

## **“Pata Cluj Roma Inclusion”**

The author, Enikő Vincze was invited to make a presentation with this title at the 7<sup>th</sup> Dialogue of the Council of Europe with Roma and Traveller Civil Society, “Protecting family life by securing housing and preventing evictions” Strasbourg, 11-12 April 2019 - *Working group 2: Housing and Cities in a time of change: are we focusing on People? The overall objective of the working group is to explore and develop concepts for analysing institutional and organisational change and dynamics in affordable housing provision. Government policies, management reforms and rapidly changing social and economic contexts have placed new expectations on social and public landlords. In addition, policies encouraging partnering with the private sector and/or direct private market provision of social/public housing have blurred the lines between public and private housing activities*

### **Introduction**

While discussing about the “Pata Cluj” project from Romania, as a contribution to the organizers’ aim “to explore concepts for analysing institutional and organisational change and dynamics in affordable housing provision” I am proposing to make use of two concepts:

- (1) **externalization** of the accountability of public authorities in what regards housing provision for low income people;
- (2) **rescaling** the solution of territorial desegregation from the level of the city to the level of metropolitan area.

But before discussing about how “Pata Cluj” project contributed to the trend of externalization and rescaling housing provisions, I would like to critically address two interrelated issues:

- On the one hand: the phenomena mentioned in the description of this working group, i.e. “government policies, management reforms and rapidly changing social and economic context” – I am going to talk briefly about them under the heading of **changing housing politics under the conditions of post-socialist capitalism;**
- On the other hand: **the formation of the deprived housing area from Cluj-Napoca, Romania, called Pata Rât, as a local manifestation of the general phenomenon of housing crises**, which is exactly the area on which the “Pata Cluj” project focused on between October 2014 and April 2017.

At the end of my presentation, I will read the “Statement on Pata Rât” of the movement Căși sociale ACUM!/ Social housing NOW! from Cluj-Napoca.

My presentation might bring three contributions/ recommendations to the discussions of this meeting of the CoE on housing, which are the following:

- (a) A need for mainstreaming the “housing policies for Roma”, since the major manifestations of housing crises that affect impoverished ethnic Roma are part of a larger systemic problem that needs to be solved by the means of changing housing politics altogether.
- (b) A need to address the responsibilities of the EU, and in particular of the EC on the domain of housing, and formulate demands in what regards the need to modify some major aspects of the compulsory economic policies (such as the competition rule, and the fiscal surveillance of the countries), so that member states could invest public money into public housing.
- (c) A need to address all the housing issues faced by impoverished ethnic Roma people as a whole, i.e. when looking for measures to legally recognize informal settlements, to provide measures for social protection, measures for legally forbidding forced evictions and also compulsory measures for providing public social housing as alternative housing solutions. The demand for security of tenure should be applied in the case of several types of tenure.

#### **1. Pata Rât – a product of changing housing politics under post-socialist capitalism**

Housing politics that shaped the economy of housing after 1990 in Romania, played an important role in the transformation of really existing socialism into neoliberal capitalism. Processes of privatization via the right-to-buy and the retrocession measures, paralleled by the lack of public investment in public housing or differently put by the prevalence of private housing development, resulted in the over-commodification of housing and in its financialization. The fact that housing became predominantly a commodity and a financial asset, while peoples’ right to housing is violated and their social need for housing remains unsatisfied, is related exactly to how urban and housing development serves the interests of capital and not of people, and definitely not of low-income people.

The changing political economy of housing leads to housing crises, which includes phenomena such as the increase of housing prices and private rents, the rise of the rate of households overburdened with their housing costs and of the over-crowded households. But housing crises also creates diverse instances of extreme forms of housing dispossession, like forced eviction, homelessness, living in inadequate and unsecure homes, or being enforced into housing arrangements in toxic environments harshly disconnected from the rest of the locality. The **Pata Rât vicinity of the developed Cluj-Napoca cumulates all the dispossessions and deprivations related to poor and unsecure housing, but it is not a singular case in Romania, which is a country that displays all the big inequalities and uneven developments created by late capitalism.**

On the one hand, Romania is listed as one where the real estate sector fared very well in the recent years, being ranked on the 3rd position in the European ranking of Gross Rental Yields. The gross annual rental income (what a landlord can expect as return on his investment before taxes, maintenance fees and other costs) is situated at 7.76% at the moment, outreaching countries like Italy, Denmark, Germany or France. This is due to the fact that Romania is the leading foreign direct investment recipient in South Eastern Europe: the country's friendly business climate assures one of the lowest flat tax, VAT and income tax in the EU, tax exemption on reinvested profit and income tax exemption.

On the other hand, in Romania more than 100.000 families live in precarious informal housing. More than 24.000 forced evictions were performed by the bailiffs in the last 17 years (some evictions affecting tens of families and hundreds of persons). Romania has the highest overcrowding rate in Europe. About 25% of the population lives under the risk of poverty and almost 40% of the population lives under the risk-of- poverty-and-social exclusion. About 50% of the employees earn the minimum wage and in-work rate poverty is 18%. Gini coefficient displays one of the highest income inequality in Europe. Since 2007, the government has spent less than 800 million lei (around 150 million euros) for social housing, which is less than 3% of the governmental funds supporting housing development and mortgages.

## **2. Pata Rât – a failure of the municipality of Cluj-Napoca to provide secure housing and prevent evictions<sup>i</sup>**

As *Maps 1 and 2 from the Annex* show, Pata Rât's inhabitants are grouped in four 'communities'. They have diverse histories and, besides housing deprivation and insecurity, are all faced with the risks inherent in the proximity of the city's landfill. The wasteland not only stigmatizes and inferiorizes people by undermining their human dignity, but also endangers their life.

People informally inhabiting the sub-zones called 'Dallas' and 'Rampa de gunoi' are the oldest inhabitants of Pata Rât (*Photo 1 in the Annex*). Their ancestors established these sub-zones starting with the end of the 1960s as waste collectors. The old landfill, these people's home under the conditions of lacking other alternatives, and at the same time their workplace, was closed down by the municipality in 2015, but it was not ecologized ever since. Besides, because – despite the EC's pressure on Romania and on the city – the responsible authorities did not manage to build up by that time a waste management centre, two new so-called temporary waste lands were authorized in the same area. The temporary nature and adequacy of these fields is contested by several ecological and social activists who demonstrate that they continue to pollute the site and endanger the life of people living nearby.

As part of the city's post-socialist development, Cantonului colony was formed starting with the end of the 1990s (*Photo 2 and 3 in the Annex*). This happened when people evicted from several other urban neighbourhoods (Avram Iancu Street, Calea Turzii, Albac Street, Kővári Street, Byron Street, temporary shelters for civic protection, etc.) were directed towards 'strada Cantonului', through the assistance of City Hall. Those evicted were allowed to settle in the area via several administrative initiatives, but they were never acknowledged as legal settlers.

The last date of significant population growth in Pata Rât was 2010 (*Photo 4 in the Annex*). This was the year when the local public administration transformed one of Pata Rât's areas formerly acknowledged as an industrial zone into a residential area, and constructed 10 modular houses in that location. These buildings proved to be the so-called 'social houses' provided for the 76 families evicted by City Hall from Coastei Street in December 2010 (marked as 'Noul Pata Rât' on Map 1 from the Annex).

To conclude: **in the past two decades, Pata Rât was extended from an informal settlement of exploited landfill workers into a large deprived and racialized housing area inhabited by almost 2000 impoverished persons, due to several factors**, such as:

- a **series of evictions** of impoverished Roma from other parts of the city and their resettlement in Pata Rât by the local public authorities;
- the **lack of development of a public housing stock** that could respond in an adequate way to the housing needs of the low-income people;
- the **scarcity of investment by the City Hall in the proper ecologization of the landfill or in the improvement of the infrastructural condition** of the Pata Rât housing areas, for example their connection to public utilities and public transport.

### 3. The “Pata Cluj” project – externalization of responsibility and rescaling desegregation <sup>ii</sup>

“Pata-Cluj” was a project implemented in Cluj-Napoca, Romania between October 2014 and April 2017 by the Intercommunity Development Association of Cluj Metropolitan Area (IDA-CMA, a non-governmental organization with public utility), with the support of the poverty alleviation program of the Norway Grants Romania. So not by the City Hall of Cluj-Napoca that, as we have shown above, had a great role in its formation, and not from or with the contribution of the budget of one of the fastest growing and richest cities of Romania. As a result of the project, the new homes became nor the property of the local public authorities, or of the people in whose name the project was written, but the property of IDA-CMA. In this way, “Pata Cluj” created a new type of social housing, i.e. private social housing for the poor. **Due to these facts, its actions are inscribed into the larger trend of externalizing public service provisions from the obligation of public authorities towards the capacity of private sector to attract money for project-based interventions.**

The full title of the “Pata Cluj” project referred to Cluj Metropolitan Area, and specifically to its vulnerable groups, including the disadvantaged Roma. But actually, its beneficiaries were only the inhabitants of the underdeveloped landfill area of the city of Cluj, Pata Rât. The Pata-Cluj project started without a housing component, however, prior to its elaboration it seemed that under the pressure of anti-ghettoization activists from the city, housing was accepted as being

the core element of the whole problem. Fortunately, even if later during the project's lifetime, the project team required and was provided with funds for housing. As a result of the housing component, 35 families were relocated from Pata Rât (cc 10% of the total inhabitants). Two thirds of them were given apartments bought or constructed by project money outside of the city of Cluj-Napoca, in three of the villages of the Cluj Metropolitan Area (Apahida, Florești, Baci). Likewise, during the project, 15 school-aged children who benefitted from the project's educational services, were enrolled in schools outside of the city of Cluj-Napoca (located in Cojocna and Cara villages). By these measures, the "Pata Cluj" project undertook the desegregation of Pata Rât via the relocation of the low-income city dwellers outside the territorial-administrative boundaries of Cluj-Napoca, to the villages of Cluj Metropolitan Area.

**Is this rescaling of desegregation from the city to the metropolitan level a technical solution? Or is it a new manifestation of an urban development that pushes as far as it can from its valued territories the people that it racializes as inferior and worthless to live in the developed city?**

According to its claims, the "Pata Cluj" project not only aimed to improve people's lives, but also to prepare mainstream public services "to reach out for the most vulnerable groups in the society...". One may note that it might have had a positive impact on the social workers of the specialized department of the City Hall, but it did not generate change in city policies regarding Pata Rât, evictions, social housing or urban development, and its team was not sustained by the municipality for very long after the project budget was consumed. The full scope of socio-territorial justice to the inhabitants of Pata Rât is still waiting to be delivered by further externally funded projects. No political accountability, no institutional change, and no financial or other types of contributions have been enacted by the decision-making bodies of the local public administration towards improving living conditions in Pata Rât or assuring the relocation of the inhabitants into adequate homes in other parts of the city. As an exception, in 2018, the City Hall of Cluj-Napoca launched the rent subsidy program for homeless people, and it considered that in this way it might solve the problem of housing provision for those in need. Through this program, the City Hall undertakes to pay the partial or total rent (depending on the income of the persons concerned) directly to the owners of the dwellings. The major

problem of this system is the great difficulty of Roma families with children to find owners to rent them their apartments. Besides this problematic matter, the system of subsidization of private rent is also disputable because through it, instead of creating public social housing, the city hall directs money from the public budget to private owners.

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### **Căși sociale ACUM!/ Social housing NOW!: *Statement on Pata Rât* <sup>iii</sup>**

Our movement is sustained by Roma, Romanian and Hungarian activists, academics and artists from Cluj-Napoca, among them dwellers of the Pata Rât area. Căși sociale ACUM!/ Social housing NOW! is one of the leading forces of political activism for housing justice in Romania. Pata Rât is a ghettoized space formed with the contribution of the public authorities of Cluj-Napoca, while this deprived area assures home for the cheap labour force exploited in different stigmatized industries contributing to the city's wellbeing. Therefore, **we sustain that the local public administration is accountable for responding to the housing needs of the Pata Rât inhabitants and it has to respond to them with a just and non-racist politics of public housing. We call for the support of international community of human rights defenders, policy makers and donors to put pressure on our local authorities in this sense.**

We observe: all the evictions leading to the formation of Pata Rât were forced evictions, i.e. evictions as a result of which evictees were transformed into homeless people - either in the strict sense of the word, i.e. without a roof above their head or in the sense of people who were offered by the authorities some sorts of emergency homes, such as waggons and containers on Cantonului Street or the modular houses built nearby the landfill.

We note: forced evictions leading to the formation of Pata Rât are not part of a remote past, but are a feature of our very present. Evictions from retroceded buildings and lands are continuing. Evictions from degraded buildings belonging to the old state-owned housing stock that the municipality does not want to improve, continue. Evictions from vacant spaces where low-income people create themselves a living space in the absence of alternatives, especially if they are in territories targeted by real estate development, continue. Evictions from social

housing due to the failure of paying the rent or of public utilities whose cost increased a lot in the past 10 years due to their privatisation, also continue. In all of these cases, the Cluj-Napoca City Hall and Local Council fail to fulfil their obligations defined under the rule of Romania's social legislation. People remaining homeless, without other housing alternatives, are continuing to look for a home in Pata Rât, even if that is unsecure and inadequate. All of these instances, alongside with other several tens of thousands of cases of forced eviction happening in Romania that affect hundreds of thousands of persons, demonstrate how the Romanian state fails to respect the international treaties that it signed in what regards securing housing for all, and forbidding and preventing evictions.

After almost 10 years of the eviction from Coastei street and the forced resettlement of the evictees nearby the landfill, after 20 years since the Cantonului street colony started to evolve, and after almost a half of century of the existence of the Dallas informal settlement, we recall the attention of the international human rights and policy-making community towards this fact: **the existence of Pata Rât housing area nearby the landfill is a manifestation of racism against the Roma and against the poor, and it is an act that not only dehumanizes people day-by-day but also endangers their life. We demand from the European community to assure a European housing strategy that allows and facilitates public investments into public housing, and enforces the respect of housing as a universal human right by assuring housing for those who cannot afford a home from the market and makes the fulfilment of the housing needs of low-income people a high priority!**

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> The information presented in this chapter is based on the one hand on a collective research done under the project „Spatialization and racialization of social exclusion: the formation of Roma ‘ghettoes’ in Romania in a European context”. The project produced a Romanian language volume on Pata Rât (*Pata*, edited by Adrian Dohotaru, Enikő Vincze and Hajnalka Harbula, EFES: Cluj, 2016), an English language volume (*Racialized Labour in Romania. Spaces of Marginality at the Periphery of Global Capitalism*, edited by Enikő Vincze, Norbert Petrovici,



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Cristina Raț and Giovanni Picker, Palgrave MacMillan 2018), and three documentaries,, among them *Social justice in Pata Cluj*, documentary, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tafj5l0r7ek>. On the other hand, we could reveal the lived individual and collective experiences of evictions and lack of proper and secure housing by the means of an ongoing activist research conducted by people involved in the housing justice movement *Căși sociale ACUM!/ Social housing NOW* ([www.casisocialeacum.ro](http://www.casisocialeacum.ro)). This resulted among others in some documentary films about the formation and reproduction of Pata Rât:

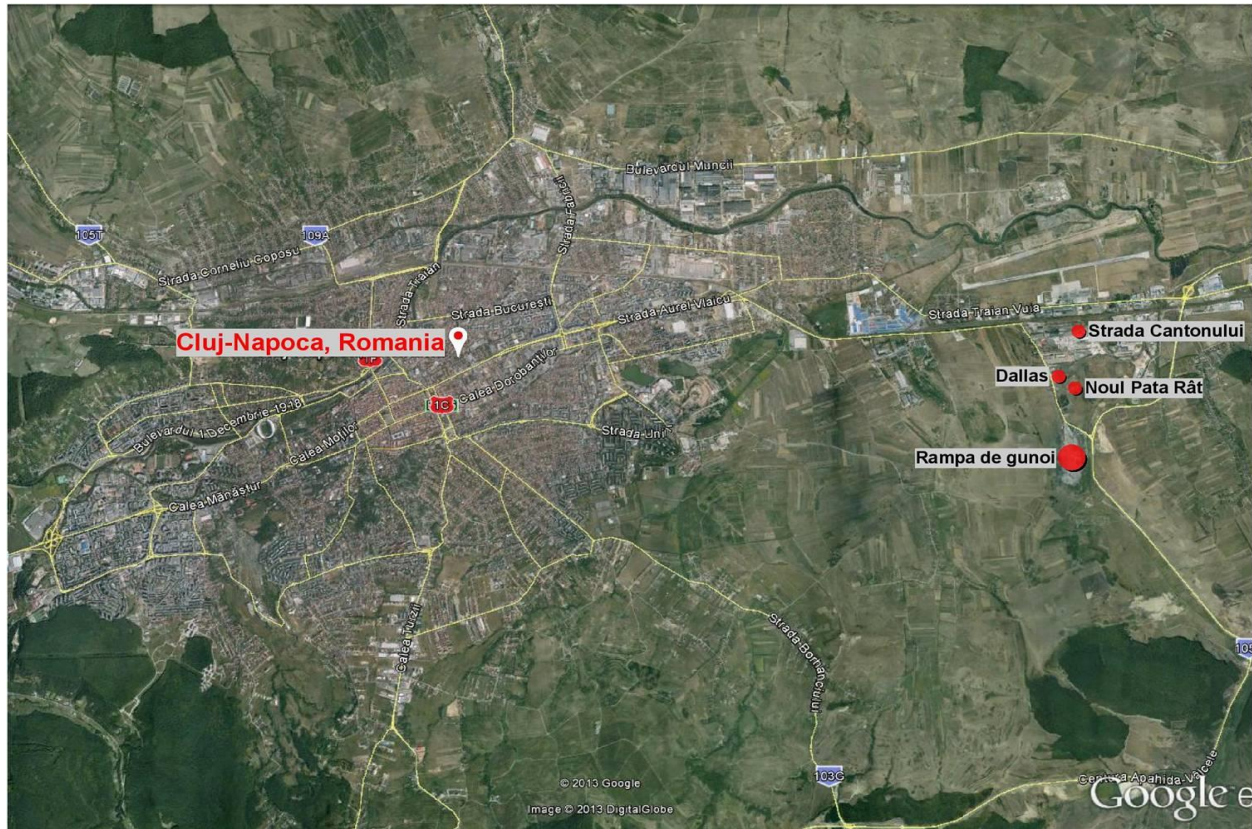
*Roma are not garbage*, documentary film, 2017,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihP\\_rs3lOoE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihP_rs3lOoE); *Dislocations. Eviction routes towards Cantonului street (1996-2016)*, documentary film, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/194308421>;

<sup>ii</sup> The ideas presented in this chapter resulted from an action research conducted under an FRA program (Local engagement for Roma inclusion, LERI), resulting in the case of Cluj in the following report: *LERI. Community study, Cluj-Napoca (Romania)*, 2016, by Enikő Vincze, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/local-engagement-roma-romania-cluj-napoca\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/local-engagement-roma-romania-cluj-napoca_en.pdf). And as well as from the study made by Foundation Desire as member of the consortium of the RELOCAL research project with the financial support of Horizon 2020. Authors of the report *The Pata Cluj project – residential desegregation of the landfill area of Cluj-Napoca*, finalized in March 2019 were Cristina Bădiță and Enikő Vincze.

## ANNEXES

## Maps of Pata Rât, Cluj-Napoca, Romania (Map 1 and Map 2)





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*Photo 1, Dallas, Pata Rât, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*



More info in the documentary film made by Desire Foundation in 2017: *Roma are not garbage*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihP\\_rs3IOoE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihP_rs3IOoE)

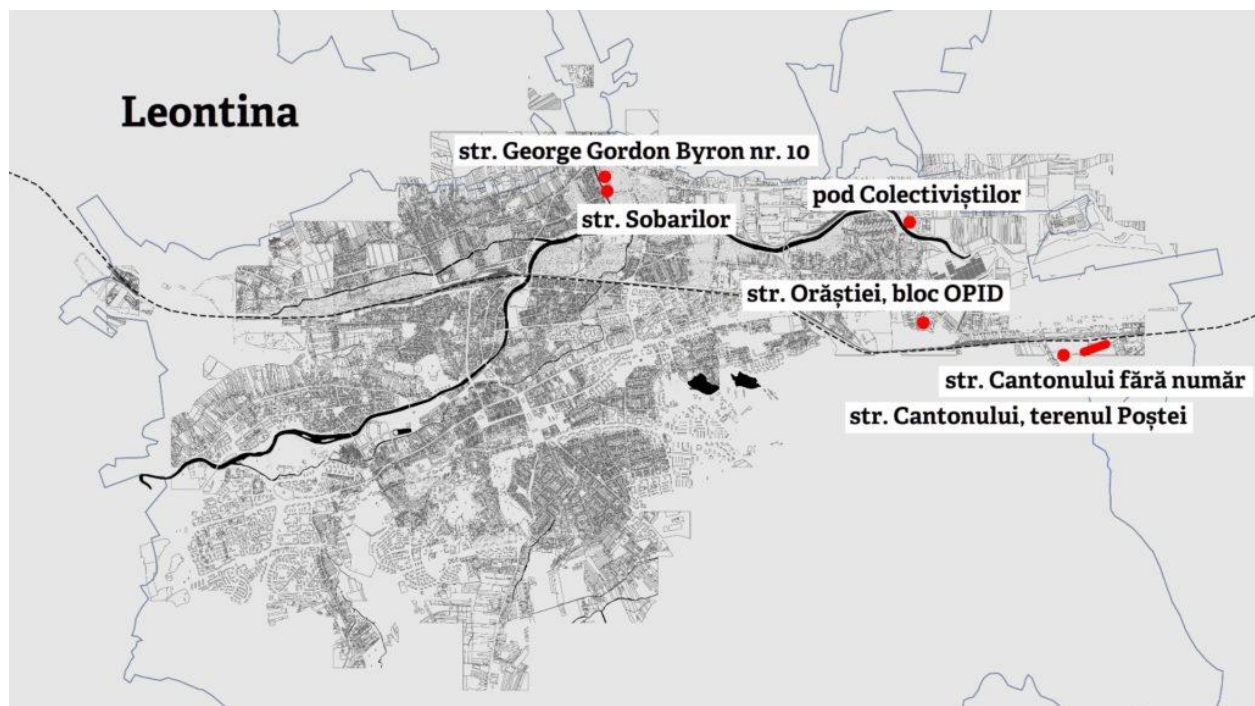
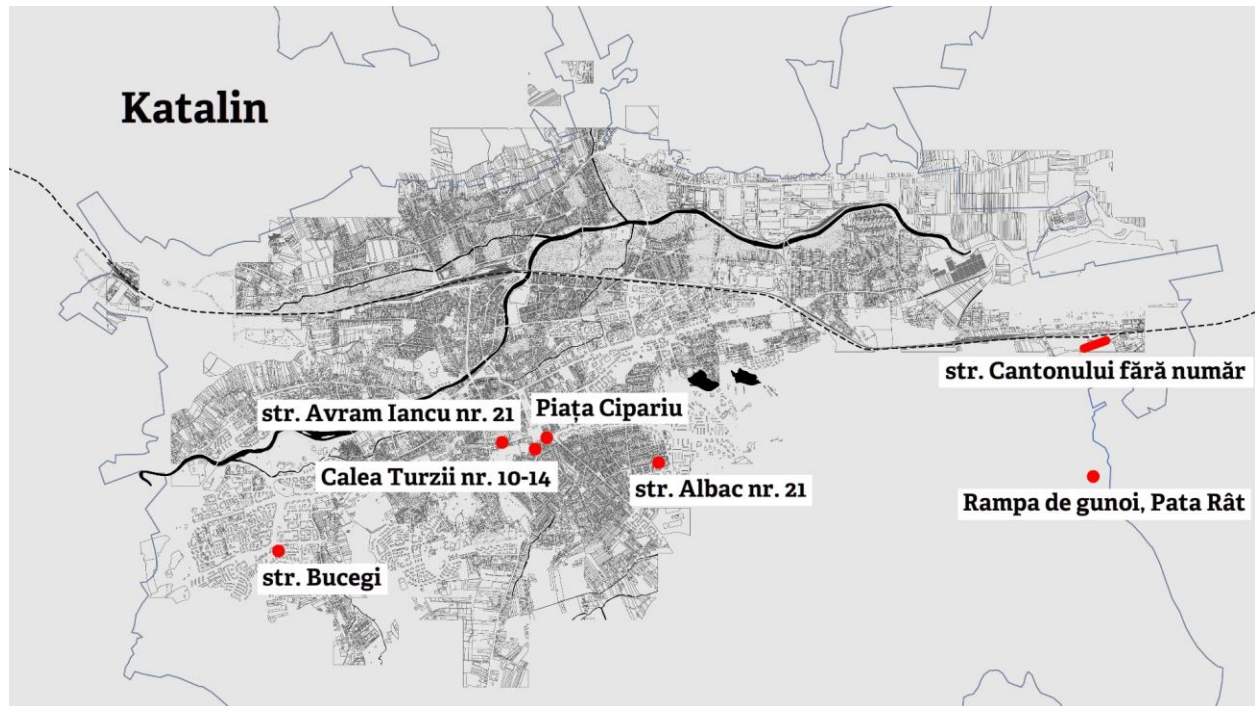
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Photo 2, Cantonului street, Pata Rât, Cluj-Napoca, Romania



More information in the documentary film made by Desire Foundation in 2016: *Dislocations. Eviction routes towards Cantonului street (1996-2016)*, <https://vimeo.com/194308421>  
Trailer, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zExkAhXL-CI>

Photo 3, Examples of eviction routes displacing people towards Pata Rât



Documented in the film Dislocation, mentioned above



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Photo 4, Noul Pata Rât, modular houses, Pata Rât, Cluj-Napoca, Romania



More information in the documentary film made in 2016 within the research project *Spatialization and racialization of social exclusion: Social justice in Pata Cluj*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tafjsl0r7ek>

iii Moments of housing activism “Căși sociale ACUM!/Social housing NOW!”, <http://casisocialeacum.ro/>

- Pata rămâne a tuturor, 17 December 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KnOZYFqVn0>
- Cluj Manifesto against forced evictions, 17 December 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KCHdYl\\_x9k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KCHdYl_x9k)
- Street performance, Racism at home, 21 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPPhXVF6x6c>

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*Photo 5, made by Adrian Nemeti with the occasion of the event SOS – Scoateți-ne din Pata Rât (Take us out from Pata Rât), 17 December 2013*



Foto: Adrian Nemeti