



Baltesti, Romania. Winter of 2010

Social housing in Romania - Context after 90s

- After 1990 the state and in particular the local authorities have moved away from reckoning with the social problems of the homeless, concomitantly with a substantial increase in poverty
- Evictions and various degrees of neglect have been the two major approaches for addressing clandestine inhabitants and squatters.
- The agency dealing with the social housing in Romania is the National Agency for Housing, but....

(Cosima Rughinis, 2001)

....The National Agency for Housing focuses especially on the middle-class of young public employees, not on vulnerable groups

.....only several local authorities have adopted initiatives to contain the social problems of their residents by providing some form of housing but most of these programs have proposed:

to collectively resettle the Roma tenants at the margins of the town.

One of the most known case is that of Piatra Neamt (October 2001), when the mayor stated that he plans to build a “ghetto” for the Roma, thus stirring political and media. At that time mayors in cities of Deva and Baia-Mare also expressed their intention to build similar housing estates for local Roma, to “solve”the social problems of these unwanted residents.

Plus, when the city halls tries to develop housing projects for Roma tenants, they faces:

-resistance from the ethnic majority. One recent example (2009) is the Sighisoara case, where the city hall tried to build 120 houses (in 4,600 sqm) for Roma inhabitants. Romanians protested in the street and decided to send a memorium to the local and national authorities, accusing them of lack of public consultation

-Resistance from the Roma ethnics (Targu Mures, Valea Rece neighbourhood), due to the fact that the community development actions don't exist

Plus, some of the conditions are discriminatory, such as the video surveillance in Baia Mare (July 2009), where the 224 social housing units were built especially for Roma ethnics.

- And...all the initiatives are in the hands of local authorities (sometimes acting as “landlords”), there are not national initiatives for Roma housing programs, only isolated ones...Plus, they are not known or discussed with other institutions or NGOs to analyse the impact
- In 2008, the former minister initiated a governmental program, with 300 houses to be built in Roma communities

Conditions to have access to this program:

- ✓ A income under the medium net in Romania
- ✓ Family members should not have a home in their property or have sold a house after 90s or benefited of state help

Roles of the public institutions:

- the National Agency for Housing is responsible for building new houses
- The Ministry allocates the money from national budget
- Local administrations are responsible for the connection to utilities, with the local sources or others (such as European Funds)
- After the construction, the new houses become part of the public local property, being administrated by the local councils
- The houses repartition is made after the local analysis of the demands

Questions:

- Are the communities involved?
- Are the NGOs involved?
- The housing project is accompanied by projects in other domains (education, community development)?

Alternatives?

I. Housing programs developed together with NGOs, with the involvement of the local authorities, with:

- a strong community development component
- Volunteerism
- Incremental solutions (renovations or repairs instead of new houses)
- Target group formed by Roma and nonRoma ethnics

In Romania, Habitat for Humanity proposed a “national agency for housing” for vulnerable groups.

Funding: private (by now)



Houses renovations in Baltesti, Prahova (85 km from Bucharest). January 2011. **“One home, one future”** project , year 2.





Houses renovations in Baltesti, Prahova (85 km from Bucharest). January 2011. **“One home, one future”** project , year 2.





House of Cires family – before and intermediary stages, Vanatori Neamt, January 2011



House of Cires family – final

II. Microfinance for solving the most urgent housing needs for people living in poor conditions

- Partners: housing NGO (such us Habitat) in partnership with a microfinance institution (or bank)
- The small loans should be accompanied by technical assistance for repairs/renovations
- The community development component should be “mandatory”
- Question: these interventions approach mainly the emergency of the housing issue. Sustainability and urban planning should also be considered.

Funding: Private

Countries: Macedonia, Bulgaria, Armenia, Bosnia, Slovakia, Tajikistan

Bulgaria: The loans allow families to finance self-help home improvement construction to reduce their energy costs and to improve their housing conditions. Home improvements may include the following items: roof repair, hydro insulation, exterior wall insulation, window repair or replacement, updating bathroom fixtures, replacement of inefficient appliances, etc.



Nadya and Ivan Hadziev used a Habitat loan to improve their bathroom for their sons Mihail, left, and Mitko.

*III. Large scale programs for housing /urban development
(Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative in USA)
http://www.habitat.org/env/NRI_default.aspx*

“ Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative affiliates tailor work being done in each neighborhood to meet its specific needs.”

Habitat for Humanity affiliates, in partnership with community organizations and agencies, will decide what work needs to be carried out in their community. A wide array of housing services can be tapped to help transform communities in need, such as:

- New, energy-efficient house construction.
- Rehabilitation of vacant and foreclosed properties.
- House repairs for existing low-income homeowners, through [A Brush with Kindness](#) and critical home repairs.
- Weatherization to make existing houses more [energy efficient](#) and affordable.”

Partners and funding: private and public.

Conclusions:

1. Habitat Romania have helped (through new buildings and renovations) 1700 families in 10 years. It is almost “nothing” compared with the need; we need more partners near us.
2. Our housing programs targeting poor compact Roma community are not “sustainable” in terms of social business, people can’t afford to repay the entire cost of the house. The situation is different with the individual Roma families (the “traditional program”)
3. Long term integration is possible if the housing program is part of a bigger program, including education, employment, health and community development (not necessary all of them together)
4. Our aim is to target 2000 families per year, not only with the new houses, but also with different housing products

Thank you!



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