High Level Event follow-up on the EU Structural Funds Contribution to Roma Integration in Slovakia

Košice 23 May 2013

Panel on: Basic infrastructure, housing, health

Abstract: Suggestions for an integrated intervention for Roma and non Roma housing

Monica Rossi, CNR IRPPS

Background informations: Roma encampments in Italy

The case of the Roma encampments in Italy represents a perfect example of a modern hyperghetto\(^1\). The conditions that we have seen as temporary even for migrants arrived just from a few years have instead become permanent for the members of this minority. The forms of segregation and marginalisation to which the foreign Roma in particular are subjected are unprecedented and have remained largely unchanged. The first groups of foreign Roma reached Italy after 1965. Much as the Italians, they would settle and build self-made dwellings on abandoned portions of land on the city’s periphery, thus they remained for a long time ignored by institutions. During the decade 1980 – 1990 there was an attempt to regulate this issue, at least at a local government level. Thus 11 Italian regions promulgated specific laws dedicated to Roma\(^2\). These acts, in the intentions of the legislators, instituted the encampments as places that should address the needs of a population that was believed to be nomadic and have been implemented with the idea of “preserving” and “protecting” the Roma cultural heritage and tradition. It was also requested to local authority to build these camps in areas reached by public transport, and to serve them with infrastructure supported by interventions for social inclusion and occupation. Actually very few of these actions have been effectively realised. The intervention of social and working integration have been largely limited and ineffective. With this form of differentiated treatment, based on a social policy that was presumed to be “anthropologically correct”, the phenomenon of the encampments in Italy was created. This choice has resulted in the maintenance of the Roma as a separate sector of the Italian society, contributing to increase prejudices and mistrust. Ethnic separation, spatial segregation and institutional carelessness have crystallised the Roma situation in a way that today we have arrived at the fifth generation that is born in an encampment and is under the constant threat of evictions. One of the main problems that Roma people are facing is the one created by decade of housing segregation that has been imposed on them and at the same time is produced and reproduced. No one today defends the encampments anymore, and a recent ruling of the Consiglio di Stato declared those built in Rome by the Mayor Gianni Alemanno to be illegal\(^3\). Nonetheless there is still a

\(^1\) On the transformation of the ghetto into an hyperghetto see Rossi M. (2012), Fiori nella discarica. Forme di resistenza nell’iperghetto, in: Inchiesta n.175.

\(^2\) For the Lazio region see: L.R. 24/5/1985, n. 82 “Norme in favore dei Rom”.

\(^3\) Ruling 6050 of the 16 november which states the illegitimity of the emergency state declared by the President of the Council of Ministers the 21st may 2008.
tendency to suggest an *ad hoc* housing model for Roma, like those of the *microareas*⁴. I honestly consider these solutions to be ineffective under the aspect of social inclusion⁵ and harmful for their possible repercussions on social cohesion⁶. Further, in a country affected by chronic land overbuilding, agricultural land should instead be preserved. Those scholars who are suggesting solutions such as the microareas should then be sent in the territory to explain, justify and implement them. In my opinion, today in Europe the most advanced housing policy model is the French, that after the realisation that the *banlieue* did not create satellite modern neighbourhoods but a concentration of marginality, has undergone a deep self-review which led to the experimentation of forms of housing centered on the concept of *mixité sociale*. Choices like that of reserving a certain number of homes in every city neighbourhood to “disadvantaged” categories is a project which communicates a great vision of society and which prevents social suffering from being geographically concentrated in one place. To this project we must then add the one already quoted here of the creation of the ZEPs for the *banlieue*, chosen on the basis of indicators of the social disadvantaged. It is to these pioneering experiences that we should look for inspiration. Two important experiments of housing inclusion have been realised in Turin ("Il Dado") and in Rome ("Metropoliz"⁷), one supported by institutions, the other completely self-organised. It is from these examples that we must learn and start to build a path for the exit from the encampments and for the access to housing, but also to diffuse forms of active citizenship, so important for a community which has experimentated mostly segregated ways of living. But what is important in the examples quoted above is the methodology. It must be remembered that it is not sufficient to have a free available building. What must also be encouraged, in all the communities involved, is a journey toward active citizenship and participation in the *res publica*.

**A Roman experience**

The Movement of the Fight for the Right to Housing (from now on MFRH)⁸ is an historical Roman organisation dedicated to the re use of abandoned public and private building with the practice of squatting. These movements of squatters are in contact with the Municipality’s Government who has in many case recognised the occupations and often by mean of specific Deliberations⁹ has conceded the building or granted access to social housing. The Movement is so large and rooted in the territory that it has had even an elected member in the Municipality Council of Rome. It exists since the 1960’s, at a time when the shanty towns in Rome were hosting some 60.000 impoverished Italians. This Movement in time has enlarged and it has been joined by others organisations (*ATTAC*, *Blocchi Precari Metropolitani* and others), all dedicated to the problem of housing in Rome, where lack of housing is chronical and local poverty endemic. House squatting in Italy, and especially in Rome, is a popular practice and bears no resemblance at all with the 1970’s English or

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⁴ Senato della Repubblica Italiana, (2009), Commissione straordinaria per la tutela e protezione dei diritti umani, “Rapporto conclusivo dell’indagine sulla condizione di Rom, Sinti e Caminanti in Italia”, p.60.

⁵ Differentiated solutions ends up with suggesting an “irreconcilable diversity” of the groups toward which these actions are directed. Further, considering also the “gender” issue, often conveniently underevaluated in many researches and reports, the closed contexts do not favour the social mixing and neither they endorse female emancipation. The community is a shelter but it is also a cage. Why postulate this dimension as natural for a whole group? Unless is at work also here a form of thought dissociation basing on which for “us” there are the democratic rights, and for the “others” the tradition.

⁶ In this moment of crisis such solutions will create frictions among the rest of the population, migrants included, many of which comes even from other continents without ever having been necessary to implement for them special forms of housing.


⁸ Movimento di Lotta per la Casa.

⁹ See for example: *Comune di Roma*, Deliberation n.110/2005 and the new one (which also includes the “Metropoliz”).
Dutch squatting movement because the protagonists are prevalently familiar groups or single adults who cannot afford to rent an apartment. In the year 2008 a group of Romanian Roma families and individuals of circa 100 persons, all coming from Kalarasi, settles in a large abandoned area in the eastern periphery of Rome along the via Casilina. After one year, in November 2008 they have been evicted for the first time. The solution offered by the Municipality was that of being transferred in a former squatted and abandoned paper factory along the via Salaria in hygienic and living conditions which were even worse than that of the encampment. A small NGO that was volunteering with members of this group and who was also in contact with the MFRH, decided to propose to the evicted Roma to join the Movement and begun a series of meeting with the members of the Occupation Committee. Many were afraid of having a whole community of 90 people entering the occupation, but in the end a newly formed group, the *Blocchi Precari Metropolitani*, accepted to try and welcomed them in a huge former factory along the via Prenestina: the so called “Metropoliz” group, already inhabited by 110 Italians, Moroccans, Peruvians and African families. When the Roma arrived it was explained to them how the place worked and was organised: all decisions are taken collectively in the assembly, which must be participated from everyone and where everyone must express his/her views. The space would be assigned on the bases of family’s needs and commitment in the occupation regardless any other consideration. Common tasks such as cleaning, fixing and patrolling of the area are also undertook collectively with turns. Abusive language and behaviour is banned, it is forbidden to beat or mistreat women or children. Children must go to school together with the children of the other groups accompanied by their own parents. The base idea of the project is the direct representation, and that everyone must take responsibility for the place, individually and collectively.

**Lessons learnt**

Since 2009 there have been the following results:

1) For the first time a group of Roma entered into an historical local movement such as that of MFRH joining other groups and breaking the vicious ethnic trap which led to the creation of the encampments. Regardless of ethnic origins all occupants who live there are considered as people who share common rights and common needs, in a self determination path. Also, there are now at least five nationalities living together, including impoverished working class Romans. This has helped to break also forms of ethnic segregation and jealousies which have been often the cause for rivalry and hate among locals and foreigners poors.

2) For the first time it has changed the mechanism of leadership and political representation among all the groups involved, including the Roma. In the “Metropoliz” experience there are no community leaders, prominent members of the community, head of families or mediators. Everybody is held responsible for his/her actions and must participate to all collective decisions and tasks, expressing his/her views in the assemblies regardless their sex, origin or social position.

3) Not a single euro has been asked to Institutions ot to Companies. The “Metropoliz” people refuses the logic of the public bids and that of cementification. The city of Rome has many abandoned buildings and warehouses like this, and they could be reused with relatively little money and according to environment friendly standards thus offering solutions to many problems like that of the lack of housing and unemployment.

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10 The former military Airport “F. Baracca”, who later became a large Roma dwelling under the name “Casilino 700” (destroyed in 2000), only a few meters away from another historical Roman shanty towns first inhabited by Italians and later on by Roma, “Casilino 900” (destroyed in 2009).
11 See video on You Tube here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLAdxUYkFJQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLAdxUYkFJQ)
12 POPICA Onlus.
13 See video on You Tube here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeqIINjcOvY&feature=feedf_more](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeqIINjcOvY&feature=feedf_more)
All the public rooms, the apartments, common areas, common services have been refurbished and fixed by the same occupants with the technical help of the group “Stalker” and that of a Researcher of the Faculty of Architecture University of Roma 3, Francesco Careri, who like me, came to knew this project and strongly supported it.

In April 2011 the Rome’s city Mayor Gianni Alemanno included also the “Metropoliz” inhabitants in a 2007 Municipality Council Deliberation\textsuperscript{14} for the population with housing needs. This does not mean that the factory where the “Metropoliz” people are living now will be entrusted to them, but that 25% of the social and Municipal houses that will be made available in the course of time, will be reserved to the “Metropoliz” dwellers.

It is the first time in the history of the housing issue in Rome that an entire foreign Roma community gain access to social housing and I consider it as one of the most successful experiences ever put into practice.

**A proposal for transferability:**

The project described above took place in Italy, but anywhere else in Europe it will be possible for local institutions who owns public and abandoned places to entrust these properties to local groups of citizens. It is not necessary to squat them. The aim should be that of renewing and use them as homes and collective spaces for the neighbourhood or district. Institutions and citizens would cooperate for a common good, and the action could become a vector for local empowerment and development. After the renewal of buildings there are other possible initiatives for employment in order also to guarantee a minimum degree of sustainability. The project is based on a strong partnership and cooperation between institutions and citizens, meaning that the chances of success are proportional to the institutions’ commitment and capacity of networking in order to overcome the bureaucratical aspects in a spirit of mutual cooperation.

**Action to be taken**

The aim of this action is that of producing an integrated intervention for Roma and non Roma in order to solve not only the housing need, but also (within the same intervention plan) to tackle other urgent social and economic issues such as:

- Favour social inclusion and social mixing (social cohesion)
- Stimulate processes of active citizenship (social awareness)
- Reduce unemployment (economic inclusion)
- Increase the collective social capital of the area involved

The main idea is that of mobilising the local population joining Roma and non Roma in the building of a common plan for the common good (*bene comune*) with the support and participation of all the local competent institutions. All actions should target both Roma and non Roma.

**Action A:** Building of a “map of the local needs” drawn by institutions after a consultation of the local inhabitants’ needs. Building of a map of the social and cultural capital of the area involved. The aim of this mapping is that of singling out individuals and groups from both communities who would be willing to offer their skills for the project (plumbers, electricians, ecc.).

At the same time institutions should organise open and public meetings to explain to the local population the plan. Such meetings should include citizens and citizens’ local organisation with the help of institutions, schools, trade unions, NGO and any other social actor available and willing to participate to the project.

**Action B: Institutions should set up a census of the unused/abandoned public building and establish a network between Cadaster Offices and local institutions for the creation of a database on the available spaces and buildings.**

**Action C:** Organisation of citizens in social cooperatives for the buildings renewal project and for the following maintenance. Institutional support. Collective refurbishment of abandoned buildings by Roma and non Roma population. Building and maintenance of public spaces (parks, public gardens and orchards, spaces for children or elders etc.)

**Responsible actors**
Local Roma and non Roma citizens, institutions, NGOs, trade unions, chamber of commerces, others.

**Monitoring and evaluation: Notes for an impact assessment of the project**

An impact assessment serves to determine if and how a specific action or intervention has had an impact on the target population to which it was destined.

Opposite to output evaluation, which only measures the implementation of the action itself without any specific attention to the real changes, the impact assessment can measure the actual improvements produced by both projects and policies in the life of beneficiaries. Assessment and evaluation procedures are invaluable tools and their results serve to correct and eventually to reassess the intervention during the course of its life span. Its use is beneficial not only to the target community, but also to the stakeholders involved who are in need of keeping track of changes, improvements or obstacles.

Here below I am listing a small prospectus on how to provide output and impact evaluation for the project\(^\text{15}\).

**a) Quantitative aspects (measurement of output):**

Regarding the quantitative aspects it will be important to record:

- Number of citizens involved
- Number of citizens who expressed satisfaction through a questionnaire
- Number of Roma and non Roma employed (sample population equally divided per gender and age groups)
- Number of households/individuals who gained access to proper housing
- Other

**b) Qualitative evaluation (measurement of impact):**

\(^{15}\) The grid below is purely indicative and does not represent the whole evaluation package that will be necessary for a proper assessment. Nonetheless the author thinks that they will suffice to give an idea of the general goal and methodology of the assessment procedure.
Impact assessment procedures should be used to determine the effective changes realised in the situation of individuals or communities targeted by the intervention.

Interviews with the beneficiaries should address a series of questions to be submitted to each member of the extended family. Here is a minimum sample grid for interviews:

-How many members of this family have been actively involved in the project?
-Who? (Gender, age class)
-With which role?
-Has the project changed somehow their situation?
-How?
-What things have they done that would not have been possible without this project?
-What improvements can be enacted to the project?
-Other

Then, in order to complete the data gathered among the communities, a similar set of questions should be submitted to the other stakeholders involved (Institutions and NGO) and with a random control group of local non Roma coming from the same economic and social background. These data obtained from sources other than that of the target group (control group) will serve to check the data gathered within the community, to reassess the intervention and to correct possible failures.

**Who will create the monitoring and evaluation system?**

An independent third party. Preferably a public research institute.