complexities of urban informality are increasingly being examined in nuanced and region specific ways. Within the post-socialist states of Central-Eastern Europe, a growing body of research is interrogating phenomena within urban environments through the lens of transition and the unique historical and social dynamics of the area. In Romania, one such phenomena is the overrepresentation of Roma in informal settlements on the peripheries of urban centres. This thesis engages with this issue through the undertaking of an ethnographic case study of a settlement in the city of Arad. Firstly by establishing the factors that led people to the settlement and then modelling the relational dynamics between settlement, state and NGO through a Bourdieusian theoretical framework. The findings indicate that historical and contemporary processes of exclusion and expulsion work to leave some Roma households with limited options within the city. Solutions which focus on resolving practical “development” issues without engaging with embedded issues of racism stand to reproduce the same issues in a new space. To move away from hidden and explicit segregation and actively work towards desegregation is perhaps the most challenging resolution but has seen success in other places and confronts a multiplicity of entangled issues.

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**Key Words:** Urban Informality; Roma; Power & Resistance; Informal Settlements; Critical and Emancipatory Perspective; Ethnography; Housing; Segregation; Bourdieu

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

EU	European Union
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
GUA	Gypsy Urban Area
MDRAP	Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
URBAN-ICERC	National Institute for Research Development in Construction, Urbanism and Sustainable Development
UN	United Nations

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# 1. Introduction

This paper is the culmination of many years working alongside Roma communities in many different contexts. The research undertaken for the purposes of this thesis explores issues of urban informality and the overrepresentation of Roma in a Romanian context. Urban planning and development in Romania has taken many twists and turns through the rise and fall of communism, post-socialist transition and integration with global neoliberalism. These varied transformations have had profound impacts across Romania's population. They have created a challenging and unique housing situation, with the highest home ownership rate in the European Union<sup>1</sup> (EU) (OECD, 2019) combined with the highest rates for both overcrowding<sup>2</sup> and severe housing deprivation<sup>3</sup> (Eurostat, 2019<sup>4</sup>). This thesis focuses on the widespread movement of Roma households to informal or insecure housing on the urban periphery under post-socialist transition (Toth, Dan & Briciu, 2012), the factors that contributed to this and the dynamic relations between stakeholders in the urban environment. It is positioned amongst the developing debates around urban informality and the challenges faced when confronting development issues layered with historical and contemporary racisms and prejudices (Berescu, 2018).

## 1.1 Research Purpose and Questions

There is a growing body of knowledge and understanding around the issue of informal settlements and the overrepresentation of Roma populations within them in Romania. Combined with the desire of scholars to explore the complexities of informality in Eastern Europe, with greater emphasis on the unique dynamics of the region (Ferenčuhová, 2012), makes this a valuable avenue for research. The purpose of this thesis is to develop an ethnographic case study of an informal Roma settlement (Mărului<sup>5</sup>) in the city of Arad in the west of Romania and to analyse the relationships between different actors using a Bourdieusian field analysis framework. It is my hope that this small-scale

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<sup>1</sup> 95.8%

<sup>2</sup> 46.3% (% of the total population living in an overcrowded household)

<sup>3</sup> 16.1% (% of the total population living in an overcrowded household + at least one other indicator of low housing quality e.g. lack of sanitation, leaking roof, lack of light)

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat source their data from the annual EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) Survey.

<sup>5</sup> Pronounced: "Muh-rul-ooee"



case study can contribute to a larger body of understanding being developed in Romania around issues of informality affecting Roma communities. In order to do so, this paper will address two primary research questions:

- How did people come to live in Mărului and what factors contribute to them remaining?
- How do relations of power and resistance play out between the different actors within the field?

## 1.2 Outline

The thesis begins with a review of literature concerning relevant debates around urban informality; in particular, the tension between critical and emancipatory perspectives. Subsequently, a theoretical framework is developed, rooted in the urban sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and a post-structuralist interpretation of power. This framework provides the basis for the description and analysis of the case study. A background section provides context for the study by overviewing historical and contemporary issues within Romania. The methodology outlines the approach taken in conducting the field work for this thesis before moving into the findings and discussion sections. Finally, conclusions and opportunities for further exploration are suggested.

## 1.2 Terminology

I want to clarify two points regarding terminology. Firstly, the use of three different terms to refer to the same people group - Roma, “Gypsy” and “Țigan”. I use the term Roma, which came into mainstream use in the 1970s after the establishment of the International Romani Union (Bunescu, 2014), in my own reflections and writing. The term “Gypsy”, predominantly used in older literature or as a pejorative term, is used when quoting from sources that use it. Finally, “Țigan” is used if referring to the way a respondent has referred to themselves. or when discussing historical issues.

Secondly, the settlement which constitutes the focus of this thesis will be referred to by the name of the street upon which it sits - ‘Mărului’. There are numerous terms used in everyday language, official documents and academic literature to describe areas of housing deprivation in which the population is or is perceived to be homogeneously Roma (Berescu, 2019). The focus of this thesis primarily uses the term ‘informal settlement’ (Ro: așezare informală) a term that has found increased use in Romanian literature and was adopted into law as recently as 2019.

## 2. Literature Review

Understandings of urban informality are evolving, especially in cities beyond the Western world, to move beyond informality as a sector, setting or outcome (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019). These evolutions can be summarised as a move away from dichotomous formal-informal analysis, towards a conceptualisation of a more cohesive urban space. This is increasing the salience of agency and visibility of informality as a strategy utilised by groups across the social spectrum (ibid.). A more nuanced approach to urban informality also moves us away from designating groups and spaces as marginal and towards recognising historical and contemporary issues that are always at play in creating the urban space, something that is pertinent to the dynamics involved in creating informal spaces in Romania.

### 2.1 Critical and Emancipatory Perspectives

Informal space can be said to constitute a contradictory realm of alienation and liberation (Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom & Schmid, 2008). As such, two polar perspectives emerge within debates around urban informality, critical and emancipatory (Rocco & van Ballegooijen, 2019). Each of these debates is bound to ideas of structure and agency; whether or not informalities are the result of structural issues or acts constituting agency and resistance. Contemporary urbanism and arguably much contemporary debate has often been polarised by these ideas, a diagnosis of sharpened states of inclusion and exclusion within modern cities (AlSayyad & Roy, 2006).

Critical perspectives are more likely to be highly critical of structural actors, leaning towards issues of marginalisation, inequality and poverty. These ‘structuralist’ critiques point to the uneven development of capitalism and the resulting inequities (Pasquetti & Picker, 2017; Lombard & Meth, 2016). Conversely, this critical lens is applied by authorities to frame informal spaces as inferior and undesirable, needing to be purged from the urban landscape (Lombard & Meth, 2016). Scholars frame informality from this perspective as something transitional and with negative impacts on public life (Polese, Kovács & Jancsics, 2018). In this view, informality is the result of structural malfunctions and will necessarily be resolved as a society progresses or once a powerful agent intervenes. These perspectives tend to frame marginalised groups, living in informality, as the ‘passive poor’, “a politically passive group, struggling simply to make ends meet” (Bayat, 2004 pg.

83). Too great a focus through this lens negates actions taken by those choosing to be selectively 'informal' (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019).

In contrast, emancipatory perspectives see agency and autonomy in the development of informal urban spaces; fostering entrepreneurial endeavour and forcing the gears of social mobility, generating a so called 'resistance paradigm' (Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2019; Rocco & van Ballegooijen, 2019; Lombard & Meth, 2016). They too are critical of the uneven development of capitalism, however, view informality under pervasive global neoliberalism as central to "subaltern urbanism" (Roy, 2011). From this perspective 'informality' is framed as "a way of life" for the urban poor, giving expression to situated forms of politics, resistance and transgression against disenfranchisement and marginality (Pasquetti & Picker, 2017 pg.2). Whereas those who favour an emancipatory perspective are likely to take the view that critical perspectives miss signs of agency, critical theorists would argue that an emancipatory perspective risks romanticising informality.

Adopting something of a 'third way', some scholars point to the "social embeddedness" (Polese, Kovács & Jancsics, 2018 pg.207) of informality. Arguing that it is not born of structural issues which people are merely subject to, but is rooted in the social fabric of an urban environment. Those living in informal urban spaces are typically positioned as being marginalised and peripheral. However, Perlman (1975) counters this in his appraisal of the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, arguing that occupants of such spaces are fully integrated into society, however, only to their detriment. To place informal spaces on the margins of society would be to deny the web of historical factors and contemporary power dynamics which are fully integrated aspects of a society. It would also deny the substantial contributions made by people who have little choice but to work in the informal economy or for low wages within the formal, often doing the most stigmatised work (Vincze, 2018).

Across both strands I think it is important to move away from dichotomous normative approaches, which divide the urban into 'normal-formal' and 'deviant-informal' realms (McFarlane & Waibel, 2016). Instead, acknowledging the interconnectedness of the two; how ideas and beliefs within the formal, marginalise and impoverish and how activity within the informal induces change and evolution in the formal. A structure-agency nexus allows for proper analysis of the relationships between formal and informal spaces and the ways in which the two influence one another (Recio, Mateo-Babiano & Roitman, 2017).

## 2.2 Spatial Informality

Informality as a spatial concept is most closely associated with the city, as both the binary of in/formality and the city are human constructs and within the city the power of constructed regulatory frameworks is strong (Lombard & Meth, 2017). This is a process associated with areas becoming racially connoted (Picker, 2017). When these spaces are contrasted with the socioeconomic ‘norm’ they become in-formalised (ibid.) and delineated as, for example, the ‘slum’ or the ‘informal settlement’.

Discussions around spatial informality date back to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. Charles Abram’s (1964) *Man’s Struggle for Shelter in an Urbanizing World* was a seminal work on the issues being raised by rapid urban expansion around the world. As Abrams writes, “Human history has been an endless struggle for control of the Earth’s surface [. . .] squatting is part of a desperate contest for shelter and land” (Abrams, 1964 pg.12). He argued that rule of law and property rights were too firmly rooted in European societies for squatter settlements to really take hold. However, this view is an example of what contemporary scholars see as Western bias in literature concerning urban informality. The turbulence of many post-socialist transition societies, in particular Romania (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999), has meant that for periods of time, there were legislative vacancies and ideological conflicts that contributed to the development of spatial informalities. In parallel with growth in the general use of the term ‘informality’, the number of academic articles published about ‘post-socialist informality’ grew from tens to hundreds between 2000 and 2016 (Polese, Morris & Kovács, 2016). The concept of urban informality is growing in usefulness for social scientists focusing on changes in post-socialist societies (Polese, Morris & Kovács, 2016; Zhang, 2011). It is allowing for critical analysis of the impacts of neoliberal market driven policies on the cities of Eastern Europe. Importantly for this thesis, it is opening up new horizons in engaging with how transition has opened up ethnic tensions and historical marginalisation.

There have been moves away from positioning informal spaces on the margins of urban debate (McFarlane, 2012; Herlle & Fokdal, 2011). A more integrated understanding is crucial in analysing the negotiated power relations between sectors, levels and actors within the urban field (Herlle & Fokdal, 2011). The conceptualisation of social exclusion as a spatial phenomenon has led to efforts to dismantle physical pockets of deprivation in cities, without actually engaging with the causes of deprivation (Madanipour, 1998). It has also led to informal settlements becoming what AlSayyad &

Roy (2006) referred to as “[sites of] fierce competition between different territorialised forms of association and patronage - be they state, religious organisations, NGOs, or international development institutions.” They represent a space in which the struggle between structure and agency plays out.

These spaces play an integral role in re/producing injustices. The emphasis is not on physical space itself, but on processes that produce it and the subsequent implications of produced spaces on the dynamic processes of social, economic and political relations (Dikeç, 2001; Madanipour, 1998). Further to this, Dekeç (2001, pg.1792-93) describes the dialectical relationship between space and injustice in terms of “the spatiality of injustice” and “the injustice of spatiality”. In thinking spatially about issues of justice, we can develop theoretical understandings about informality and improve practical responses (Soja, 2009). Pasquetti & Picker (2017) highlight the developing relationship between informality and confinement by proposing a dual framework for analysing the interplay between the two phenomena. They argue that the two interact relationally in producing “subaltern spaces” within cities; such as, squatter settlements and ghettos (Picker & Pasquetti, 2015). This echoes the way in which Bancroft (2005) describes social interactions within a city as being “built out of the architectural script” (Bancroft, 2005 pg.57). As such, spaces and therefore people are screened off, made invisible and separated from the formal or legitimised urban sphere, in segregated “monotopias” (Pasquetti & Picker, 2017 pg.4; Bancroft, 2005 pg.57).

# 3. Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical framework concludes with a theoretical model that will be applied to the findings of this research. It is based on an anti-dualistic Bourdieusian approach to urban theory, embracing both symbolic and material modes of theory building, thereby not dismissing historical structures and peculiarities within a social domain (Shin, 2012 pg.269-70). While embracing a post-structuralist conception of power through the work of Foucault, it also acknowledges and emphasises the presence and capacity of social structures to distort power relations in the urban space (Shatkin, 2011). A post-structuralist approach is important in this thesis because it allows for the study of both spaces as objects but also the ideologies and beliefs that produce them (Raulet, 1983).

## 3.1 The Field

A critical spatial perspective is concerned with how the urban environment and society interact with and influence one another (Soja, 2009). It adopts the ontological stance that people are spatial beings, as well as social and temporal (ibid.) and that social space is both produced by and produces changes in the urban environment (Gottdiener & Hutchinson, 2011; Soja, 2009). Agents are constituted in social space by being situated in a site that is defined by their position, relative to the position of other agents (Harding & Blokland, 2014). According to Bourdieu, we need to interrogate the relations between structures of social and physical space (Bourdieu, 1999). This perspective, at least partially, echoes the socio-spatial dialectic of ideologically driven urban planners under communism, who understood the capacity of the city to implement social changes (Diener & Hagen, 2013; Salier-Fliege, 1998).

The spatiality of social exclusion is constructed through the physical organisation of space and through relational exchanges - the spatiality of injustice - and through the social control of space ensured by formal and informal codes, rules and regulations - the injustice of spatiality (Dekeç, 2001). Within the field network these relations dictate the distribution of and access to power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Which, in turn, effect the ways in which actors can profit, or incur losses, for their position within the field. This Bourdieu (1991) refers to as the concept of spatial profits. These are manifest through the distribution of goods, services and infrastructure, which corresponds with the ascribed status of a space. Social relations become inscribed in the physical

space of the city in such a way that their manifestations are taken as given. We become so accustomed to modes of interaction that we no longer look beyond them. Within the city, there is no space that does not express social hierarchies, acting as living metaphors for social order (Bourdieu, 1991). In thinking spatially about issues of justice, we can develop theoretical understandings about informality and improve practical responses (Soja, 2009)

Within the larger urban field exist smaller constituent subfields. A subfield is defined not necessarily by space but shared practices (*habitus*) and interests (*capital*) (Shin, 2012). A contributing factor to the stigmatisation and racialisation of space is when practices and interests ascribed on the basis of ethnicity are associated with people living in a certain area. To some extent actors within subfields share practices and interests because they are all engaged in the larger dynamics of the broader field. Subfields within this model allow for the modelling of internal power dynamics.

## 3.2 Power and Resistance

Foucault also provides a useful lens through which to view power and political agency expressed within urban environments. It is a “mode of relationship”, an exchange network between different parts of a society, something akin to a nervous system (Moghadam & Rafieian, 2019 pg. 8). He traces the evolution of cities through modernity, to the point they become, “the models for the governmental rationality” (Foucault, n.d In: Rainbow, 1984 p.241). He adds layers to the spatial conception of the urban space; firstly, identifying issues inherent to urban life such as the fast spreading of epidemics and increased potential for revolutionary sentiment. Then recognising that the interconnectedness offered by a city, by means of infrastructure such as transport, electricity and water, denotes power and legitimacy. If an area is not well integrated or is cut off in some way, it is delegitimised.

I adopt a post-structuralist conception of power based on the Foucauldian notion that power is something diffuse, which permeates society and social interactions. It is uncodified, inexplicit and largely unconscious (Searle, 2010 pg. 154). This idea of power integrates informal spaces into the social fabric because it sees power as a juxtaposition, liaison and a hierarchy of different powers, each with their own specificity and interacting with one another (Foucault, 1976 In: Crampton & Elden, 2007 p.156). An important consideration when discussing power as diffuse is that of the

deemphasis of state power (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019; Bayat, 2000). Arguably not only the state but other actors as well. As such, within this framework, though there are not any social structures to which power is inherent, there are structures and ideas that have greater ‘mass’ and therefore have greater capacity to draw upon and utilise power. Bourdieu would describe this mass as accumulated forms of capital. Therefore, in some places, power is “weightier, more concentrated, and ‘thicker’” (Bayat, 2004 pg.89).

Knowledge, who has it and who creates it, is an important aspect in explaining power dynamics within the field. Foucault talks about the complete knowledge of an empowered observer granting them complete power over the observed. Although not a panopticon, informal and stigmatised areas can work to confine people, as proposed by Picker & Pasquetti (2015) and this can be reinforced either explicitly by, for example, building a wall. Or, implicitly, by limiting access to infrastructure. Power is implied through both these processes and is held by those brokers who take decisions to confine or limit access. This is when the panoptic effect works because there is power within both the physical marginalisation of a space and the decision making actors. This dynamic highlights two constraints, proposed by Searle (2010), which can be used to critically engage with diffuse power - exactness and intentionality. The exactness constraint says that it must be understood who has power over whom, or between which parties there are power relations. The intentionality constraint says that the attribution of intent behind the exercise of power, must specify the intentional content (ibid. pg.154). That is to say the beliefs, attitudes and desires that enable intentional exchanges, involving both deliberate action and inaction.

A de-centred Foucauldian notion of power provides a key theoretical grounding for resistance and micro-politics within urban environments. Foucault himself discussed the idea of “counter-conduct”, as a useful concept for analysing potentially more subtle, complex and ambivalent forms of resistance (Odysseos, Death & Malmvig, 2016). In this sense ‘power’ and ‘counter-power’ are not in binary opposition to one another, rather they are in a perpetual “dance of control” (Bayat, 2004 pg.86). In *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985), a seminal work on resistance paradigms, Scott offers this definition of resistance:

“[ . . . ] resistance includes any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by



superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-a-vis those superordinate classes”

(Scott, 1985 pg.290)

Asef Bayat (1997) specifically addresses how resistance is manifested in the activities of the urban informal poor when he writes of the “silent, protracted but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive and improve their lives” (Bayat, 1997 pg.57). Wherever there is power being presently exerted over another, there is resistance, even if that resistance only constitutes small scale everyday activities. These activities often stop short of outright defiance, engaging the “weapons” of relatively disempowered groups; foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance and sabotage (Scott, 1985 pg.29). The everyday creative appropriation and use of resources and time by the disempowered, constitute a reclaiming of ground from hegemonic power brokers (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019 pg.50). Often, precarious subfields cannot confront power directly but engage in this process of re-appropriation of resources and “residual space” (Bancroft, 2005 pg.75) in order to suit their own interests (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). It has been noted that theories of everyday resistance have not always accounted for more powerful entities coopting ideas, sentiments or plights of marginalised communities for their own use (ibid.). In response, this framework emphasises the structural and institutional capacity certain entities possess, enabling them to increase their mass, as discussed above.

Bourdieu has dismissed so-called everyday resistance as ineffective and ultimately self-defeating. He argues that such everyday resistances only compound marginalisation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The “resistance paradigm” is at risk of romanticising everyday actions taken by lack of a viable alternative and positioning them as conscious efforts to disrupt the normative functioning of power (Bayat, 2004). There is a difference between organised resistance and acts that are contrary to the dominant paradigm, such as rent evasion, tapping amenity supplies or working on the black market. The idea of ‘real resistance’ is that it is organised, principled, selfless and has revolutionary consequences. By contrast, ‘token resistance’ is unorganised, opportunistic, self-indulgent and without revolutionary consequences (Scott, 1985 pg. 292). This view is that so-called tokens are tacitly in agreement with domination, however, this belies the degree to which a group must already be empowered and enfranchised in order to leverage ‘real resistance’ (ibid.). What the resistance

paradigm does establish is the potential of informality to act as a gateway towards politics and the formulation of legitimate demands (Rocco & van Ballegooijen, 2019).

### 3.3 Theoretical Model

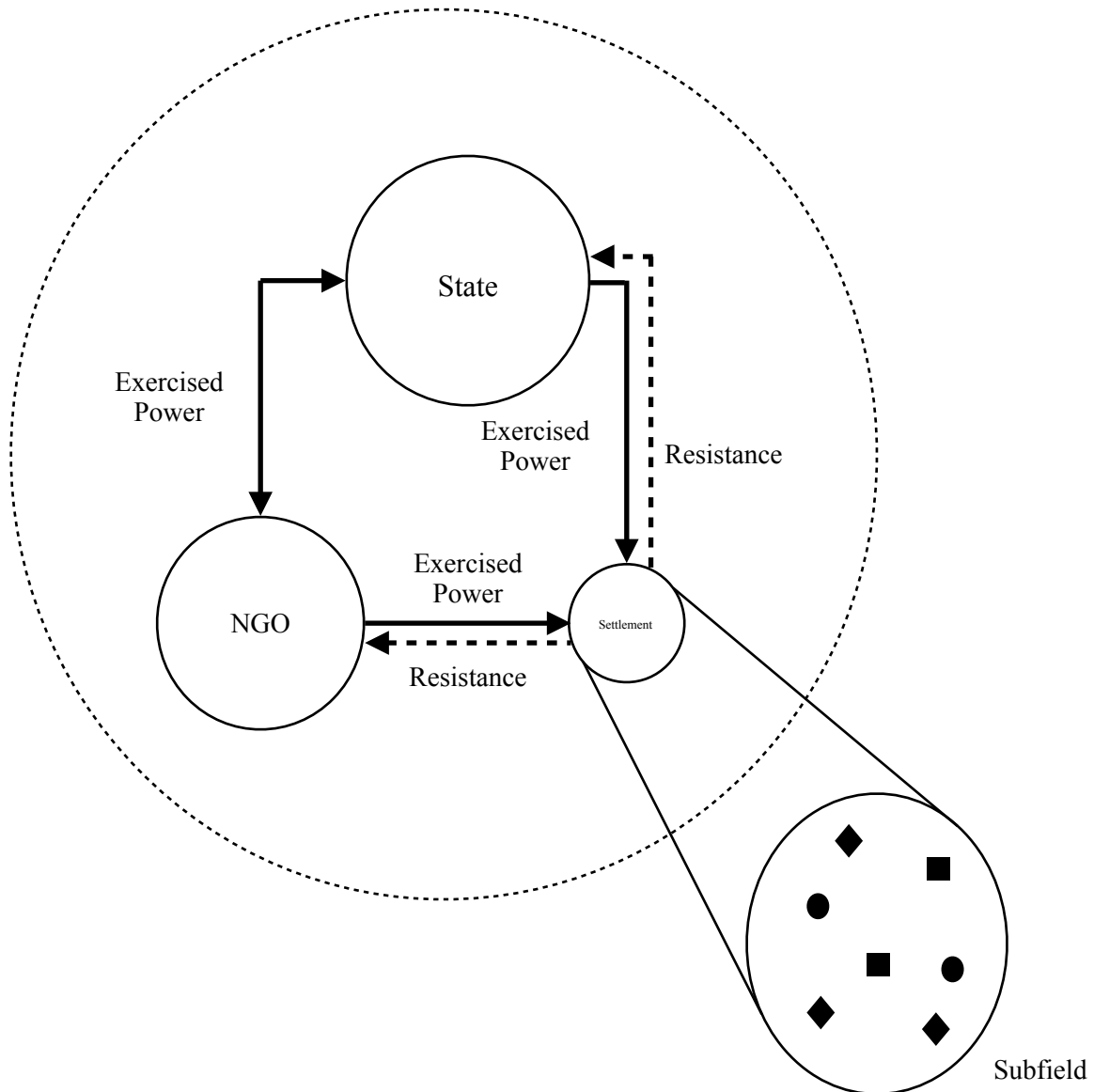


Fig. 1 'Theoretical model'

Adapted from "If Foucault were an urban planner: An epistemology of power in planning theories" by Moghadam, S.N.M. & Rafeian, M. (2019) *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pg.3.

The theoretical concepts discussed above are modelled above (Fig. 1). It was utilised in the research design where it informs both data collection and provides a structure for analysis. The model visualises the relations between different actors within the urban field. The two research questions

relate to the model by firstly seeking descriptive information to give life to the diagram and specifically Mărului as a subfield . This is something which Bourdieu prioritised in his research and writing in “The Weight of the World” (1999) (Savage, 2012 pg.516.) and is fitting in a study using an ethnographic methodology. Secondly, it provides a format for interpreting the power and resistance dynamics at play between different actors. In this thesis, I am primarily analysis the relations between other actors and Mărului. This analysis will allow for a subsequent discussion of development implications.

The representative size of each entity within the model reflects Bayat’s statement that “[. . .] although power circulates, it does so unevenly” (Bayat, 2000 pg.544). It also reflects their capacity to profit and accrue capital based on their locality, position and occupation, thereby modelling their ‘power mass’.

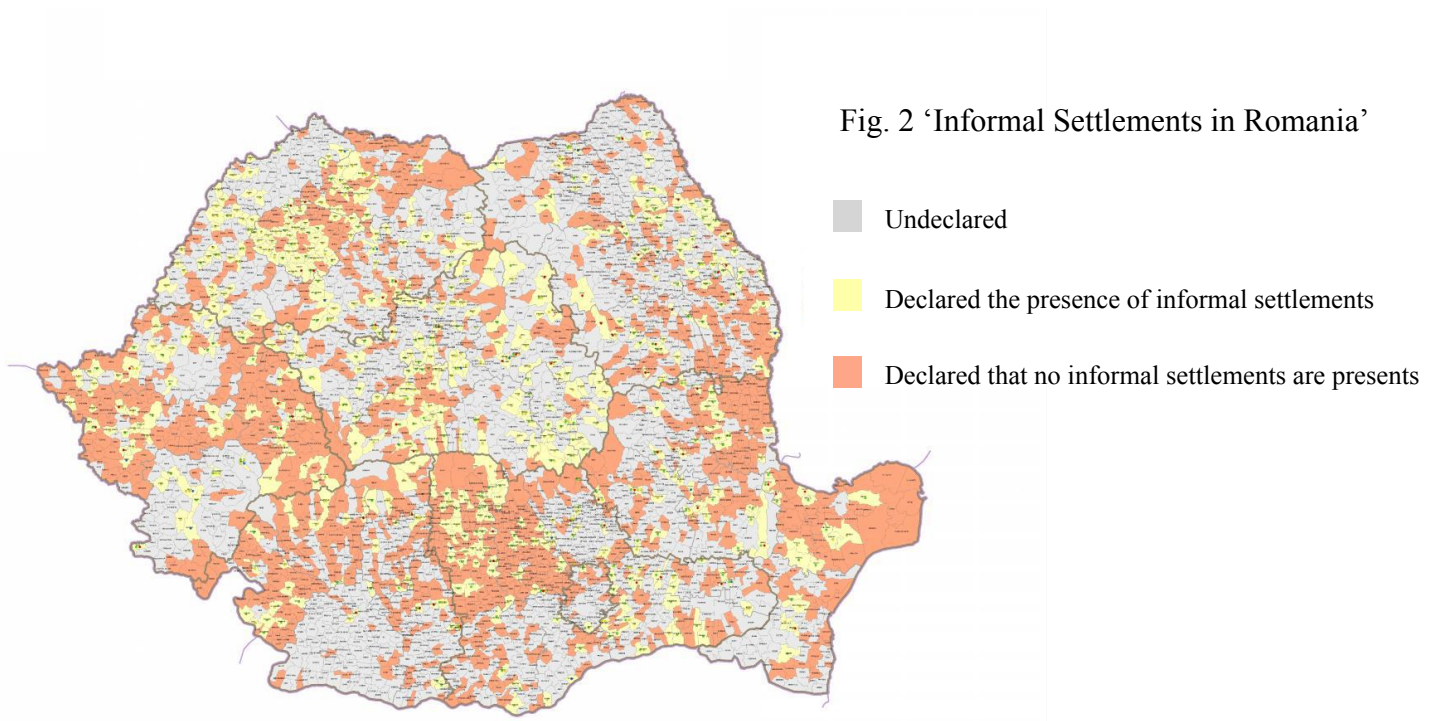
## 4. Background

This section provides contextual information pertaining to informal settlements within a Romanian context and historical and contemporary factors which contribute to the overrepresentation of Roma within them. This information will be important for contextualising the case study.

### 4.1 Informal Settlements

Romania experienced particularly harsh ideological transitions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999) and this contributed to many urban infrastructure challenges in the 2000s. In 2003 UN-Habitat reported that 18.8% of Romania’s urban population was living in “slum conditions”, lacking access to basic services and subject to severe overcrowding. These are issues that linger today as indicated by Romania having the highest rates of overcrowding and housing deprivation in the EU. Key factors in the widespread nature of informal settlements are fragmented urban planning, redundant and complex legislation, poor housing policy and inefficient public administration (Tsenkova, 2010). The Ministry for Regional Development, Public Administration

and European Funds<sup>6,7</sup> (MDRAP) acknowledged that in twenty years of urban planning, no effective long-term solutions were proposed or implemented for informal settlements, leaving them outside of the urban planning framework and in effect excluded from the city (MDRAP, 2017). MDRAP also acknowledges the overrepresentation of Roma within informal settlements, something which is prevalent across the wider Balkan region (Pojani, 2019). Research carried out by URBAN-INCERC<sup>8</sup> found that of the known informal settlements in Romania, 51.3% have been constructed since 1990 (Fundația PACT, 2018). The following figure (Fig. 2), produced by the same research, shows the extent of declared settlements across Romania and the extent of municipalities unwilling to disclose information about informal settlements:



Source: Fundația PACT (2018) Informal Housing in Romania - Research Report. Published online: March 2018.

(I.N.C.D. URBAN-INCERC (2013) Analiză privind așezările informale din România – Evaluare situației curente în vederea formulării unor reglementări și instrumente de intervenție)

<sup>6</sup> Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale, Administrației Publice și Fondurilor Europene

<sup>7</sup> MDRAP was reorganised into ‘Ministerul Lucrărilor Publice, Dezvoltării și Administrației’ (MLPDA) on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019. However, the ‘National Housing Strategy’ referred to in this thesis was produced by MDRAP and therefore MDRAP is used throughout.

<sup>8</sup> Institutul Național de Cercetare-Dezvoltare în Construcții, Urbanism și Dezvoltare Teritorială Durabilă (The National Institute for Research Development in Construction, Urbanism and Sustainable Development)

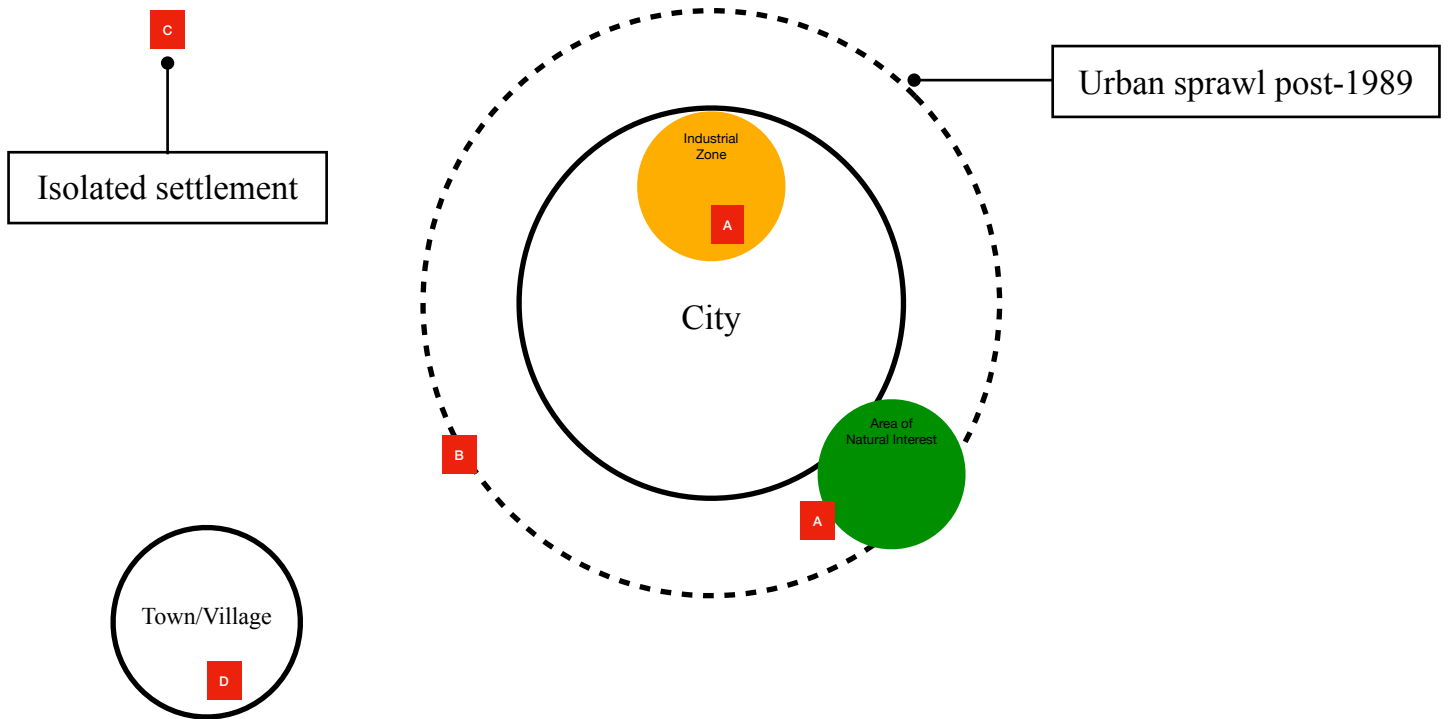
A specific definition of informal settlements, in a Romanian context, is provided by Suditu & Vâlceanu (2013) and can be summarised as clusters of insecure housing, on the outskirts of a larger population centre, where households do not own the rights to their property. In general, construction is unauthorised or only partially respects regulations. Due to their tenuous legal status abodes often lack basic infrastructure, institutions, quasi-social structures and the majority of residents are placed at greater risk of poverty (Bancroft, 2005). In Romania, being at risk of poverty is defined as an income equal to or less than 60% of the median income (Institutul Național de Statistică<sup>9</sup>, 2018) and 25% of the population are believed to be living below this line (Stănescu & Dumitru, 2017). The position of a household within such a settlement can be considered a reflection of their overall wellbeing and level of integration within Romanian society (Stănculescu & Berevoescu, 2004). In 2019, the Romanian government adopted a legal definition of informal settlements, amongst other relevant amendments, within Law no. 350/2001 “On Spatial and Urban Planning<sup>10</sup>” (see Annex No.5), which focused on the associated exclusion, segregation and marginalisation driven by socio-demographic factors and location. The amendments primarily serve to enhance the state’s capacity to formally document informal settlements (see Annex No.4 for Art. 19<sup>1</sup> (1) ), increase pressure on authorities to resolve the issues of informality and obligate the state to engage in a consultation process with residents (see Annex No.4 for Art. 19<sup>1</sup>. - (2) ). Blocul Pentru Locuire, a housing pressure group, has questioned if this amounts to substantive or beneficial change (BPL, 2019a). The amendments lean towards preventing the further expansion of informal settlements without necessarily considering the fundamental issues that drive people into informality. There is therefore a risk of criminalising those who resort to or are stuck in informality because they do not have the means to pursue any alternative.

The existing research into informal settlements in Romania has led to the identification of four broad typologies. The following model (Fig. 3) visually locates these typologies:

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<sup>9</sup> The National Institute for Statistics

<sup>10</sup> Legea nr. 350/2001 privind amenajarea teritoriului și urbanismul



- Type A:** Settled in the 1980s and expanded rapidly in the 1990s. They consist primarily of improvised buildings, adjacent to a source of economic activity. A living is made from nearby natural resources, such as woodland, or by recycling waste material (Iacoboaia, 2009).
- Type B:** Built on the outskirts of cities and have subsequently been absorbed. They tend to be built to a higher standard and have been incorporated into the urban plan.
- Type C:** Often a legacy of a feudal slave owning system and have been left behind in isolated rural areas as demographics changed.
- Type D:** Typically less organised or consolidated and where people have built wherever and however they have desired. A reflection of ineffective planning legislation.

Fig. 3 Four Typologies of Informal Settlement in Romania

Although the circumstances within and between typologies differ, they have in common that their unresolved status contributes to the vulnerability of families living within them, inhibiting the social and economic development of communities and the country as a whole (Grabowska, 2018).

The future of informal settlements in Romania is uncertain and problematic for local authorities. The legalisation of settlements is prohibitively expensive and constitutes a legislative issue. According to the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) cost

of legalisation exceeds the costs of legal construction because the process includes fines for breaching the law which occupants are often unable to pay (Mojovic<sup>11</sup>, 2011). The Association of Communes in Romania estimates that costs of legalisation in cities could exceed new construction by 140% (ibid.). However, from a municipal perspective, to waive fines or implement widespread legalisations could encourage further settlement. The issue is a core concern for MDRAP who give particular attention to regenerating slums and informal settlements by reducing the number of people living in them; promoting participatory approaches, engaging residents and stakeholders; avoiding spatial and socioeconomic segregation and gentrification and avoiding uncontrolled urban expansion (MDRAP, 2017 pg.8).

## 4.2 Overrepresentation of Roma in informality

According to the research report “Informal Housing in Romania” (Fundatia PACT, 2018) more than 60,000 Roma households are living within settlements which meet the above criteria. An exact number is unclear as comprehensive data covering the entire country is unavailable. An analysis of census data from 2001 found that as many as 900,000 people could be living in ghetto or slum-like conditions (Berescu, 2019). Census data from 2011 shows that 621,537 people reported their ethnic identity as Roma, census data is often contested by non-governmental observers because of a perceived unwillingness of people to self-report as Roma as a tactic of state avoidance (Plájás, M’charek & Van Baar, 2019; Bunescu, 2014). Many Roma settlements within Romania are physically and symbolically separated (Berescu, 2019), echoing the interaction of informality and confinement discussed by Pasquetti & Picker (2017). They are fixed in what Wacquant (2008) refers to as ‘advanced marginality’; becoming concentrated, easily identified and isolated areas. In Romania, the Roma and space that they occupy is frequently problematised; spaces are stigmatised as insecure, chaotic, filthy and criminal (van Baar, Ivasiuc & Kreide, 2019).

### 4.2.1 Historical Factors

Although discourses of racism and racialisation take on many different forms in societies and cultures around the world, Powell & van Baar (2019) argue that anti-Roma racisms broadly take

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<sup>11</sup> Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe

two forms; exploitation and expulsion<sup>12</sup>. Exploitation takes the form of historical and contemporary enslavement of Roma. Expulsion is seen as forces which work to expel Roma households from where they are living. The operation of these two dynamics towards Roma in Romania constitutes the backdrop for the overrepresentation of Roma in states of informality.

The earliest documented evidence for the presence of Roma in modern day Romania is from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, with evidence of their presence and interaction with other cultures in the area dating to the latter-half of the century (Crowe, 1995). The next five-hundred years of Roma history in the region were endured under slavery. The legal enslavement of Roma persisted until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At the beginning of which the Code of Wallachia<sup>13</sup> decreed that, “Gypsies shall be born only slaves; anyone born of a slave mother, shall also become a slave [ . . . ]” (Petcut, n.d.). The origins and history of Roma slavery in this part of the world are complex; suffice to say that a colloquial name often applied to Roma, “Gypsy” (Ro: Țigăni), became synonymous with ‘slave’ (McGarry, 2011; Achim, 1998; Crowe, 1995). The stigma of slavery has subsequently lingered over the Roma into 20<sup>th</sup> Century and modern Romania.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century was a turbulent time and a newly independent Romania struggled with land distribution and the social upheaval brought about by numerous factors, including the emancipation of the Roma. The turmoil returned some aspects of Romanian society to a quasi-feudal system through uncontrolled landlordism, which led to the exploitation of not just Roma, but members of the peasantry across the country (Seton-Watson, 1934). An emergent ‘Romanian’ identity led to ethnic minorities, even those indigenous for centuries, being regarded as foreigners. The Roma, still finding themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy, for the most part continued to live as they had post-slavery, in parallel to wider society (Achim, 1998). A new sense of self-identity began to emerge amongst the Roma of Romania in the inter-war period. The lack of a territorial or geographical basis for this emergent Roma identity has had implications for the way in which people fit in with the cultural, economic and social context within which they live until today

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<sup>12</sup> These typologies were inspired by Hage (2014) in “Recalling Anti-Racism”. He posited exploitation and extermination two typologies. However, Powell & van Baar (2019) reason that expulsion allows for an analysis of racist expressions across a broader spectrum, at the most extreme end of which lies extermination.

<sup>13</sup> Wallachia was a principality bordered to the south by the Lower-Danube and to the north by the Southern Carpathians, today’s southern Romania.



(Kovats, M., 2013 pg.106). The challenge of cultural diversity, differing social histories, language and customs, without a unifying factor such as a land claim, has made it difficult for Roma to establish a common political position (Berescu, 2019).

The state policies of ‘sedentarization’ and ‘systematization’ under the communist regime were particularly damaging to Roma communities and have had long-term detrimental effects (Bancroft, 2005; Achim, 1998). Both entailed the attempted ‘Romanization’ of Roma peoples and wider efforts towards social “homogenisation” (Grabowska, 2018; Suditu & Vâlceanu, 2013; Achim, 1998), as well as the practice of forced proletarianisation through the confiscation of the base wealth of Roma families and communities (Bancroft, 2005; Mireanu, 2019). The Roma were not included in an official list of ‘co-inhabiting nationalities’ by the Communist regime (Achim, 1998), which enhanced state driven efforts to dissolve their culture. Attempts by the regime to overturn old social hierarchies by simultaneously denying Roma formal recognition and employing Roma within party apparatus and appointing Roma mayors, secured the dual goals of loyalty and cultural cleansing (ibid.).

People of many backgrounds and classes in Romania struggled during the post-socialist era, however, socioeconomic transformations have manifested themselves in some specific ways regarding Roma (Picker, 2017). They have been scapegoated as relics of the Communist era, a direct consequence of the regime’s social manipulation. The processes of socialist industrialisation and slum eradication did lead to the “relatively successful” integration of Roma slums that had developed since their emancipation (Berescu, 2019 pg.192). However, transitional phenomena such as privatisation, retrocessions, forced eviction and administrative abandonment have seen a rapid increase in new informal Roma settlements and inhabitants (ibid.).

#### 4.2.2 Contemporary Situation

In parts of Europe where there are large established Roma populations, certain urban areas have become associated with urban decay, social deviance and “Gypsies” (Picker, 2017 pg.2). These areas exist as entire neighbourhoods, housing blocks, improvised settlements or camps and Picker (2017) refers to them as “Gypsy Urban Areas” (GUAs). The majority of inhabitants in these areas are not necessarily Roma, although are perceived as being so, and from the outset housing might not have differed from the surrounding city (Ruegg, 2013). However, the depreciative connotation due to stigmatisation and racialisation, leads to high rates of unemployment, dilapidated housing, few or

no public services and poor sanitation (ibid; Powell & Van Baar, 2019). In 2014, Roma households were around twice as likely to be in arrears with gas or electricity companies when compared to the general population and five times more so when compared to Romania's Hungarian minority population (Stănescu & Dumitru, 2017). The following data, from the FRA's "Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey" (2017) highlights some of the housing issues faced by Roma households in Romania:

- 68% of Roma households go without access to clean tap water
- 79% lack basic sanitation amenities (sewerage, toilet, shower, bath etc.)
- 26% live in a dwelling with a leaking roof and/or damp and rot issues

The period following the collapse of the communist regime saw the majority of Roma households move from urban to rural areas or into informal settlements on the urban periphery (Toth, Dan & Briciu, 2012). In 2006, the Roma Inclusion Barometer<sup>14</sup> found that 83% of Roma were living on the urban periphery, 77% in 'compact communities<sup>15</sup>' (Bădescu, Grigoraș, Rughiniș, Viocu & Voicu, 2007). MDRAP attributed this, "at least in part, [to] the social and economic marginalisation of the Roma<sup>16</sup>" (MDRAP, 2017 p.69). They also acknowledged that the majority of Roma households still living in urban areas neither living in social housing nor secure private accommodation. Instead they are, "[. . .] usually living in precarious conditions, in some cases without running water or electricity<sup>17</sup>" (MDRAP, 2017 p.69). They noted that in the twenty years following the revolution there was a dramatic decline in the number of Roma households living in planned urban spaces in apartment blocks. In 1992, 32.9% of Roma households lived in apartments, by 1998 this had fallen to 21.3% and in 2006 even further to 8.3% (ibid.). An issue not to be overlooked in this decline is that by 2012 affordable social housing for rent comprised a mere 2.2% of total housing stock (Amann, Bejan & Mundt, 2013). Romania has been referred to as a 'super' homeownership state, with an ownership rate of 96.5% (ibid.). The strength of this 'ownership ideology' has contributed to the lack of state investment in affordable stock. The insecurity of many Roma households, compounded by attempts to assimilate and strip them of their wealth, makes it

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<sup>14</sup> Barometrul Incluziunii Romilor

<sup>15</sup> Compact communities can be understood as Type A informal settlements.

<sup>16</sup> "Această mutare din blocurile de apartamente situate în zonele urbane către casele pentru o singură familie din mediul rural s-ar putea explica, cel puțin parțial, prin marginalizarea socială și economică a romilor."

<sup>17</sup> "aceștia locuiesc de obicei în condiții precare, în unele cazuri fără apă curentă sau electricitate."

difficult for them to engage with the housing market. Therefore, not only has social housing stock been depleted by the privatisation of state owned stock since 1990 (Picker, 2017), but the ‘ownership ideology’ is likely to make rental property in any format less desirable.

## 5. Methodology

As previously stated, this thesis represents a culmination of almost a decade's experience of working alongside Roma communities dealing with issues of marginalisation and informality. As such, I agree with the statement made by Baert (2005 pg.155), that we should, “take self-knowledge seriously as a cognitive interest” when conducting research. The field research was carried out in the form of an ethnographic case study; this type of enquiry is not separable from the self and values personal investment (Richardson, 2000). I adopt a constructivist ontology that posits phenomena, such as informality, are socially constructed and are always in a state of negotiation (Bryman, 2012), fitting with the theoretical framework of negotiated relations.

### 5.1 Ethnographic Case Study

Ethnography, as an epistemology, focuses on the collective experience of a community, it utilises qualitative methods through which a researcher places themselves within the ‘real-life’ environment of the study participants. I adopt a critical ethnographic approach, focusing on systems of power and advocating the position of those with least access to them (Madison, 2005). The aim of the research design was to produce a case study of Mărului, a settlement in Arad which could be described as an informal Roma settlement by the criteria above and therefore an isolated instance of a wider issue (O’Reilly, 2009).

This form of research is typically associated with longer timeframes, something that circumstantial constraints did not allow for. However, when considered in the broader context of my years of experience, observing and engaging in the iterative process of developing an understanding of Romanian Roma communities living and working in both Romania and Sweden, I believe that to undertake a so-called mini-ethnography (Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2017) in this context was viable and appropriate for answering the research questions. The methodological approach taken acknowledges my preunderstandings as a researcher and instead of partitioning them, makes them a

fundamental aspect of the research. The iterative process of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ (Hollis, 1994) describes the recursive process which contributed to the development of the initial research purpose and theoretical framework. This process has deepened understanding and researched knowledge over the course of many years. Although not previously as a researcher, I have spent many years alongside people, implicitly observing their surroundings in order to understand them and my place within them. This is reminiscent of the way in which Hammersly & Atkinson (1983) describe ethnography as sharing people’s daily lives for extended periods, listening to what is said and asking questions (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983 pg.2). This approach combines my previous experience and access to a rich research site, to have substituted it for another approach would have degraded the study (Wolcott, 2008).

Throughout the research, analysis and data collection were seen as parts of an intertwined process, interacting reciprocally. Enhancing my capacity to be agile in the field and promoting development and exploration of theoretical developments (Gobo & Molle, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Therefore a process of inductive reasoning based on both my prior knowledge and experience, as well as early open coding analysis contributed to the development of the theoretical model applied in this thesis.

## 5.2 Research Site

Mărului has the characteristics of a ‘Type A’ settlement as described in Fig. 3; it is on the urban periphery, near to a site of natural interest and built around a construction waste site. The site was selected by a process of discriminate sampling for two reasons; firstly, because of its characteristics and therefore potential for maximising opportunities for verifying “the story line” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Secondly, such sites are difficult to access and operate in as a researcher, both practically and ethically and therefore access was obtained through a known gatekeeper organisation.

Mărului sits on the south-western outskirts of Arad, on the banks of the river Mureş, adjacent to the Mureş Floodplain National Park (*Parcului Natural Lunca Mureşului*). The settlement is built around a triangular intersection of streets including Strada Mărului, Strada Sabinelor and a third unnamed street. Within the triangle there are a series of smaller side-streets and alleyways loosely defined by the contours of the land. The national park was established by the Romanian government in 2005

and, as well as having protected status as a RAMSAR<sup>18</sup> sight with SPA<sup>19</sup> and SAP<sup>20</sup> designations, it is also of interest to the municipality for development as a tourist destination. Arad is located close to the Hungarian border and as such is well situated to benefit from both Romanian and Hungarian tourism.

A local NGO has had a working presence within the community for around ten years. According to them, the settlement is home to approximately 400 people, of whom approximately half are children, based on those registered within their programs. This size of settlement is typical of informal Roma settlements in Romania (Berescu, 2019). The settlement has attracted the interest of numerous international non-governmental actors over a longer period of at least twenty years. The majority of those living in the area are understood to be Roma, or are at least perceived as being so.

### 5.2.1 Access

Access to the research site was gained through a local NGO which has a working presence in Mărului. As a researcher, neither I nor the NGO wanted to tie ourselves to one another's work. In my own interest, research involves research-political decisions, meaning that what is or is not researched denotes an adoption of certain positions and I wanted to remain neutral to the greatest extent possible (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). However, my key informant within the settlement was a representative from the NGO which will have introduced limitations to the research. In terms of reaching people within the settlement, they were the key gatekeeper; allowing me in, clarifying who I was and gaining the confidence of the community (Creswell, 2007). The pay-off of having them as a key informant significantly outweighed any limitation incurred by their being a representative of the NGO.

## 5.3 Research Design

This section describes the methods used for collecting data and the respondent sample.

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<sup>18</sup> Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat

<sup>19</sup> Special Protection Area

<sup>20</sup> Special Area of Conservation

### 5.3.1 Observation

Observation as a method within an ethnographic study involves, most often, extended periods of participant observation (Creswell, 2007). It allows the researcher possibilities along a spectrum from being a complete outsider to a complete insider (Jorgensen, 1989). This was useful in this case as the time spent in the process of being accepted meant that I could observe as an outsider, held at a distance.

When in Mărului any observational notes were taken on my phone as this was more inconspicuous than if I were to have taken out a notebook and pen. The intent was not to deceive anybody, but to not make anybody feel uncomfortable. My intention in being within the settlement was at no point hidden from people and so there was an awareness of my role as a researcher. A field notebook was used to record observations at the soonest available opportunity using an observation protocol that divided notes into 'descriptive' and 'reflective' observations (Creswell, 2007).

The data gathered through observation was used, together with my and my key informant's prior knowledge, in developing the interview guide (see Annex. No.2). The combined internal and external knowledges of myself and my key informant often served to provide context and recognition of useful information which allowed us to identify potential interview respondents and progress the fieldwork more generally (Wolcott, 2008).

### 5.3.2 Purposive Sampling

An open purposive sampling method was used to identify interview respondents. Purposive sampling is used by researchers to select sites and participants that are most appropriate for answering the research questions (Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). All respondents self-identified as Roma, this was not a prerequisite in the sampling process but was a reflection of the purposive sampling of the research site, chosen because it was representative of an informal settlement with a predominantly Roma population.

The combined experience of myself and my key informant was crucial in applying this sampling method because of the patience and delicacy required (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 pg.182). They were also invaluable in allowing for the 'rapid appraisal' of preliminary conversations and interactions within Mărului, as this is not something that can be done effectively by an individual (Beebe, 1995).

My informant and I worked together to identify what would constitute a representative sample of experiences from within Mărului. In doing so we took care to prioritise a range of generational experiences and a gender balance. An element of convenience sampling was also used because it was not possible to predict who would be available each day. The unpredictable nature of people's lives made it challenging to arrange interviews in advance. The weather was a significant factor in the sampling process as well, if the weather was fine people were less likely to be home during the day. However, if it was inclement then everyone was likely indoors, which made respondents more accessible but would potentially influence the responses we received that day.

There was not a predetermined ideal number of respondents, instead, by going through the process of sampling, collecting and analysing data a saturation point was identified when there were no longer any new broad themes emerging. That is not to say the complete data saturation had been reached but any further nuanced data would not alter the overall findings.

### 5.3.3 Anonymity & Consent

The purpose of this study and the content of the interview guide was carefully explained to each participant prior to requesting their permission to interview them. It was made clear at all times that participants could decline to answer a question or terminate the interview at their discretion. Once permission was granted each participant was asked to sign a consent form (see Annex. No. 1). In order to protect participants, all names have been redacted and codified as follows:

I	00	-	Ba/Fe/Cu/Fa	00
(Interview)	(Number)	-	(Bărbat/Femeie/Cuplu)	(Age)

In cases where a respondent's exact age was unknown, their age by decade is given denoting that they are, for example, in their fifties e.g. I04-Ba50. Below (Table 1) is a list of interview respondents.

Interview	Respondent Code		Setting
I01	Ba24	Man - 24 years old/married with one child	At home
I02	Cu50	Husband and wife - 50s	At home
I03	Fe50	Woman - 50s	At home
I04	Cu50	Husband and wife - 50s	At home
I05	Fe50	Woman - 50s	At home
I06	Cu20	Husband and Wife - 20s	At home
I07	Fe40	Woman - 40s	At home
I08	Fe30	Woman - 30s	At home
I09	Cu50	Husband and Wife - 50s	At home
I10	Fe40	Woman - 40s	At home

Table 1 - Interview respondents

In conjunction with anonymising each participant, no vocal recording was made of any of the interviews. This decision was taken, together with my primary informant, in order to further protect people's identities and to make them feel most at liberty to speak openly about issues with potentially far-reaching consequences for their own lives. There was also a desire to ensure that, should anyone express a view which reflected negatively on either local authorities or the NGO, this could in no way count against them in any future interaction. This choice served to both protect respondents and enhance data collection (Rutakumwa et al., 2019).

### 5.3.4 Interviewing

In total fourteen people participated directly across ten semi-structured interviews, other family members and visitors occasionally joined in for portions of interviews. Their views were recorded where verbal permission was given but they are not recorded as interviewees. Each interview was conducted together with my key informant and both Romanian and English were used. The interviews were divided into four broad topics - background, livelihood, relocation and identity. The guide was designed to allow the participants to, in their own words and cognitive structures, describe their experiences and reflections. In this format myself and my key informant were



prepared to be flexible with how each interview proceeded, change the format of questioning and possibly eliminate certain lines of enquiry (Gobo & Molle, 2017).

All of the interviews were carried out in people's homes after a period of building familiarity within the community and participating in the day-to-day activities of my informant. In order to build familiarity within the community, I spent time in conversation with my key informant, taking on-board their knowledge and understanding, developed over seven years of working within the community. Their position as a gatekeeper was critical, as stated previously, in gaining access to people and them being willing to be interviewed. During this time, my own past experience of working in similar settings played an important role and meant that I was quickly able to read situations and adjust accordingly.

In place of recording, each interview was transcribed into notes written within a field notebook and these notes and reflections were discussed afterwards with my contact, in order to cross-correlate and clarify aspects of the interview. These conversations in and of themselves became a rich source of data and understanding.

### 5.3.5 Data Analysis

A three stage coding process was applied as part of the circular process of collection and analysis; deconstruction (*open*), construction (*axial*) and confirmation (*selective*) (Gobo & Molle, 2017).

After each interview, time was taken with my key informant to clarify points of language, issues raised in the conversation and interpretation of people's responses. This served as a means to cross-correlate the data gathered from each interview. Observational data gathered during the research period and taking into account a wealth previous experiences, also served to enhance and filter the interview data. This was again considered alongside current literature and research around the issue of Roma informality in Romania. This process of triangulation gives the data gathered the greatest degree of integrity possible (Creswell, 2007).

The initial open coding process was done by a combination of distilling my own preunderstandings and those of my informant and observations made in the initial period spent in Mărulei. These initial codes were condensed into four broad categories: background, livelihood, relocation and

identity. These categories were then used to develop an interview guide. Analysis of the interview data was then used to refine the theoretical model prior to the more specific analysis focusing on answering the research questions.

The intermediate coding stage was initially organised under the interview guide headings and broad themes emerged from within that data. A timeline (see Annex. No.3) was also created in order to temporally locate the data against the broader backdrop of historical events and forces at work in Romanian society.

## 5.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethnic minority groups, especially those which are marginalised can prove difficult for researchers to reach, often exhibiting low levels of participation in research. This is certainly the case when attempting to broach sensitive subjects such as marginalisation, victimisation or a specific issue pertaining to a group's precarious state (Wallengren & Mellgren, 2015). In the case of this research, I was seeking to speak with people about the informal and precarious nature of the place in which they were living. This was certainly a sensitive issue within the community, with the ever-present threat of demolition and eviction.

### 5.4.1 Reflexivity and Positionality

I clearly position myself as internal to the research project and not as an external objective observer (Gobo & Molle, 2017). However by adopting a critical ethnographic approach (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994) I work to constantly dispute any assumptions of objective authority (Gobo & Molle, 2017) that I might be inclined to take from years spent working within the NGO sector. I have positioned this experience as being a valuable resource in this thesis. However, that is not to say that I am ignorant to the fact that the line between preunderstanding and presumption, is thin.

In stepping into Mărului as a researcher, I risked casting an objectifying gaze, which is often cast over Roma communities. Roma communities live constantly having to push back against the 'homogenised and imagined' Roma, against ideas about who they are, how they live and how they think. Within these imaginings, Roma are, "positioned, assigned the role of players in the drama [. . .] the attempt to portray an understanding of their lives" (Marsh, 2007). Assumptions of 'cultural

heritage' are often made about the living conditions and choices made by Roma communities, when in fact they are more demonstrative of socioeconomic position (Berescu, 2019).

There are numerous good examples of researchers and others, who have sought to engage with Roma communities facing many challenges (Zsuzsa, 2012; Stewart, 1998; Okely, 1983). In particular the writing of Zsuzsa (2012) about her work over a number of years building trust and undertaking a research project within a Roma community in Cluj-Napoca, Romania's second largest city, was insightful given its shared country context. She identified that there were "hard" contributing factors to the conditions in which people were living; such as post-socialist restructuring and housing policy. However, it was the "softer" issues of historical encounters with local authorities and NGOs that framed people's feelings about their circumstances. This was a particularly pertinent issue in this research as I was likely to initially be associated with the NGO or mistaken for a representative of either another donor or the state. Entering a community and being perceived as someone. "[. . .] from the hostile outer world", would only lead to rejection as people would only be reminded of how they had been used from their point-of-view (Zsuzsa, 2012).

Despite my best efforts to counteract these issues and to avoid "fetishising the Roma [. . .] and positioning them as an essentialised ethnic group to be studied in isolation" (Yildiz & De Genova, 2017); it was always a risk that in trying to uncover power dynamics and structures, my work could unintentionally validate and consolidate them (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994 pg.308).

#### 5.4.2 Limitations and Reliability

As previously mentioned, the NGO was a key gatekeeper mediating access to Mărului. I considered it necessary as a researcher, in order to be accepted, to enter the area together with my key informant and to conduct the interview with them. Although this produced a potential limitation is that respondents may have been unwilling to discuss openly their interactions with the NGO (Sultana, 2007). Similarly, it is not possible to know to what extent people saw me as completely separate to the NGO or potentially associated me with another donor of governmental body, an obstacle described above by Zsuzsa (2012).

The purposive sampling process, although jointly undertaken, was heavily reliant on my key informant. This was also the case for people we met and spent time interacting with in general. This

means the sample is likely to be heavily biased towards households with which they have a positive relationship.

## 6. Findings

The findings presented in this section are primarily based on data collected through interviews, observations and some analysis of legislation. They are also informed by my own preunderstandings and those of my key informant. I use them to build an understanding of what Mărului is like as a place and to begin relating the field research to the theoretical model.

The findings are organised according to the interview guide - Background, Livelihood, Relocation and Identity. Through these findings the issues raised in RQ1 are addressed.

### 6.1 Background

Mărului is accessible via a dirt slip road, which passes under a section of motorway. It is therefore accessible to motor-vehicles, although during prolonged rainfall the road turns to mud, which both slows passage and makes walking difficult, limiting access to the city. This was raised in numerous interviews, I08-Fe30 said that in Mărului you have to have two pairs of shoes just to go out - one to reach the paved road and one to wear in the city. She highlighted that the lack of access meant that there was no rubbish collection, so waste was either burnt or just built up. There is an adjacent bicycle path that runs into the city, however, it is an indication of the municipalities intent to develop the area for tourism and not to integrate Mărului. This is a sign of the area transitioning from a 'residual space' (Bancroft, 2005) as tourist development opportunities arise through the national park. There is a lack of basic infrastructure; no running water or sewerage; electricity is accessed from a handful of houses on the edge of the settlement that are legally connected to the grid or illegally by cable hooking. This is consistent with the FRA data cited in section 4.2.2. As well as revealing power inequalities (Harding & Blokland, 2014), the lack of access to mass-transit and infrastructure reflects the lack of spatial profit in Mărului. This signifies its position within the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1991), denoting the status of the area as illegitimate.

Structures are improvised with whatever material is to hand. Dwellings are typically built using mud; bricks are made by digging out nearby earth, mixing it with straw or another binding agent

and packing them. The protected status of the nearby woodland means that trees cannot be felled for firewood or material and a tenuous relationship with a local gatekeeper dictates whether or not people are allowed to scavenge for wood on the forest floor. This means that people are often forced to burn plastics and other waste to heat their homes. Wood burners often double-up for both cooking and as a source of heat, they are often crudely made and not smoke-tight, the air inside houses becomes heavy, especially in the winter. The air throughout the area is dense and constitutes a health hazard to those living there. The area is rife with health hazards; such as air quality and municipal and human waste.

### 6.1.1 Origins of Mărului

Through the recollections of interviewees a timeline emerged of when Mărului was established and when it grew significantly. A complete timeline, plotting the given time of arrival for each respondent within eras identified by URBAN-INCERC in their research into informal settlements within Romania can be found in Annex No. 4. Accompanying the timeline is a graph, presenting the data gathered by URBAN-INCERC, pertaining to the share of informal settlements established within each era.

The data collected indicates that Mărului was established during the Communist era, URBAN-INCERC found the greatest share of settlements were established. According to the responses of participants in I04, there were at least a small number of dwellings in Mărului as far back as 1985. At the time there was no one else living there but they had come because it was beautiful and there was work with a local company producing bricks. This is a trade that some Roma communities within Romania are known for, being known as ‘cărămiduri’ (*brick makers*) (Ruegg, 2013). The next earliest respondent (I08) arrived almost a decade later in 1994. The majority of respondents (I02, I03, I05, I07, I09, I10) arrived during the period from 2001 - 2012. This correlates with the account of the NGO, a representative of which said they had first entered the area in 2001, when it was relatively less populated. A further survey of the community would better establish whether this trend holds, but the interview findings corroborate the account of the NGO, therefore this period of time is most likely when the settlement developed significantly and became established.

The factors that drew people to the area were mixed but all respondents reported either being forced out of where they had been living (I03, I05, I06, I07, I10), a lack of work elsewhere (I01, I04) or

having exhausted all other avenues for housing (I02, I08, I09). Mărului became the only option available to them. Half of the respondents said they had family already living there (I01, I02, I05, I08, I10), which factored into their decision to move to the area. These findings correlate with the trends discussed in 4.2.2, whereby there has been a consistent decline in Roma households living within planned urban housing and a rise in the number living in peripheral settlements. They also resonate with critical perspectives on urban informality which consider the inequities produced by neoliberal processes of development and the opening up of historical racisms and prejudices leading to the de facto expulsion of Roma households (Powell & van Baar, 2019).

## 6.2 Livelihood

When discussing how people made a living in the city, respondents often raised issues around their lack of education (I01, I02, I03, I04, I06, I08, I09, I10) and the way in which the labour market had changed in Romania since the Communist era. I09-Cu50 noted that the increased regulation of the labour market meant that the demand for black market construction work had declined, this was a reflection shared with I04-Cu50. He said the companies were no longer willing to take the risk and could secure cheap insured labour from outside the country. Data from the General Inspectorate for Immigration supports this, the number of non-EU workers legally employed in Romania has at least tripled since 2016 and in 2019 the Ministry of Internal Affairs expanded its annual quota of non-EU workers to 30,000 (Soricianu, 2020). These moves by the state can be interpreted through the dual confinement-informality framework proposed by Pasquetti & Picker (2017). As the state raises barriers to entering the labour market and effectively imports labour, marginalised communities that have come to rely on the black market are further confined to their space. They are less likely to be able to secure work outside of the area itself and less likely to be able to afford to leave. One response to this has been that some households have begun to engage in circular labour migration, however, we were unable to speak with any such household.

Many respondents spoke of the fact that without a basic level of literacy, even jobs that would not explicitly require an ability to read or write, are now unattainable. Within Romania, Roma communities have historically had and continue to have high rates of dropping-out compared to the wider population (Rotaru, 2019). I08-Fe30 said that her parents had not allowed them to go to school as children and now they must live with the consequences. She did not elaborate on why her parents had not allowed her to attend school but saw the potential in her own children completing

their education. That her children are enrolled in a nearby school was also a significant factor in her choosing to stay in the area. The increased risk of even greater instability incurred by leaving means that families consider it better to stay despite the deprivation the area experiences.

These two factors broadly contribute to many households relying on unstable incomes. There seem to be three primary sources of income within the community; the black market, state welfare and the NGO. The adjacent forest is an occasional source of work with I01-Ba24 saying that he had been given forestry work from time-to-time. The scrap metal yard that sits on the edge of the settlement is perhaps the most consistent source of income for households. I03-Fe50 mentioned her means of making money was digging for iron in the ground around Mărului and selling it to the scrapyards. Whilst spending time in the area, it was common to see people bringing in motor vehicles in order to strip them down for any scrap metal that could be sold.

Residents within Mărului are legally entitled to receive universal welfare support for their children. This is a common stream of income for families and a link between the in/formal spheres. One respondent, I02-Cu50, said that they received about 150 RON<sup>21</sup> per child in welfare support. In their case, this constituted the family's primary income each month. This income is expected to cover the costs of feeding themselves and three children, paying for electricity, replacing damaged clothing, wood for cooking and heating, medicine and any unforeseen expenditures. A regular monthly income of 450 RON does not stand to meet the needs of a family. According to the European Commission, a minimum salary combined with means tested and universal welfare support is barely sufficient to lift a family of four above the poverty line (Pop, 2019). One respondent (I05-Fe50) discussed that it is possible to earn welfare payments by working for the municipality. However, she said that she had been expelled from the program when she was unable to attend work because of health problems related to her breathing. This meant that she was unable to secure a regular source of income and living in Mărului, as raised in 6.1, exacerbates her health issues. Although no one brought up receiving money from the NGO during the interviews, it often came up in general conversation. The NGO can give money on an ad hoc basis to cover expenditures such as medical prescriptions, bills, administrative fees and food. This could represent influential sums of money in the context. It could also present a resistance modality through which residents make efforts to access a valuable resource. However, as discussed in 5.4.2, I was unable to discuss openly with respondents about their interactions with the NGO.

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<sup>21</sup> approximately €30

One way in which some households within Mărului do use a reappropriated resource to secure income is through electricity. Houses on the periphery of the settlement or located nearby one of the local industries, such as the scrap metal yard, are able to access the power grid by both legal and illegal means. Those who monopolise access to electricity often extort large monthly fees in exchange for a connection. I07-Fe40 described this dynamic in detail. Her house is connected by a single wire to a neighbouring house about 30 metres away. The neighbour sells electricity to a number of other houses at a rate significantly higher than they would otherwise be paying. They do so to cover their own costs but also to make a profit. I07-Fe40 is charged 200 RON/month and she estimates that her monthly bill would be around 40 RON if legally connected. Her house has one lightbulb and an extension cord for charging a mobile phone and plugging the television in. She says that the arrangement often leaves her having to sell belongings to cover short-term debts. It also seems to be common that the extension is passed on between houses where neither is connected first-hand.

## 6.3 Relocation

The threat of eviction was ever-present while moving around Mărului, something that residents in similar settlements are often exposed to (Habitat for Humanity, 2018). We were often asked about ‘demolition’ and because of my unfamiliarity people initially wondered if I might know about an imminent decision. During the interviews when the conversation turned to this issues the most common response was, “We have nowhere else to go” (I02, I03, I05 ,I06, I08, I09, I10). The only spaces available to people in the city because of their socioeconomic status were areas that had not yet been turned into private or public property, so-called “residual spaces” (Bancroft, 2005 pg.75). Mărului had once been such an area but is considered valuable for the development of the urban space. However, not in terms of developing it for those currently living there, a reflection of social hierarchies being played out.

### 6.3.1 Tarifului

In over half of the interviews (I01, I02, I05, I06, I08, I09) an area of the city known as “Tarifului” was mentioned. Tarifului is a housing development of eight apartment blocks. It is located on the southern edge of the city, on Strada Tarifului, about 7 km away from Mărului and is where the state has previously attempted to resettle people. Although I did not go there during my field work, I



have previously been to the area and was aware of its perception as what Picker (2017) would refer to as a GUA.

During one interview I02-Cu50 said, “I would rather squat down by the river, than live in Tarifului”. The consensus was that the state had tried to place too many people, in too small an area, with unsuitable accommodation. This has led to the area becoming “violent and dangerous” (I01, I05). Even though people were aware that it was an alternative area in which they could live, the prospect seemed to reinforce the sense that there was nowhere else for them to go in the city.

Tarifului was a contributing factor in people not applying for social housing. I08-Fe30 said that if she were to do so, local officials would just put her and people like her (a reference to her being Roma) “la bloc”, referring to Tarifului. There was a sense that people felt as though they would just be put away, out of sight. This could reflect an awareness of, if not an articulation of, “disappearing the poor” (Picker, 2017). This is a process of ghettoisation by which, in a state where welfare support has been stripped back and the people in question are scapegoated for their position, they are moved away. In doing so, pockets of space within a city are created, in which stigmatised people live and that the wider population accept.

When discussing the issue of social housing more generally, respondent I05-Fe50 said that they would not consider applying for social housing. When faced with the choice of living in Mărulei for free or incurring costs that they cannot afford, the choice is simple when you have no money. This is a rational choice when considering the fact that Roma households are significantly more likely to be at risk of poverty and in arrears with basic amenity payments than the wider population (Stănescu & Dumitru, 2017).

Overall, when considering where else they would like to live the biggest factors for respondents were peacefulness, safety and sanitation. There were a diverse range of responses but all resonated with a desire for “normality”.

## 6.4 Identity

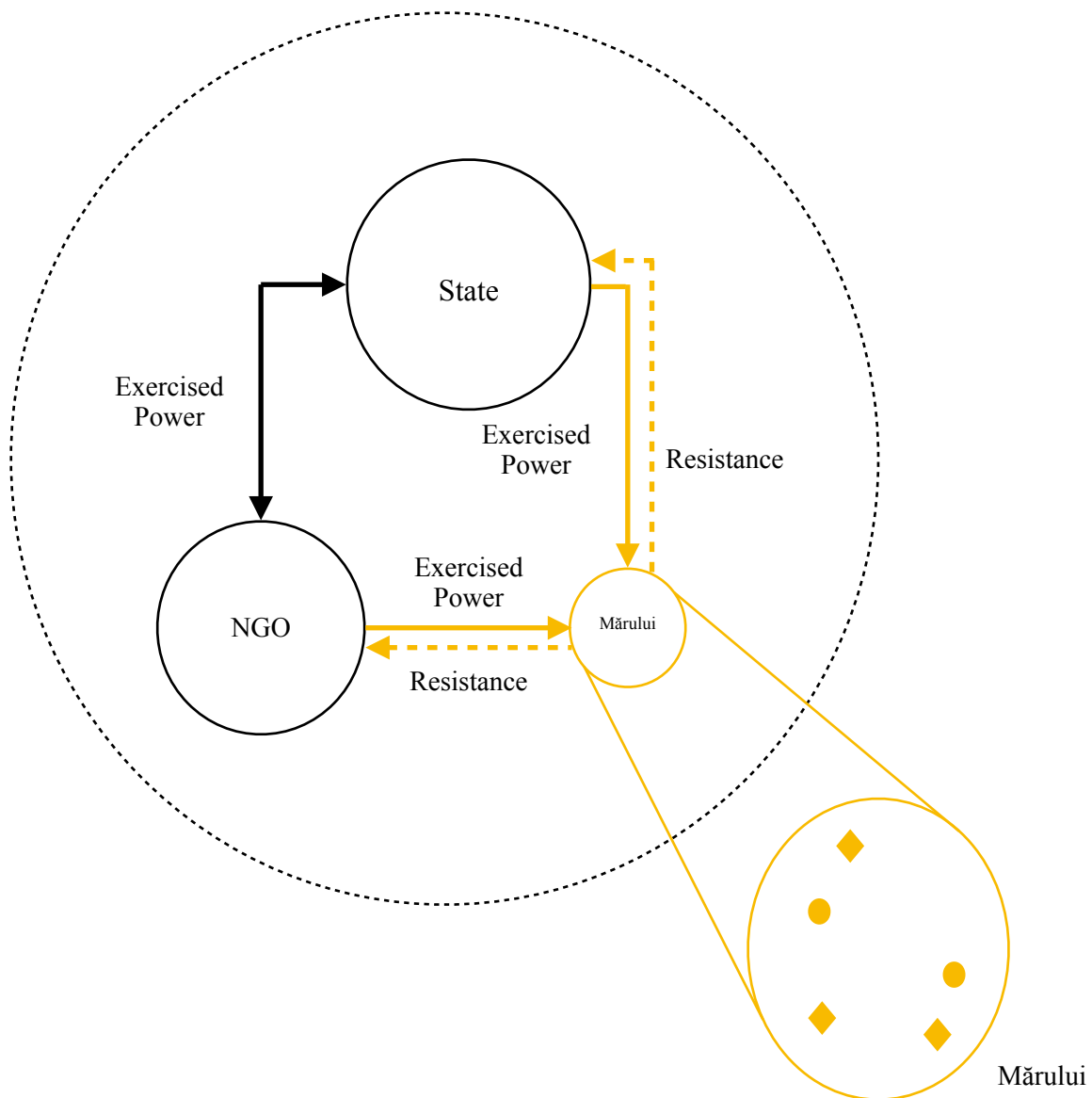
As mentioned in 4.3.2, all respondents self-identified as Roma. This was something both I and my key informant were unsure as to how people would respond. Depending on the social setting and perceptions of the enquirer, the same people can both identify with other ethnic groups and self-identify as Roma depending on what they perceive to be to their benefit (Bunescu, 2014). In census data, for example, people often choose to identify as belonging to a different ethnic group, as discussed in 4.2 (Plájás, M'charek & Van Baar, 2019; Bunescu, 2014). Most respondents chose to use the term “Țigan” to self-identify and both I01-Ba24 and I07-Fe40 expressed pride in this. This could constitute an example of reappropriation (Galinsky et al., 2013), whereby a previously negative slur, such as “Țigan” (Achim, 1998; Crowe, 1995), is revalued and applied self-consciously by a group.

When respondents related their identity as Roma to how they felt about the Romanian state there was an overwhelming sense that the state neither represented them nor worked on their behalf (I01, I02, I03, I04, I05, I06, I08, I09, I10). I05-Fe50 felt that legislation in Romania is not designed to help those who find themselves excluded because of a lack of education, health issues or poverty. This could be a reflection of critical perspectives of neoliberal policies adopted in the 1990s as a means of economically catching up. Leaving social problems created and exposed by transition unaddressed. I08-Fe30 pointed out that the conditions people in Mărului are living in demonstrate the state's lack of concern for people living there. She questioned that if people are not even given access to clean water; why would anything else be done for them?

There was a clear difference in the way people reflected on their identity in relation to individuals they might encounter around the city, in which case most respondents expressed that they felt accepted. Compared with the way in which they reflected when, potentially, those same individuals were reconstituted into representatives of the state or in relation to Romanian nationhood. However, not all respondents (I01, I03, I06, I08, I09, I10), reported that they felt accepted by wider society. A number of respondents expressed that “Romanians” do not like Roma because they are seen as dirty and uneducated (I01, I03, I06, I08, I09, I10). I03-Fe50 said that she feels that others cannot stand them, because they are Roma; this was echoed in I09 when respondents said that they could “feel people's judgment”. I08-Fe30 said that other people mocked them for being Roma; in I06,

respondents felt that this was because “Romanians” believe that Roma are dirty. They said that it is “ugly”, the way in which they are treated and that it changes how they see and interact with others (I03,I06).

## 7. Discussion



This section will relate the case study of Mărului to the theoretical framework as a means of mapping relations of power and resistance. The above model (Fig. 4) highlights the aspects of the theoretical framework directly addressed, focusing primarily on the relations as they pertain to

Mărului externally and internally. The wider model could provide a conceptual framework for positioning further research within this or other fields within a similar context, using the same theoretical lens.

## 7.1 Power and Resistance

In the model, the state and the NGO represent the places within the field where power is most concentrated (Bayat, 2004). As discussed earlier, AlSayyad & Roy (2006) refer spaces such as Mărului as places where competition is fierce between different power brokers. It is a space in which the attritional “dance of control” (Bayat, 2004) plays out. As such, the issue of relocation will form the basis for analysing power relations between the three parties, and addressing RQ2, because it is an issue that each has a stake in.

### 7.1.1 Internal Power Dynamics

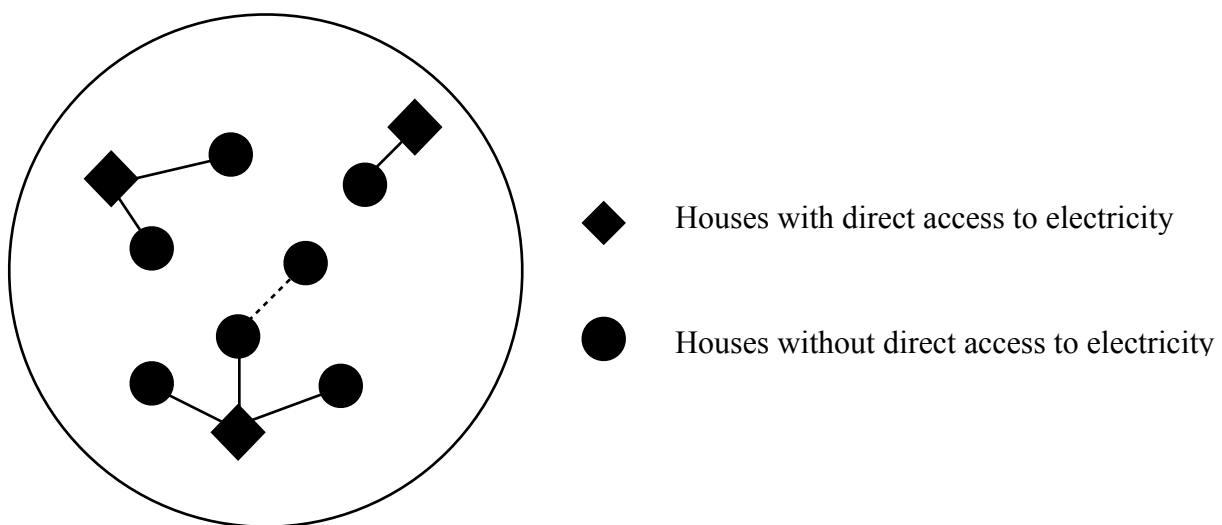


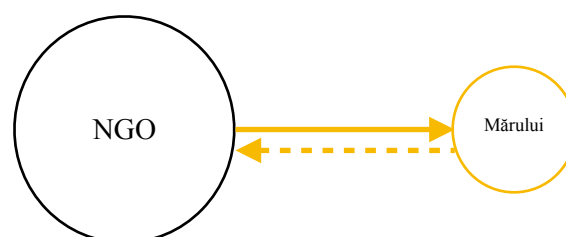
Fig. 5 Adapted from “Bourdieu and Urban Politics: Conceptualizing a Bourdieusian relational framework for urban politics research” by Shin, (2012) *Planning Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pg.276

Within the framework of a Bourdieusian field analysis, the concept of the subfield facilitates the analysis of the internal dynamics of identified actors. Access to resources appeared to be a governing factor in internal power dynamics within Mărului. As discussed in 6.1 and 6.2 the access

and means to distribute electricity within Mărului forces households into inequitable relationships with one another. This is modelled above (Fig. 5), whereby houses with a direct connection to the power grid are able to extort a profit from houses they then indirectly supply with electricity. This double-locks those households whose precarious income is further strained by large electricity bills relative to their consumption. They cannot either pursue any formal action because they are illegally accessing the power grid. Critical informality perspectives might argue that this is the logical outcome of structural malfunctions, as inequity is passed down the chain. This example of an internal power dynamic subverts notions of collective resistance as even though some households manage to gain access to a valuable resource, it is then used as leverage internally. However, it does still constitute an example of households coopting an external resource and utilising it for their own means.

Internal power dynamics raise further questions about the idea of relocating communities such as Mărului as a whole or in large part. Where individual actors within the subfield have become empowered, relative to others, it is possible that these relations will extend to function similarly within a new setting. The extent to which internal dynamics in communities like Mărului are well understood by outsiders is debatable and have implications for the interactions they have with the community.

### 7.1.2 Relations with the NGO



The presence and activity of NGOs within Romania was something which became a factor in considering the development of the theoretical framework and that I was able to observe in the field. As mentioned in 5.4.2 and 6.3, I was unable to directly address this with any of the interview respondents. However, observational data gathered in the field and my own preunderstandings informs an analysis of this key dynamic.

As recounted by Carothers (1999), “aid from the United States and other Western donors in the 1990s [. . .] fuelled an NGO ‘boom’ in Eastern Europe (Carothers, 1999 pg.215). This led to the establishment of numerous NGOs across the country (Flanigan, 2007). According to the Foundation for Civil Society Development<sup>22</sup> (FDSC), at the end of 2015, there were 45,500 active NGOs in Romania, 21% of which were working in the “social/charitable” sector (FDSC, 2017). The status of NGOs, CSOs and donor/state funded work in Romania is complex. Shifting trends within the country have seen similar organisations variously referred to as “non-governmental”, “non-profit”, “civil society”, “social entrepreneurship” or “social economy” organisations (Matei & Apostu, 2013). This has also contributed to individual organisations attempting to fulfil multiple objectives using many different instruments (ibid. pg.143). This is the case for the NGO in Mărului as they work to provide aid relief, pre/postnatal support, social work, micro-enterprise and education.

The role of NGOs in relation to disenfranchised communities within Romania is complex. The beneficiaries of such organisations are not usually in the position of being able to choose whether or not they associate with or consume the services of an organisation. This is especially true when organisations are embedded within communities. In many cases NGOs effectively replace public services (van Tuijl, 1999) and people are limited to choosing the solutions provided by one particular organisation. In Romania this is a fundamental issue, as described by Flanigan in his study of Romanian child welfare NGOs:

“[. . .] if clients choose not to associate, they must also choose to give up access to certain social services. Because many of these services provide for the most basic human needs, exit is not a realistic option”

(Flanigan, 2007 pg.172)

In this case, the choice not to associate could be framed as the choice between access to certain social benefits through projects implemented by the NGO or being left with no alternative but to move to an area they consider undesirable. This is not the free choice of a citizen, it is the illusion of choice granted to a denizen (Standing, 2012). It is also indicative of a wider problem of Roma political representation stretching across Europe. It forces Roma communities to play an

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<sup>22</sup> Fundația pentru Dezvoltarea Societății Civile

asymmetrical power game in which NGO-networks become the de facto political representatives of communities and people groups of whom their own structures are not representative (Rostaş, 2012).

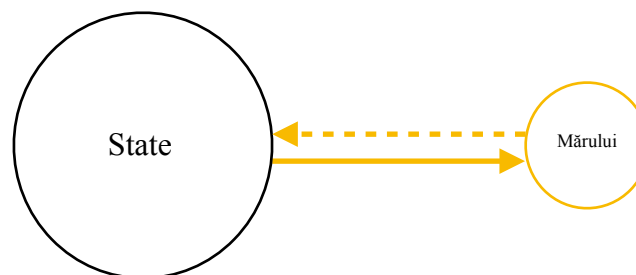
The position of the NGO in relation to Mărului puts them in a challenging position. The development of their relationship followed a common trajectory as described by Daniele (2020); after contact was made, residents were gradually offered access to services being provided to other communities; financial support, food and social assistance. Once a regular relationship was established and people were willing to engage with the NGO's rules, a school project was established and the support available was expanded in scope and variety. The proximity of the NGO to the community could mean that in a case where there was limited availability of designated housing stock, they would fulfil the role of arbiter. In cases such as this Clough Marinaro (2017) identified that non-Roma practitioners often default to allocation of resources or opportunities to those they perceive as being most compliant with regulations and most integrated into projects (Daniele, 2020). This is demonstrative of the power an NGO can exercise within an environment such as Mărului.

The NGO acknowledges that, in the long-term, Mărului is untenable and that the city will eventually demolish the settlement, for the reasons previously identified. This means that authorities are less likely to pursue approaches taken within some cities whereby legal rights to the dwelling have been granted but not to the land the dwelling is built upon (BPL, 2019b). An alternative site is proposed by the NGO, in an area of the city known as Gai. It is in the north, approximately 7 km away from Mărului. The site is presently zoned for industrial development and is surrounded by light industry. As the findings in 6.3 demonstrate the pervasive sense was that there is nowhere else for residents to go beyond residual spaces (Bancroft, 2005) or an already stigmatised and racialised housing development. This risks reinforcing the delegitimisation of residents' presence within the city by offering one marginal space for another. The process of relocation targets categories of precariousness which can be resolved by "calls for development" (Berescu, 2019 pg.202), project driven language which benefits the agendas of both the NGO and the state. However, these resolutions circumvent the issue of racial exclusion (ibid.; Madanipour, 1998) rooted in historical factors and stitched into the social fabric of the city. This approach risks marrying the architectural script (Bancroft, 2005) of the city to socially embedded narratives (Polese, Kovács & Jancsics, 2018) contributing to Roma overrepresentation within informality. This is a situation in which the confinement framework proposed by Pasquetti & Picker (2017) is relevant combined with

Berescu's (2019) assertion that development agendas targeted at Roma, neglect that racial exclusion is ultimately the underlying factor defining power relations and informality. Attempts to relocate entire communities reinforces notions that Roma choose to live separately which in turn justifies their confinement (ibid.).

There is indication that the process of consultation required by the legislation discussed in 4.1, regarding the future of the settlement, is done through the NGO as a proxy. However, whether or not people within the settlement have truly given permission for this is debatable. Rostaş (2012), citing Arnstein's (1969) "Ladder of Citizenship Participation", describes community engagement at this level as forms of 'tokenism'. Consultation provides a forum for opinions to be expressed but no mechanism by which any power broker must take them into account (Rostaş, 2012). The NGO then mediates power relations between Mărului and the state. It is not clear to what, if any, extent there is any conscious effort made by people within Mărului to lever the influence of the NGO in their favour. However, there is an awareness that through the NGO they have access to certain formal social and legal frameworks, such as legal advice and welfare support. In this way, residents within Mărului are able to lever the power and resources of the NGO to secure access to formal frameworks that would otherwise have been beyond them. They are also able to access financial support, which as discussed in 6.2, is distributed in an ad hoc manner without a strong regulatory framework. This means access to it is negotiable on both sides and arguably this suits both parties.

### 7.1.3 Relations with the state



The findings reported in 6.4 indicate that there is tension in the relationship between residents within Mărului and the Romanian state. In the way in which respondents reflected upon the state's interactions with them, it was apparent that they felt an underlying prejudice towards Roma and that their poverty and lack of education made it hard to engage with the state. These combined factors point towards the "social embeddedness" of informality (Polese, Kovács & Jancsics, 2018). That



informality is produced by issues weaved into the social fabric of the city. In this case, the issues of perceived anti-Roma racism, illiteracy and poverty are all identified by respondents as being endemic issues. These shape interactions between the state and Mărului as residents incur significant losses on their position within the relational field.

The NGO said that the local government was most interested in relocating people in Mărului to a site adjacent to the current development in Tarifului. An interpretation of this could be that officials view this as the most viable site because it is already highly stigmatised and racialised, instead of creating multiple sites around the city. This is something which other localities in Romania have been accused of doing, in particular, in Cluj-Napoca regarding an area outside of the city known as Pata-Rât (Mireanu, 2019). It is widely acknowledged that there is stigma attached to an area in which Roma live or are perceived to be living (Berescu, 2018; Picker, 2017).

The shift from the policies of urban development during the Communist era, which had seen many Roma sedenterised and relocated to new urban developments, towards neoliberal policies have had the effect of filtering and polarising the distribution of groups within the city (Novy & Mayer, 2009). Quite contrary to the notion of the 'hands off' state, this neoliberal approach required a great degree of state action. The issue of housing has constituted a significant way in which power flows between the state and people in Mărului. State policies pre and post transition have factored into the relocation and displacement of people, who in their own words, are no longer able to go anywhere else. The state ultimately holds the monopoly on the future living situation of residents within Mărului. The choice people do have is to leave but due to the combined factors of anti-Roma racism, illiteracy and poverty, it is likely they could find themselves in a similar situation elsewhere. A drawn out circular process of expulsion therefore continues.

The legal amendments highlighted in 4.1, priorities participatory and consultative processes. However, the extent to which they are viable is challenged on the grounds of the social conditions of the people they most concern (BPL, 2019b). The right to participate is specified in both international and Romanian laws but how this is interpreted in practice differs (McGarry & Agarín, 2014). As discussed above, in the context of Mărului the NGO operates as a proxy between state and residents. There is no formal mechanism by which this takes place and raises many ethical and legislative issues around the participation of citizens in processes directly affecting their lives.

Although state police have been a contributing factor in the settlement of Mărului, it has become a space where the state also struggles in some ways to extend its reach. A key factor in people choosing to remain in Mărului is that they are not subject to rent, taxation and bills paid to amenity companies. They incur fines by living in the area but these often go unpaid, only becoming a pressing issue when there is a need to interact with local authorities, for example if identity documents need renewing. These were issues highlighted in conversation with my key informant when discussing reasons that people might resist moving, either by choice or if obliged. In 6.3.1, respondent I05-Fe50 had made it clear that a reason for her not applying for social housing was to avoid the higher cost of living elsewhere. In her case, this is a reasoned choice based on her means of income. It reveals a degree of analysis undertaken on the respondents part that has led to the conclusion that living in Mărului, despite the conditions, is more viable than incurring debt that authorities would be able to tie her to. In this sense, her actions mitigate expectations and claims made on her by superordinates within the city (Scott, 1975). I08-Fe30 said that her family had decided to leave where they had been living before because the cost of living was prohibitively expensive and so they left the confines of contracted housing and settled in Mărului, at a time when there were very few people there. I04-Cu50 said that when they had first come to Mărului 35 years ago, the state did not have a problem with them settling there. To what extent this is a true reflection of the state's sentiment at the time was not possible to ascertain. However, it does reflect the long process through which a settlement such as Mărului has developed.

An approach based on desegregation could work to begin addressing the myriad complex issues contributing to informality within Mărului. This would move away from discussions based on relocations to defined geographical spaces within the city and towards the deconstruction of delegitimised areas. Choices that lead to confinement and segregation emphasise insecurity and threats (Dalbello, 2019) and focus on 'hard' development issues which are more readily addressed by projects and policies. This is a limiting factor of national policy (BLP, 2019b) and European policy, as both pursue an ethnicity blind approach by ignoring embedded prejudices as fundamental factors in Roma marginalisation (Berescu, 2019; McGarry, 2011).

## 8. Conclusion

In relation to RQ1, the findings indicate that people came to live in Mărului by processes that forced them from where they had previously been living. Either by losing their housing, a lack of work or as a last resort. These are symptomatic of processes which have worked to expel Roma households to informal and precarious areas on the periphery of urban areas. Ultimately the greatest factor keeping people in Mărului is summed up by the common refrain, “We have nowhere else to go”. By unpacking this statement, a picture emerged of the socio-spatial dynamics within the city.

With regards the relational dynamics of power and resistance raised in RQ2, the prior resonating with critical and the former emancipatory perspectives of urban informality, the findings and analysis of this research tend towards critical perspectives. However, there are strong indicators of residents within Mărului engaging in acts of so-called “everyday resistance”. Whether this is by reappropriating space and resources; accessing formal networks through the NGO; or engaging in harder to detect dissimulative practices. I would conclude therefore that frameworks for recognising and analysing resistance are an important facet of critical analysis. An emancipatory perspective applied in this context risks underplaying to web of historical and contemporary issues implicated in informal Roma settlements.

I think, in this case, an approach based on the concept of “social embeddedness”, which has the roots of informality in the social fabric, is most appropriate. While it too leans towards critical perspectives, it embraces the complexity of the social web and recognises ways in which groups adapt overtime. It also highlights the challenge in addressing these issues because they themselves become something ‘everyday’.

The lack of affordable social housing within Romanian cities and prohibitive costs of integrating informal settlements means that often housing stock is built specifically for those in need. Disproportionately, but not always, it is the case that these households are Roma. Resultant segregation could be framed as an unintended consequence, however, the positioning of developments in peripheral or residual spaces is a conscious choice. In thinking about informality through this spatial lens it is possible to be imagining alternative solutions, such as

desegregationist approaches. Taking steps towards a shared city space in which the residents of Mărului are fully integrated and only to their benefit.

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# Annex. 1



LUND UNIVERSITY

If you consent to being interviewed and the conditions below, please sign your name in the space provided:

The answers given during this interview will constitute part of the research project conducted by Sam Fraser, a student at Lund University. Anything produced using the answers you provide will be accessible to you upon request and without restriction.

As the interviewee you will:

- remain anonymous at all times; your name and personal information will not be collected or used in any way.
- have the right to withdraw your responses at any time.
- have the right to not answer any given question without need for justification.

I consent to participating in an interview with Sam Fraser, a student at Lund University, for the purposes of his research:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## LUND UNIVERSITY

Dacă sunteți de acord să fiți interviuat, și sunteți de acord cu condițiile de mai jos, vă rugăm să semnați numele dvs. în spațiul oferit.

Răspunsurile date în cadrul acestui interviu vor constitui o parte a unui proiect de cercetare realizat de Sam Fraser, student la Universitatea Lund. Orice material produs pe baza răspunsurilor pe care le oferiți va putea fi accesat la cerere și fără restricții.

În calitate de interviuat, veți:

- rămâne anonim în orice moment; numele și informațiile dvs. personale nu vor fi colectate sau utilizate în niciun fel.
- avea dreptul să vă retrageți răspunsurile în orice moment.
- avea dreptul să nu răspundeți la nici o întrebare data, fără a fi nevoie de justificare.

Consimt la participarea la un interviu cu Sam Fraser, student la Universitatea Lund, în scopul cercetării sale:

Semnat: \_\_\_\_\_

Data: \_\_\_\_\_



# Annex. 2

## Interview Guide (English)

### Background

1. Do you identify as Romania/Roma - Hungarian/Roma?
2. How long have lived in 'Mărului'?
3. How did you come to be here?
4. What keeps you here?

### Livelihood

5. How do you support your family?
6. If you had to leave 'Mărului', how would you continue to support yourself?
7. What would be the ideal place of work for you; that would motivate you over a longer period of time?
8. What are the obstacles that prevent you from finding work?
9. Do you believe that it would be too expensive to live in another part of town?

### Relocation

10. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be?
  - If you had to choose somewhere in Romania, where would that be?
11. If you could chose between having to move or being able to stay here, which would you choose?
12. What would be the conditions under which your would agree to move from here?
13. If you would be forced to move, where would you go?
14. Have you ever tried to apply for social housing?

### Identity

15. Do you feel as though you are treated differently because you are Roma?
16. How does the way you are treated affect the way you see wider society?
17. Do you believe you would be accepted living elsewhere in the city?
18. Do you feel that the state represents you?

## **Interview Guide (Romanian)**

### **Background**

1. Te identifici ca și fiind Român/Romm, Hungarian/Romm?
2. De când locuiești pe Mărului?
3. Cum ai ajuns aici?
4. Ce te face să stai aici?

### **Livelihood**

5. Cum te suștii pe tine familia, cum faci bani, mâncare etc?
6. Dacă ar trebui să pleci de aici, ce ai face ca să îți suștii familia?
7. Care ar fi locul ideal de muncă pentru tine, care te-ar motiva să îl ții pentru o perioadă lungă de timp?
8. Care sunt obstacolele care te împiedică să îți găsești de lucru?
9. Crezi că ar fi prea scump să traiești în oraș?

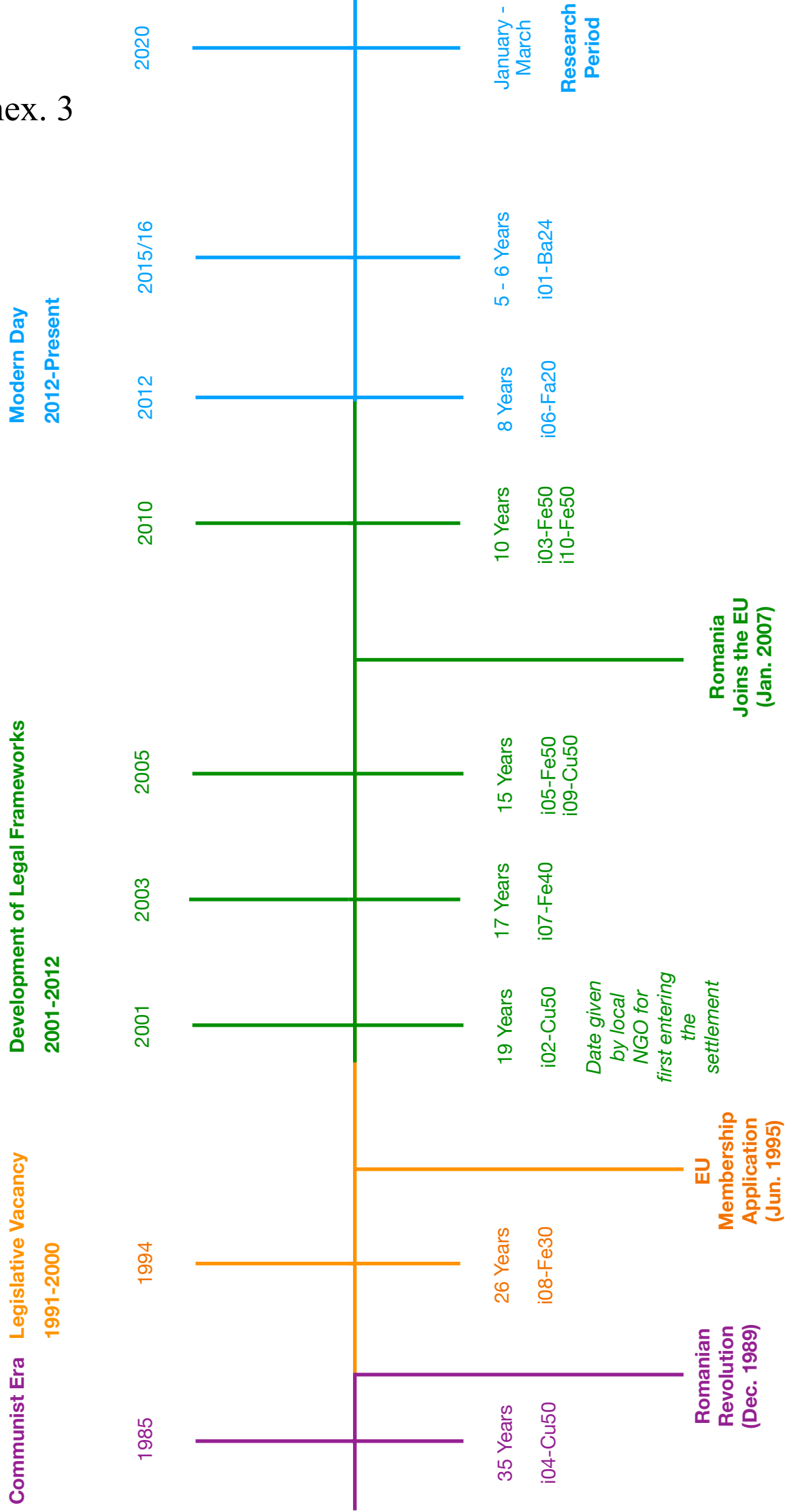
### **Moving**

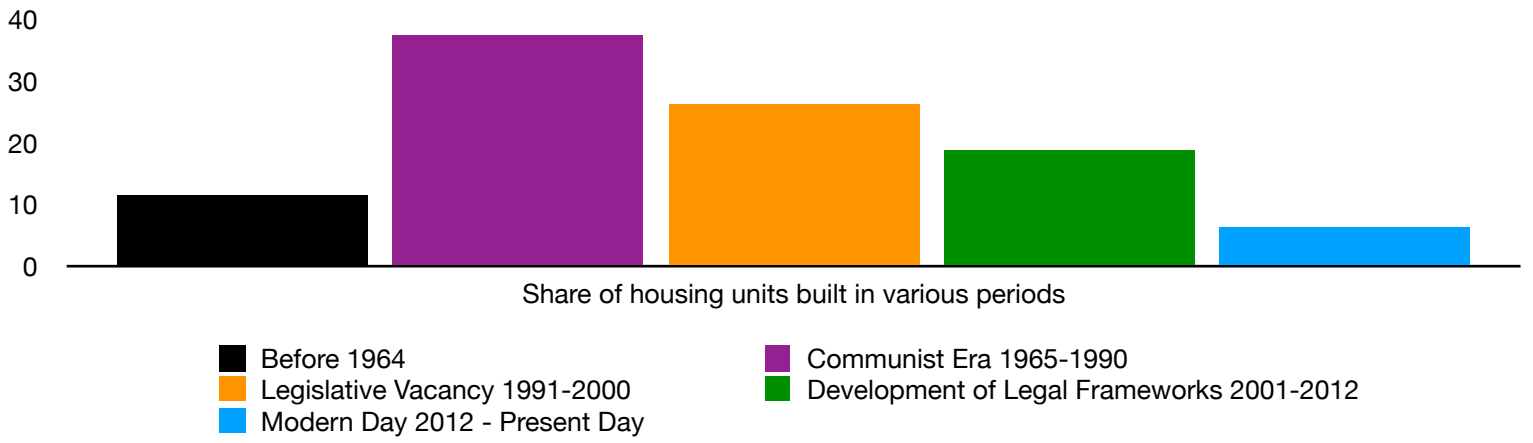
10. Dacă ai putea să te muți oriunde altundeva de aici, unde ar fi asta?
  - Dacă ar trebui să te muți undeva în România, unde ar fi asta?
11. Dacă ar fi să alegi să stai aici sau să te muți, ce ai alege? De ce?
12. Care ar fi condițiile tale, sub care ai accepta să te muți de aici?
13. Dacă ai fi forțat să pleci, unde te-ai duce?
14. Ai încercat vreodată să aplici pentru o locuința socială?

### **Identity**

15. Te simți tratat diferit pentru faptul că ești Romm?
16. Cum te face pe tine să te uiti la societate după felul în care ești tratat?
17. Crezi că ai fi acceptat să traiesc în altă parte în oraș?
18. Crezi că statul te reprezintă?

# Annex. 3





(Fundația PACT, 2018)

## Annex. 4

▪ Așezare informală - grupare de minimum 3 unități destinate locuirii dezvoltate spontan, ocupate de persoane sau familii care fac parte din grupuri vulnerabile definite conform Legii asistenței sociale nr. 292/2011, cu modificările și completările ulterioare, și care nu au niciun drept asupra imobilelor pe care le ocupă. Așezările informale sunt situate de obicei la periferia localităților urbane sau rurale, cuprind locuințe improvizate, realizate din materiale recuperate, și/sau locuințe realizate din materiale de construcții convenționale, iar prin localizarea și caracteristicile sociodemografice generează excluziune, segregare și marginalizare socială. Prin situarea în zone de risc natural (alunecări de teren, inundații), biologic (gropi de gunoi, depozite de deșeuri, situri contaminate și altele asemenea) sau antropice (zone de siguranță sau zone de protecție ale obiectivelor Seveso, ale infrastructurilor tehnico- edilitare și altele asemenea), unele așezări informale pun în pericol siguranța și sănătatea locuitorilor lor.

- Informal Settlement - groupings of at least three units of spontaneously developed housing, occupied by people or families that are part of a vulnerable group as defined according Law nr. 292/2011 on social assistance, with subsequent amendments and completions; and have no rights to the buildings they occupy. Informal settlements are usually situated on the periphery of urban or rural localities, comprise improvised housing, built from recovered materials, and/or conventional building materials and by their location and socio-demographic characteristics, they generate exclusion, segregation and social marginalisation. By being located in areas of natural (landslides, floods), biological (landfill, industrial waste, contaminated sites and similar) or anthropic risks (safety zones or Seveso objective safety zones, technical and municipal infrastructure and similar), some informal settlements endanger the safety and health of their inhabitants.

(Translated by Author)

**Art. 19. - (1)** În îndeplinirea atribuțiilor sale Ministerul Lucrărilor Publice, Transporturilor și Locuinței utilizează informații de sinteză la nivel național din toate domeniile de activitate economică și socială.

**(2)** Ministerele și celelalte organe ale administrației publice centrale sunt obligate să furnizeze Ministerului Lucrărilor Publice, Transporturilor și Locuinței, la cerere, informațiile necesare pentru desfășurarea activității de amenajare a teritoriului și de urbanism.

**Art. 19<sup>1</sup>. - (1)** Autoritățile administrației publice centrale și locale, precum și alte organe ale administrației publice cooperează cu Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și Administrației Publice, oferind informațiile necesare și implementând măsurile ce țin de domeniul lor de competență, astfel încât așezările informale identificate să fie prioritare în cadrul acțiunilor și politicilor publice privind locuirea, accesul la infrastructură, sănătatea publică și siguranța persoanelor.

**(2)** Măsurile prioritare prevăzute la alin. (1) vizează: informarea și implicarea locuitorilor comunităților afectate în procesul de planificare și reglementare, identificarea regimului juridic și economic al terenurilor și realizarea cadastrului general al așezărilor informale, înregistrarea imobilelor din așezările informale în sistemul integrat de cadastru și carte funciară în condițiile Legii cadastrului și a publicității imobiliare nr. 7/1996, republicată, cu modificările și completările ulterioare.

**(3)** Proiectele și programele destinate așezărilor informale se vor corela cu programele de asistență socială ce pot viza fie o zonă afectată de insalubritate, de lipsa serviciilor și de sărăcie, fie una sau mai multe categorii de beneficiari ai măsurilor de asistență socială, prezenți în mare măsură în cadrul așezării informale.

**Art. 19<sup>1</sup>. - (1)** The central and local public administration authorities, as well as other public administration organs will cooperate with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, providing necessary information and implementing measures relating to their area of competence, in order that identified informal settlements will be prioritised in accordance with public actions and policies regarding housing, access to infrastructure, public health and safety.

**(2)** The prioritised measures provided (1) Aim to: inform and involve the inhabitants of the affected communities in the planning and regulatory process, identifying the legal and economic norms of the land and creating a general cadastre of informal settlements, registering buildings within informal settlements in the integrated cadastre and land register in accordance with Law no. 7/1996 Cadastre and Real Estate Advertising, inclusive modifications and amendments.

**(3)** Projects and programs designed for informal settlements will correlate with social assistance programs and may target a zone affected by; insalubrity, a lack of services, poverty or having a large presence of one or more categories of beneficiaries of social assistance measures within the informal settlement.

(Translated by Author)