

THE SOCIO-SPATIAL DIMENSION OF THE BUCHAREST GHETTOS

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Abstract

Based on a socio-spatial analysis, this paper aims at drawing the authorities' attention on a few Bucharest ghettos that occurred after the 1990s. After the Revolution, Bucharest has undergone many socio-spatial changes. The modifications that occurred in the urban perimeter manifested in the technical and urban dynamics, in the urban infrastructure, and in the socio-economic field. The dynamics and the urban evolution of Bucharest have affected the community life, especially the community homogeneity intensely desired during the communist regime by the occurrence of socially marginalized spaces or ghettos as their own inhabitants call them. Ghettos represent an urban stain of color, a special morphologic framework. The Bucharest "ghettos" appeared by a spatial concentration of Roma population and of poverty in zones with a precarious infrastructure. The inhabitants of these areas (Zăbrăuți, Aleea Livezilor, Iacob Andrei, Amurgului and Valea Cascadeilor) are somehow constrained to live in such spaces, mainly because of lack of income, education and because of their low professional qualification. These weak points or handicaps exclude the ghetto population from social participation and from getting access to urban zones with good habitations.

1. Theoretical notions about “ghetto” and “ghettoization”

The process through which the formation of a closed physical and social space, as well as a marginal space is formed in an urban area where ethnic, racial, sexual etc. minorities live, due to poverty and other social constraints is called ghettoization (Gyöngyi and László, 2007, p. 279 in Zamfir and Stănescu, 2007). This definition is almost identical with the one given by Peter Marcuse (2001, p. 4), who states that the ghetto is the geographic area of spatial concentration, that is forcefully used up until the dominant society separates or limits a group of persons, defined as racial, ethnic or foreign and which is treated as inferior by the dominant society.

Such studies can be found in the Romanian specific literature as well, but they refer mainly to the formation of some poverty “bags” in the urban space, often referred to as ghettos or slums. The notion of “ghetto”, in comparison to the one of “slum” has a prevalently ethnic and/or racial connotation (Mionel, 2010, p. 125 *apud* Popova, 2010). The term – which is European but which was used in the United States in the past century both in the Urban Geography and Sociology – is ethnic in nature. This urban socio-spatial structure originates in antique Rome. In the Medieval Europe, the ghetto identified a particular part of the city where Jews used to live, being separated from the Christian population of the city. In Venice, a ghetto also meant a special place belonging to the Jews where one could find a workshop in which workers used to cool the casted iron. It was a *campo gheto*¹.

The American sociological literature assigns a racial connotation to “ghettoization”, mostly because these studies often focused on the places inhabited by the Afro-Americans representing black immigrants from the South attracted by the industrialized cities of the North. This movement from South to North was generated by the discrimination policy promoted by the white population. In other words, the ghetto refers to the segregated neighborhoods which are mostly populated by ethnic minorities that are usually very poor (Gyöngyi and László, 2007, p. 279). Such cases can also be encountered in Bucharest. In certain neighborhoods there are large areas that are inhabited by ethnic minorities – mainly Roma – with a low living standard; there are such areas in the Ferentari, Rahova and Militari neighborhoods.

The economic changes that occurred mainly after the 1950s, as well as the flows of immigrants, revived the term of ghettoization. This time, the term was used to designate the new realities of poor ethnics; the Maghrebians in France, the Turks in Germany, the Greeks in Sweden, and recently, Romanians in Italy.

The process of “ghettoization” is very ample and extremely complex. Generally speaking, this is the process through which very poor neighborhoods are formed, the neighborhoods being closed from both social and cultural points of view and usually populated by ethnic groups. The process itself is complicated and specific to the social and historic context in which it takes place. However, what is defining for the

1 In an approximate translation, it used to mean *the place of freezing the iron*.

ghetto and the ghettoization are linked to the ethnic composition of the respective geographical area. Thus, the ghetto is isolated and segregated as well, a fact which differentiates it from other forms of segregation.

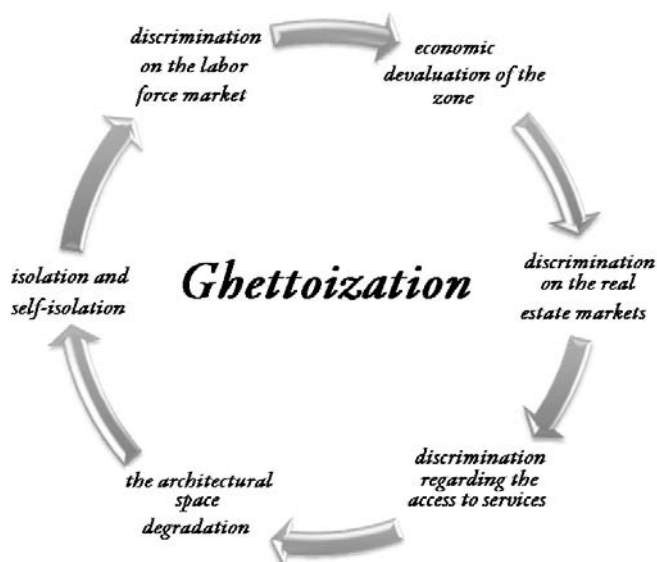


Figure 1: The stages of ghettoization process through the disadvantages cycles

Source: made by author

The process of ghettoization involves certain stages (Henderson and Ledebur, 1972, pp. 180-189) in the formation and development of the ghetto (Figure 1):

1. the discrimination on the labor force market;
2. the economic devaluation of the zone;
3. the discrimination on the real estate markets;
4. the discrimination regarding the access to services;
5. the architectural space degradation; and
6. the isolation and self-isolation.

The stages mentioned above are self-generating and lead to poverty, dirt and exclusion. What happens subsequently to the six stages is nothing else than what is called the disadvantages cycle (Omenya, 2003, p. 14). This cycle of disadvantages is a result of the segregation itself. As far as perception is concerned, the geographical space that is represented by the ghetto is seen by the majority of the population as a different physical and social reality, with inhabitants defined as different and quite often inferior. Such places show up on the mental maps of the majority of population as being “shady” urban spaces. Even in our country, the dimension of the issue is growing and this fact can lead in the future to the generalization of the collective behavior such as urban riots that could later cost important resources for reinsertion and for reintegration.

2. Research methodology

The analysis of the socio-spatial dimension of the Bucharest ghettos is based on three types of data: a first set of data coming from the relevant literature regarding the concepts of ghetto and ghettoization and from the analysis of specific papers and press articles that refer to the Bucharest ghettos; the second package of information comes from interviewing a number of persons having their residence in the analyzed spaces; and the third set of information was selected from some field analyses. Interviews were more like open discussions with some of the locals. Following discussions in the ghetto, some qualitative information were collected, which were correlated subsequently with data from national literature concerning this topic. Furthermore, the study started from a few key-words that helped us to decipher the urban dysfunctions, such as: ghetto, poverty, urban segregation, community, local administration, urban space, education, social assistance etc.

3. The Urban segregation in Bucharest: overview

After 1989, the Bucharest municipality faced many urban transformations. The modifications that happened in the urban space manifested both in the area of techno-urban dynamics or in the one of urban infrastructure in general, as well as in the socio-economic field. The dynamics and the urban evolution of Bucharest marked the life of the community and what is more, the community homogeneity that was so much aimed at during the Communist regime.

Democracy and capitalism brought advantages and disadvantages to the city. Among the advantages, one could count: social freedom, a bigger residential mobility, the possibility to earn a bigger financial income, the possibility – depending on the individual professional capacities and abilities – to obtain a better job, the insertion on the Bucharest market of multinational companies etc. However, on the other hand, disadvantages are not less numerous at all. Together with the possibility of a bigger earning, socio-economic discrepancies showed up. Certainly, there were such social differences before the Democratic Revolution too, but they were much smaller in comparison to what one may observe after 1989.

The socio-economic discrepancies range is quite ample starting from the income level, the quality of the residential space, the dimensions and the number of properties, life quality or the living standard to the spatial individualization of certain social classes. More exactly, the urban evolution of Bucharest for the last twenty years has manifested in a quite chaotic way, despite the fact that it was at another scale and intensity in comparison to the previous periods of time. The persons with high and very high income or urban privileged, or the new urban elites, as these inhabitants are also called, wanted to occupy the best residential spaces or to settle on the town skirts where they created numerous community clusters based on high level of income. This evolution is natural if one takes into account that every human being who enhances the level of his/her income wants to improve his/her living standard, this fact also involving a new and spacious house in a quite central/good area/zone, far from the

daily agitation of the city. However, things did not always evaluate in a desired urban direction. Frequently, new owners built their residences in a chaotic way, in the peripheral space. Simultaneously, the residential projects that were initiated by the real estate developers intersected at the periphery with houses built by the owners, on their own, visually inducing the sensation of an amalgam of space which is not systematized, evolving in a chaotic way. Almost without exception, in the Bucharest neighborhood, along the main roads one may come across this type of landscape. The separation from the city population or the development towards periphery in search of a “country-side” atmosphere, generated a socio-economic segregation in the Bucharest peripheral space. This is obvious in areas such as Pipera in the North of Bucharest and Prelungirea Ghencea in the South-West (Figure 2).

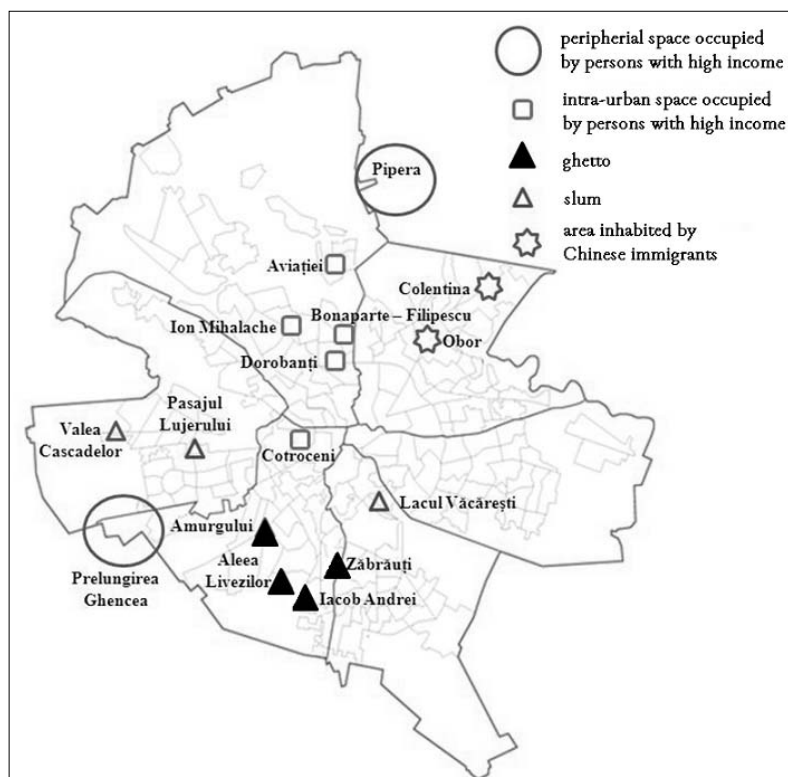


Figure 2: The Map of Bucharest Urban Segregation: Empirical Evidence

Source: made by author

A situation somehow linked to the previous one can be found within the city. Those who are willing to lead a more quiet life within the city try to settle in areas with old houses or villas, built long time ago. These zones are far from the noise and agitation of the city center with a lot of greenery and tranquility, at a great distance from the big crowded boulevards, such as the Cotroceni, Kiseleff or Tei districts. Here, as well as at the periphery, one can notice a socio-economic segregation or self-segregation of the new urban elites.

On the other side of the barricade there are the poverty zones or bags and they are not few, at all. In these urban “lock-ups”, a great deal of the marginalized live. The most, if not all of the areas belonging to these outsiders were formed after the Revolution. Their appearance is the result of socio-economic and political post-Revolution changes. The transition period disturbed the ancient social structures of Bucharest. Nevertheless, one must not forget the fact that, being the capital of Romania, Bucharest kept attracting people from outside the city: in order to find a job, to study or to carry out other activities. Not all of them succeeded and not all of them acquired a qualification. As a consequence, a part of those who came – mostly those unqualified – ended up settling in the marginalized areas, depending on the financial possibilities they had. This aspect refers to poverty and urban segregation, excluding the persons who came to study and who belong to other categories of socio-spatial dimensions and possibilities.

Social segregation caused by poverty is present in many areas of Bucharest. One can also notice that they differ in terms of dimension. Maybe the most relevant example is the Ferentari-Rahova zone in the fifth district, then Aleea Livezilor, Tunsu Petre, Zăbrauți, Amurgului and the Prelungirea Ferentari perimeter where social problems are profound. The urban space covers an extreme form of segregation in this case. Segregation caused by the poverty can be found in all the districts of Bucharest.

It is worth mentioning that there are also several micro-spaces of incipient segregation. By means of analogy with the already world-wide consecrated slums, forms of geographic segregation have occurred in Bucharest too. However, they are not the result of human concentration in an already built urban space which is subject to change by the inhabitants’ quality, but, on the contrary, they are areas in which social segregation has created thoroughly new sites or spatial patterns. These patterns made of huts which do not look at all similar to what is known to be a house/building in Bucharest and which look strikingly like the extreme zones of segregation from the periphery of big cities in the world, will be referred to as slums in this analysis, in order to avoid the terminological confusion which may occur in connection with the Romanian term “mahala” (approximate equivalent to slum), which in Bucharest has another socio-spatial connotation). Such an area, formed by more than thirty shacks/hovels there are in the District 6 of Bucharest in a quite civilized zone. There was a similar place in the Văcărești area up until 2010 when the public authorities decided to stop the phenomenon by demolishing the shacks or the informal settlement as sociologists call it.

4. Empirical evidence on several Bucharest ghettos

The so-called Bucharest ghettos, as their inhabitants call them, do not resemble very much their American counterparts from the racial composition point of view, but they rather define themselves by a specific spirit. They represent a stain of urban color, a special morphologic framework. The ghetto connotation in the Bucharest area was born as a consequence of the spatial concentration of poor Roma population in

zones with precarious technical and urban infrastructure. In fact, the term of ghetto comes from the spatial predominance and from the ethnic homogeneity of Roma population, locally associated with the phenomenon of poverty. Social problems of the ghettos are similar to those found in Florencio Varela, a ghetto from Buenos Aires (Saravi, 2004, p. 36). The inhabitants of these zones are somehow constrained to live in such spaces, mainly because of lack of income, education and because of their poor professional qualification. These types of disadvantages or handicaps exclude such individuals from the social participation and from getting access to urban zones with good habitations. Such areas are present mainly in Districts 6, 5 and 4, being less numerous or absent in the other administrative units of the city.

4.1. The Zăbrăuți Ghetto

The Zăbrăuți ghetto is formed by houses originally built for single persons who came to Bucharest for work. The more ample general profile that determined the process of segregation specific to this area was created in the 1960s. In order to improve the housing shortage, in the context of an ambitious extensive program of industrialization, one of the components of the habitation policy was represented by the construction of houses for single persons. These houses have mainly been occupied by the young employees who came from the rural environment. That was meant to be a temporary situation and the communist authorities wanted to demolish them ever since 1980 because of their wearing out and low quality that made their rehabilitation extremely expensive. In 1989, the inhabitants of these houses were evacuated and the blocks were erased from the property registers of the enterprises they belonged to, being scheduled for demolition. The project failed at the same time with the Communist regime and the degradation of these houses advanced seriously after the Revolution. In parallel with this, their doors, windows and sanitary system were stolen or destroyed (Zamfir and Rughiniș *apud* Zamfir and Preda, 2000). In the spring of 1990, Bucharest registered a great demand for residences; however the offer was almost inexistent. Consequently, new people moved in the old ghetto and this led to occurrence of the Zăbrăuți community. Whoever wanted to come in the Zăbrăuți area could find a shelter which could be transformed into a habitation, rooms being empty and available. The new inhabitants rapidly attracted relatives, friends or other acquaintances. Over time, these rooms have become the object of an informal commerce. It is true that only the right to occupy such a residence/room could really be traded because there was no owner of the residence. In the 1990s, the ghetto did not have the required utilities such as water, electricity, gas or sewerage. However, through a rehabilitation project within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), these blocks' infrastructure was improved, cold water was supplied and the sewerage network was repaired. However, problems continued to arise.

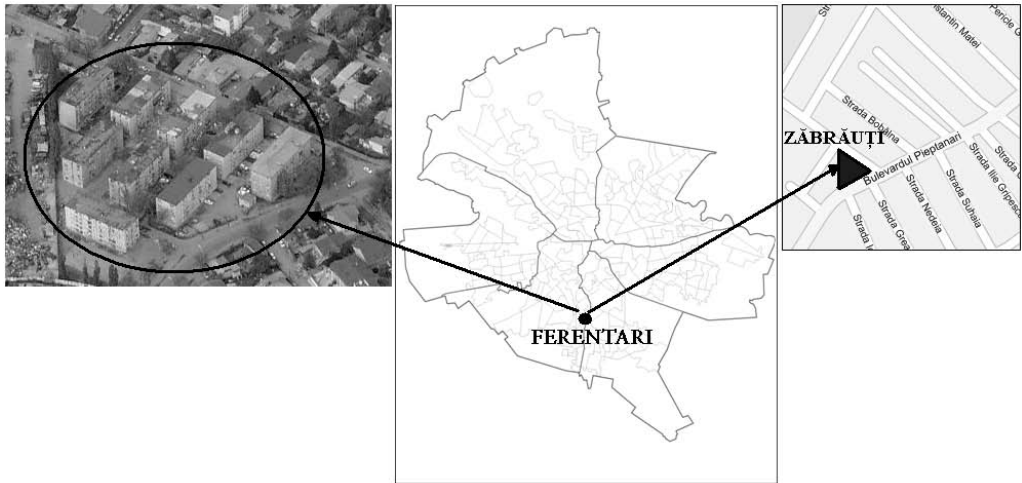


Figure 3: The Zăbrăuți Ghetto, Ferentari Neighborhood

Source: made by author

If the Pipera periurban neighborhood represents the most typical segregation of financially superior classes, the Zăbrăuți community, as well as the other areas mentioned so far, is a typical example of geographic segregation of poor persons. A large number of the ghetto inhabitants are of Roma ethnicity.



Foto 1: A usual landscape from the Zăbrăuți ghetto

Source: <http://bukresh.blogspot.com>, <http://santierul.wordpress.com/> and <http://www.reportervirtual.ro>

From the geographic point of view, the space occupied by the Zăbrăuți ghetto represents one of the most marginalized areas of the city. Situated in District 5 – maybe the poorest district of Bucharest –, the Ferentari neighborhood, this ghetto is formed by nine block type buildings that include small studios with bathroom and kitchen. The zone is territorially bordered by the Pieptănari Boulevard, Zăbrăuți Street and Ștefan Popa Street. The quality of the residences is rather low and the habitable space is extremely small. The garbage is thrown out of the window, in the spaces situated between the blocks of flats and electricity supply is still a problem. At the end of the 1990s collective power counters were installed, but because of the high consumption, the inhabitants could not pay or they refused to pay the invoices and, consequently, their access to the public network was cut off. Even at present, Zăbrăuți is the zone with the highest level of power theft in Bucharest (Zoltan, 2006).

The question which is asked is: what contributed to the formation of such a segregated community – a ghetto? The answer lies partially in the social context created after the Revolution, not only at local level, but also at national level, because such ghettos are not accidentally encountered in Bucharest; they are present in other cities of the country, as well. Thus, the relative prosperity of Bucharest attracted many young people in search for opportunities and the residence crisis which followed the Revolution urged them to adapt by improvising, to find solutions. The nine blocks of studios for singles offered such solutions. Amid the alarming rise of prices for good residences and faced with the lack of subsidized rents from public funds, the option to occupy a habitation without payment or purchasing it at extremely reduced² prices represented the most viable and convenient solution for some categories of people. The great majority of these inhabitants are young families and the Zăbrăuți area represented for them the opportunity to live in the capital city, since they are allogeneic. Another category of “owners” came here, after some traumatic experiences, being marked by extreme poverty and ending in some cases with the loss of their own habitation. As a consequence, many of them perceived the settlement as an essential stage in their social (re)invention. Hence, the problems specific to these areas are:

- lack of living room, as these habitations are much under the normal standards ;
- lack of hygiene, as well as the lack of elementary facilities of habitation (furniture, sanitary equipment etc.);
- lack of identity documents;
- lack of ownership rights in a great number of cases;
- lack of education and a high level of school dropout;
- violence; intra-community conflicts;
- high delinquency (robberies, protection taxes, menaces, kidnappings etc.);
- drug trafficking;
- lack of sanitation which favors the persistence of garbage; and

2 The flats in this area obtained through informal commerce were at least ten times cheaper in comparison with those from the real market.

- pollution caused by the abundance of garbage which are often thrown out of the window; a genuine urban ecologic disaster because the multitude of garbage attracted the presence of the vectors of diseases dissipation (<http://stirileprotv.ro/>)³ (rats, bugs etc.)

What is interesting is that in spite of all serious poverty problems the area faces, the community polarization is very intense, thus creating an internal blockage as far as the taking of immediate actions is concerned in order to diminish the phenomenon. As for the social links and connections which human beings have at their disposal or the possibility to come in contact with the outside world, there are serious problems. The internal polarization leads to a radical attitude of the community which is translated through a rejection of outsiders. The entire dynamics of the socio-spatial relationships is directed by the tension of two fundamental attitudes towards “the opportunities” offered by the neighborhood. For some human beings, Zăbrăuți embodies the chance of a new life and for others it represents the perpetuation of a degrading life of poverty and adaptation to dirt. Simultaneously, the Zăbrăuți ghetto forms an atomized fragmented society, crossed especially by relations and kinship networks and immediate vicinity. Insecurity deriving from the need to survive, which is doubled by the diffuse insecurity coming from a rather hostile community generates an ambivalent attitude: on the one side, individualism and isolation, for fear of contacts with the others and on the other side, the acute need of solidarity and social support at a collective level (Zamfir and Rughiniș, 2000, pp. 65, 76).

4.2. *The Aleea Livezilor Ghetto*

According to the Association for the Ferentari Community Development (ACDF), the disadvantaged groups from the Ferentari neighborhood include approximately 12,000 persons, concentrated mainly in the Aleea Livezilor–Tunsu Petre, Zăbrăuți, Prelungirea Ferentari and Amurgului areas. Except for the last area, situated in the neighborhood of Rahova, all others are situated in the Ferentari neighborhood; administratively, these units belong to District 5 of the capital city.

Here, as well, the majority of those who populate the Aleea Livezilor ghetto are formed by young families, socially excluded and multifold marginalized. The history of the community, the social exclusion of the inhabitants along with the very precarious infrastructure, confer to this neighborhood an aspect of closed, hermetic community. The problems the community face are almost similar to those in the Zăbrăuți ghetto: precariousness of sanitary services, lack of identity documents, a low level of education, lack of medical insurance, of medical assistance and of sanitary

3 In a piece of news entitled *The Zăbrăuți Ghetto from the capital – city, a real outbreak* from July 2010, posted on the site <http://stirileprotv.ro/>, it was stated that “the garbage has soared to the sky, the rats lurk and life goes on in the unbearable smell”.

units able to provide services to those in need, insanitary habitation spaces⁴, an enhanced risk of getting sick, lack of sanitary education, drug use (popular among young people), lack of playgrounds for children who often frolic on the fields full of garbage and syringes from the drug consumers, lack of communication with the relevant authorities etc.

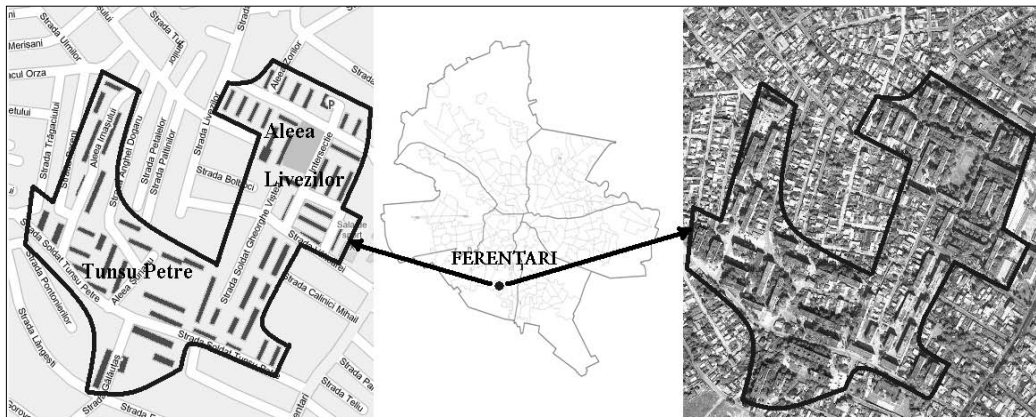


Figure 4: The space occupied by the Aleea Livezilor ghetto, Ferentari neighborhood
 Source: made by author

Being the biggest space affected by urban segregation ending in a closed community of the ghetto type, this area (Aleea Livezilor–Tunsu Petre) deserves greater attention both for geographical reasons and for potential difficulties.

From the geographical point of view, namely the urban spatial distribution, the respective ghetto is bordered by Prelungirea Ferentari, Lacul Bucura, Aleea Livezilor, Imaşului, Lacul Orza, Trăgaciului and Tunsu Petre Streets. The zone inside these street limits includes approximately sixty residences made up of studios similar to those in Zăbrăuți classified as level 3 of comfort. The inhabiting surface in these rooms/studios does not exceed 17 m². In many cases, such studios make a home for at least three-four family members; even more, sometimes.

A realistic analysis of the situation has revealed the serious problems this community is faced with. An ACDF group of initiative has rigorously evaluated these problems over a period of time from October 2009 to January 2010, and has reached the following conclusions (<http://asociatiaferentari.blogspot.com>):

1. A first cause which leads to the exclusion of this community is the lack of identity documents for its members. From this point of view, two categories of people have been established:

4 The reference to the inappropriate habitation spaces by the Association for the Ferentari Community Development is made in the following way: the disadvantaged population is concentrated on studios of the ghetto type.

- people that had identity documents but lost or destroyed them, including those whose expired identity documents could not be renewed for lack of officially recognized residence; and

- people who never possessed an identity document.

The number of those in the second category is more reduced as compared to those in the first category.

2. The great number of persons that reside in this area without legal forms. Abusive occupation or purchasing of flats without the property documents add as burdens to the inhabitants who cannot benefit from social protection as long as they live outside the habitation law.

3. Restricted access to the workforce market due to low professional qualification. Being unable to be employed, many persons work illegally.

4. One of the biggest problems this social group confronts with is the low quality of their residences. Paradoxically as it may seem, there is an important segment of inhabitants that live in insanitary studios which are deprived of water, heating or gas supply. Many buildings are not even connected to the heating system of the zone. The basements are flooded because of the drain system degradation. These are the conditions which many families with a significant number of children are exposed to.

5. Diseases such as B and C Hepatitis, Tuberculosis, HIV, pulmonary diseases, cardiovascular disease, diabetes etc., are frequently encountered in the Aleea Livezilor ghetto. Moreover, the high consumption of injectable drugs is another factor that affects the inhabitants' health. According to ACDF, those who are addicted to injectable heroine frequently share syringes, which alarmingly increase the risk of getting HIV and C Hepatitis.

6. Children represent the most exposed category. Their playground is near the garbage perimeter where syringes used by the drug consumers are thrown. Children are not carefully supervised as parents are either away with work or in prison. Often kids play with the syringes that are thrown anywhere in the street by drug consumers, this being the biggest risk for their health.

7. In comparison with the other Bucharest ghettos, the one in Aleea Livezilor faces the biggest difficulties as far as health insurances are concerned. Being unable to pay their taxes at the Home Health Insurance, they are not eligible to have a family doctor or health services in general. Only in some extreme emergencies they ask for help at the health units. The inhabitants often state that the sanitary units of all type are placed at a great distance from their community.

8. The lack of a local health unit is another serious problem of the community. The nearest health unit is at ten bus stations away from the community. Even so, it is not available for all members. However, until 2002 there was a health clinic in the area, but it was decommissioned because of litigation. For this reason, it cannot be renovated either by the local authorities, or by the Ministry of Health.



Foto 2: Landscape of the life environment in Aleea Livezilor

Source: <http://soferul.wordpress.com/>

The history of this community is similar to that of all the other ghettos in Bucharest. It was formed in an area of empty, cheap, uncomfortable buildings once built for single people. However, what one must not neglect is that the lack of coherent and immediate policies for this type of urban ghettos can affect the city even more. The Aleea Livezilor community already entered in what was called in the theoretical section, the cycle or the circuit of disadvantages and deprivation. This spiral reinvents itself in a negative sense, both at the community and spatial level (Santos, 1979).

According to a previous analysis (Enache, 2008), while the students of prestigious educational institutions from the capital city learn Marketing and consider to study abroad, children from Aleea Livezilor go to school through mountains of garbage, having as a (possible!) main goal to get out misery. School no. 136, situated in the interior of the ghetto, completes the demoralizing framework of students' perspective. "I do not think that there is a child, a single child in this school, who has not seen drugged persons", states a girl in the fifth grade, quoted in the study. The school does not have a fence, and in its courtyard garbage is piling up. The perspectives of the pupils in School no. 136, if any are invariably linked to the desire to get rid of the stigma of their ghetto life: "Not even friendship is friendship here", says another girl in the seventh grade. To her, a better future means to go as far as possible from the place of her childhood. These children's future options depend, in their turn, on education, on what they learnt to think, on the models they found in the environment they have lived in etc. For example, many boys want to become football players, while girls want to become actresses or to marry a "cool" guy, to be respected and "to avoid hassle".

For the kids in Aleea Livezilor, school is not a life solution, as it does not offer models of success that may coincide with their real needs. It is difficult to evaluate the situation on a long term when educational needs depend on some primary needs that are to be solved. Parents are rather preoccupied with covering their financial needs, for which education is not an immediate solution. Therefore, the majority of parents encourage their children to work from their early childhood and to drop out of school. In one of the few happy cases, students succeed in attending an industrial high school after the gymnasium. Under these conditions, those preoccupied to build bridges between school and community (Enache, 2008) consider that the only chance for the kids in the Aleea Livezilor segregated community is education, with teachers that may become models for their students. One can rhetorically ask: “If teachers, who have the moral duty to do something for these kids, do not do anything, then who will?!”

4.3. *The Iacob Andrei Ghetto*

The geographical position of this ghetto within the city is also linked to the Ferentari neighborhoods, in District 5 of the capital city. Situated near the Aleea Livezilor Ghetto, to the right side of the Prelungirea Ferentari Street, the Iacob Andrei Ghetto is second in rank in Bucharest, as a segregated space, considering the number of buildings. The dimension and the spatial distribution include more than thirty-five blocks. Thus, the Iacob Andrei Ghetto forms the homogeneous urban space enclosed by the following streets: Iacob Andrei, Soldat Gheorghe Florea, Pavel Constantin at the crossroad to Căpitan Constantin Radu, close to the Ferentari ATAB (Autonomous Transport Administration of Bucharest) Depot. The buildings in this area are extremely degraded and need serious consolidation works. The distressing landscape of these buildings is well-emphasized in an article (Mateescu, 2010) where one can read: “the blocks of four floors, placed side by side such as soldiers, are dirty and everything around them stinks”. Most of the people living here are also of Roma ethnicity and come from the neighboring counties (Teleorman, Giurgiu, Ilfov etc.).

The same problems, such as those mentioned before, can be found in the Iacob Andrei community. The same script was at the basis of the community (abusive occupation or informal commerce). Most of the inhabitants here evoke the moment of their arrival in the zone as a moment of action, as they keep saying that they found “four empty walls” when they reached the place. Thus, the organization of the room as a habitation became a “common action of the family”. Though the very poor studio is not perceived as a value in itself, just because it was cheaply procured, it however seems to mark a moment of success in life, an experience which cannot be forgotten since the 17 m² studio represents a first firm step in their life. The attempt to legalize the possession of the flat is for most of them a second chance to move towards a normal life. The manifold marginalization is similar to that in other ghettos and the opportunities of escaping the community are also linked to education and qualification. Here, as well, children are those who suffer from the enclosure in such an urban space that lacks real opportunities for social evolution.

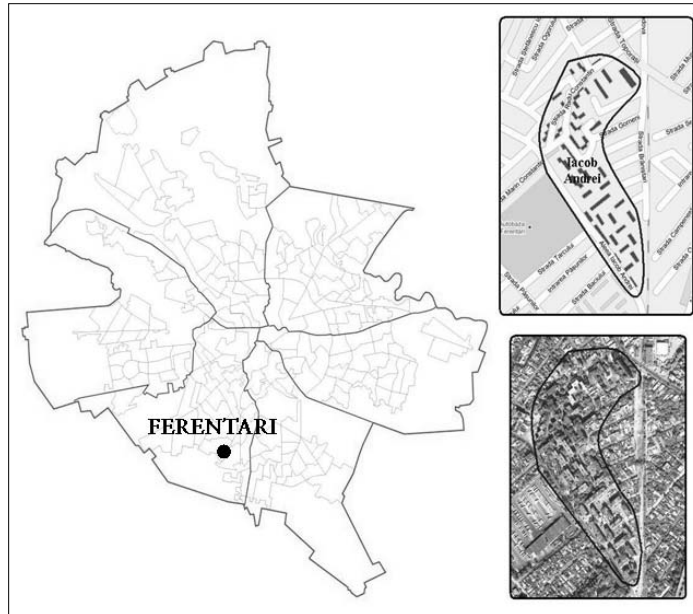


Figure 5: The Iacob Andrei Ghetto, Ferentari Neighborhood

Source: made by author

The Police perceive spaces like the Iacob Andrei, Zăbrăuți and Amurgului ghettos as sanctuaries of delinquents sought for different crimes and, at the same time, the framework where various antisocial deeds occur. For this reason, police raids are quite frequent. Often, these raids end up in fines for illegal residence and in retaining certain persons considered suspects. Only in 1997, when the first habitation contracts were drawn up, residence was legalized for some of them. Until that year, virtually any person living there did not have an officially recognized residence. The habitation could not be certified since there is no official owner of the buildings. Under these conditions, the District 5 City Hall became the owner of the buildings through a special judicial procedure. Moreover, according to the building ownership regulation, these blocks have been declared social habitations through Law no. 161/1996 (republished). Even so, authorities had to accept some compromises in order to stabilize the community.

4.4. The Amurgului Ghetto

Amurgului is an area where certain investments have been made lately in order to give a new dimension to the urban space, as well as for the social inclusion of the community. The street with the same name links Calea Rahovei, the Rahova Market and Șoseaua Sălaj. The community here is situated between two quite good urban zones and with a far bigger social potential in comparison with those presented previously. The so-called Amurgului Ghetto has developed towards South, starting from the immediate vicinity of Rahova Market. The area covered by the Amurgului community is within the borders of the following streets: Șoseaua Alexandriei,

Pucheni, Munții Carpați and Amurgului. The community is concentrated in a group of nineteen buildings (eleven are five floors tall and eight are three floors tall).

The buildings are connected at the public water supply system – both cold and hot water – and at the heating system as well, but not all of them can benefit from the advantages given by these facilities. Some of the people living here cannot pay their bills for lack of income. By a measure taken ten years ago, the Amurgului buildings benefited from water, electricity, heating but not gas supply. Over time, the supplying companies stopped delivering their services for several buildings due to client outstanding payments. In some cases, without any water or heating, the habitation quality became a burden for their inhabitants and at the same time the danger of getting sick occurred. Illegal power connections have been repeatedly reported in the area, especially in winter, affecting the general power system. The lack of garbage removal contracts leads to garbage piling up among the buildings. Such garbage mountains use to stay there for months. Out of the nineteen blocks, only four have a garbage removal contract. The practice of throwing the garbage out of the window is regularly performed here. Many inhabitants who live on the ground floor try to enlarge their space by unauthorized constructions added to the existing ones.



Figure 6: The Amurgului Ghetto, Rahova Neighborhood

Source: made by author

According to some previous research in the field, the number of Roma people living in this ghetto is not so big and they use to sell various products (clothes, cigarettes, perfumes, vegetables etc.) – of course, illegally – in the Rahova Market. Being placed near much more civilized urban spaces, the Amurgului area also attracted Romanian families, concentrated especially in P1, P5 and P6 blocks. The investments made here improved the landscape by asphalt alleys between the blocks, street lighting, parking areas and play grounds for children. Garbage is deposited in specially arranged places and collected at certain intervals. However, from a geographical point of view, these investments did not modify the urban landscape too much. The garbage is often left in place for months; the buildings are still grey, sometimes even black, wet, degraded and dirty. The blocks' ugliness is particularly evident in rainy days when water

infiltrates through the buildings fissures and in the basement. The syringes used by drug consumers are also present. Drug consumption is often made in public, in the staircase, in front of many persons.

The most encouraging thing here seems to be the “Ion I.C. Brătianu” School in which many investments have been made in recent years. The school is attended by both children from the ghetto and by children outside the ghetto community. The social heterogeneity of the school helps integrating the marginalized pupils into the larger society by means of institutionalized education where they can find positive models to follow.

4.5. The Valea Cascadelor Ghetto

A segregated space, outside District 5 (where all the other ghettos are placed) is on Valea Cascadelor Street, in District 6. Three things make it different from the other ghettos: its reduced dimension, the great distance from the city center and the fact that it is surrounded by building materials warehouses (extremely numerous in the area). This marginalized community lives only in six blocks, of the same type as those in the other ghettos, made up of studios of reduced dimensions. The small number of buildings, as well as the distance from the city center makes this ghetto less visible in the urban landscape. The buildings are strikingly similar to those in the Ferentari area by degradation, ugly image, dirty walls and garbage between the blocks. The community is placed at the crossroad between Valea Cascadelor and Liniei Street (which is nothing else but an old dismantled railway that goes towards the old Cotroceni station), in the immediate vicinity of Militari ATAB (Autonomous Transport Administration of Bucharest) Depot.

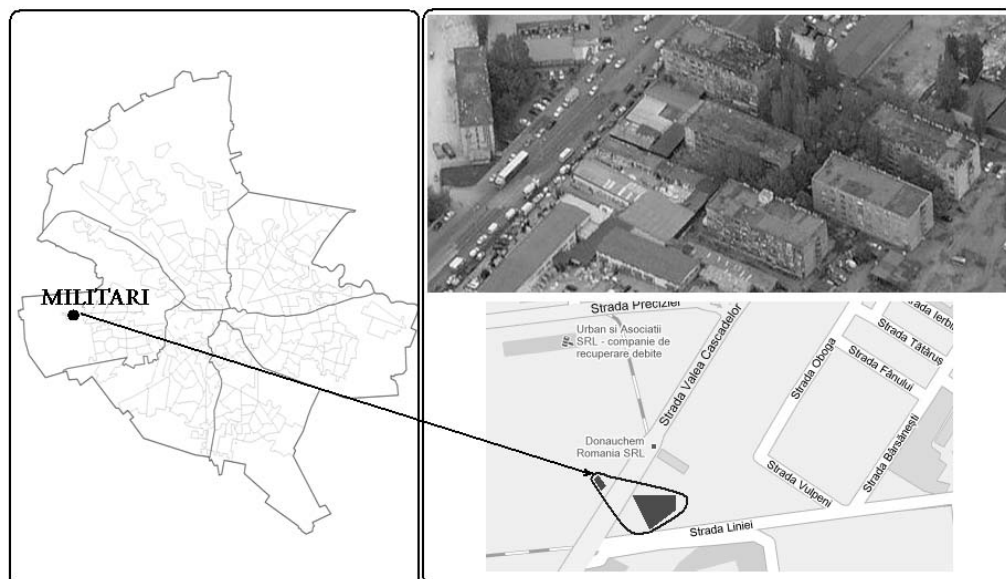


Figure 7: Valea Cascadelor ghetto, Militari neighborhood

Source: made by author

5. Theoretical and practical importance of Bucharest Ghettos

It is very true that following the presentation of the ghettos encountered in Bucharest a series of fundamental questions for the present study show up. First of all, why should one be interested in the Bucharest ghettos and why are they important? And after having accounted and identified the specific problems of the ghettos, what measures should be taken by the urban authorities? And, last but not least, one must see which is the connection between them and the political sphere.

As for the economic and social problems and symptoms they are confronted with, Bucharest ghettos resemble their counterparts from other sides of the Globe. However, in geographic and social terms, they eminently represent a local problem. The Bucharest ghettos were formed after 1989; as a consequence, they are “young” ghettos, arisen from the economic transition through which Romania passes. The importance of knowing them resides in understanding the way in which they were formed and in the palette of socio-economic problems, in the spirit of taking definite measures. The obvious lack of such spaces during the anterior period of time is due to the communist politics of social smoothing. In other words, from here also begins the incapacity of urban authorities to take definite measures of reducing poverty and other economic dysfunctionalities. The lack of money and opportunities pushed the inhabitants of ghettos towards illegalities, drug consumption and violence. Simultaneously, the lack of education perpetuates the social agony of these urban spaces. Not taking urgent measures to eradicate poverty from ghettos means accelerating the spatial dynamics of population that lives here. In other words, not taking measures now means far greater costs in the future.

The actions that the urban authorities must take ought to be as pragmatic as possible and at the same time to be based on definite socio-spatial studies. Starting from this type of studies, the local authorities must exactly identify the cause/source of the presented problems, and afterwards to try their elimination with the lowest possible costs and without falling into the trap of “social assistance”. In other words, taking measures will be based on the saying do not give fish to the Flemish, but rather give him a rod and teach him to fish. Thus, creating jobs specific to the educational and professional training for the inhabitants of the affected area, appears to be a possible modality to exit the “ghetto state”. At the same time, promoting some specific educational programs – that could include even repetitive internships (if not permanent ones) of schooling in educational units out of the ghetto – may have beneficial effects on the long term. In time, they will be able to be aware of the fact that there really are beneficial socio-economic alternatives in comparison to those encountered in the ghetto. Last but not least, the strict application of law could diminish in the future the unwanted effects of urban segregation.

All the elements exposed above undeniably involve the politics. Whether one talks about the district management or the one of the capital as a whole, the political side is omnipresent. As the inhabitants of the city are those who benefit from the facilities and the urban space quality (governed by politicians) and simultaneously

they represent the crowd that brings the votes (for the politicians), the urban benefits should be equal on both sides. However, this thing does not happen in the capital. Paradoxically or not, instead of being diminished as it is normal, in Bucharest the state of social “vegetation” from the ghettos is rather maintained. The poor crowd from the ghettos can thus be easily manipulated in an electoral goal through different “presents”. As a consequence, from a politic point of view –at least for the poor areas and populated by the Roma people from the fifth District – ghettos must rather be maintained than eradicated as they bring votes. They can very easily be electorally blackmailed. The poor population from the Bucharest ghettos rewards very easily – in exchange for goods/products or money – their electoral behavior.

6. Conclusions

Generally speaking, according to what was presented above, ghettoization is the process by which poor urban areas are created. These areas are closed from both social and cultural points of view and are usually populated by ethnic groups. In fact, the process itself is quite complicated and specific to the social and historic context in which it develops. A characteristic of the ghetto is the ethnical composition of the respective geographic space. Consequently, the ghetto is isolated and segregated that makes it different from other forms of segregation. In Bucharest, the geographical space of the ghetto is perceived as a different physical and social reality, with inhabitants who are described as being different and perhaps inferior to the majority. On the mental maps of the majority people in Bucharest such places seem to be “shady” urban spaces. Often, the ghetto inhabitants admit that the areas they live in are dangerous, because they are ghettos.

After the Revolution the socio-economic discrepancies have multiplied, starting from the income differences, the habitation quality, the dimensions and the number of properties, the life quality or the living standard and ending with special individualization of certain social classes. The urban evolution of the capital city in the last twenty years has manifested in a somehow chaotic manner. Yet it seems to be structured on two directions. The first direction refers to the new urban elites that searched to occupy the best intra-urban residential spaces (Dorobanți, Cotroceni, Kiseleff etc.), or to settle in the nearby city areas where they created genuine community clusters based on huge economic capitals: the periurban neighborhood of Pipera in the Northern part of Bucharest and the Prelungirea Ghencea in South-Western part. The second direction has led to the creation of certain areas of poverty bags, real urban “lock-ups” where a great part of the Bucharest marginalized population has settled.

Many, if not all the areas of those who are marginalized, have been formed after the Revolution and their appearance is the result of socio-economic and political post-Decembrist changes. The most obvious case is the Ferentari-Rahova zone in District 5 (Aleea Livezilor, Tunsu Petre, Zăbrauți, Amurgului, Prelungiea Ferentari) where the social issues are profound; the urban space here involves extreme forms of segregation. The negative connotation associated with the ghettos in Bucharest

should be connected with the spatial concentration of Roma population and of poverty in zones with a precarious technical and urban infrastructure. In fact, the term ghetto comes from the predominance and ethnical homogeneity of Roma population, locally associated with the phenomenon of poverty. The inhabitants of these areas are somehow constrained to live in such spaces mainly because of lack of income, poor education and poor professional qualification.

Social disadvantages such as: lack of habitation space, precarious hygiene, lack of habitation facilities, lack of identity documents, lack of ownership rights, lack of education, high level of school dropout, violence and intra-community conflicts, drug trafficking, drugged consumers, lack of opportunities that practically exclude the ghettos' population from social participation and from good urban areas. The lack of some coherent and immediate policies can damage the city even more. Since the community polarization is very intense, immediate measures for diminishing the phenomenon can be often blocked. Consequently, serious problems may occur in creating real opportunities for this category of population to get in contact with the outside world. The internal polarization makes the community's attitude more radical, leading to the rejection of outsiders. The communities presented in the analysis as case studies seem to have entered in a certain cycle of disadvantages, a spiral that reinvents itself both communitarily and geographically.

The ghetto children are the ones who suffer mostly in this situation as they do not seem to have any alternatives. However, it is difficult to evaluate the situation on a long term, as long as there are primary needs that have not been solved. As it came out from the survey, parents are rather concerned about the financial needs of the family, and they encourage their kids to work from their early childhood and ignore education. Under these conditions, the only chance for the ghetto children is education, where they can find good models in their devoted teachers. If this thing is not possible, then one can rhetorically ask what solution could prove to be viable and what future the Bucharest ghettos may have.

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