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# Temporary Shelters and Roma Housing Inclusion: Policy Learning in Implementation

by Tommaso Vitale (Sciences Po, CEE & Urban School)

If we consider the ways in which Roma are segregated in European cities, we are faced with a broad phenomenology of forms and modes of housing segregation and discrimination. In Milan, Paris, and to a lesser extent in Barcelona, local authorities have organised temporary shelters for individuals suffering extreme housing deprivation. Beds in these shelters are offered after eviction, or in case of fire or destruction of a shantytown. In some cases, it is possible to have access also for extreme weather conditions, or after the birth of a child. These shelters have different schemes, either proposing temporary housing for women only (and their children), or for the whole household. There are a few shelters aimed specifically at individual men, but we found little evidence of Roma men having been in such accommodation. Temporary housing through emergency services can be organized through a few nights in a hotel (especially in the Paris case), or shelter in some temporary housing facilities, like “integration villages” in France. In Milan, there are shelters specifically dedicated to emergency housing for Roma. All these sheltering options have substandard living conditions. Sometimes emergency housing centres for migrants may offer available rooms as well to certain Roma families or individuals. Emergency shelters are designed to be temporary solutions, in order to keep people from living in the streets or in dangerous locations. They are organized with on-site staff in order to provide social support, especially geared at employment and facilitating access to stable housing. However, the presence and availability of said staff is greatly varied from place to place.

## Methodology

Empirical data has been collected between 2019 and 2021: a qualitative survey on the problems of access to adequate housing for people who identify themselves as Roma: 128 qualitative in-depth interviews and 10 focus groups; 101 in-depth interviews were conducted with Roma living in difficult, deprived and segregated contexts; 27 interviews were carried out with policymakers, administrators, and activists, both locally and at regional and national levels<sup>1</sup>. We studied in France the metropolitan area of Paris, in Italy the metropolitan area of Milan, in Spain the metropolitan area of Barcelona, in Hungary the cities of Gyöngyös and Miskolc, in Romania two municipalities in the historical region of Transylvania, in Singeorgiu de Mures (Mures County) and in Sfântu Gheorghe (Covasna County), in the Orko neighbourhood. We chose to conduct qualitative interviews, as a specific strength of such interviews, lies “in

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<sup>1</sup> This article presents some of the results of the project *R-Home. Roma: Housing, Opportunities, Mobilisation and Empowerment. Fighting against Roma discrimination, with a focus on housing, and supporting Roma social inclusion*. Funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). Topic: REC- RDIS-DISC-AG-2018 - Call for proposals to support national or transnational projects on non-discrimination and Roma integration. Grant Agreement number: 849199. Principal Investigator: Tommaso Vitale. I would like to thank Anne-Cécile Caseau, Filip Markovic, and all the teams of interviewers who worked during the most difficult waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

their capacity to reveal spontaneous frameworks of meaning”. However, in order to have comparable results, we mobilised a fairly structured and semi-standardised qualitative method (Quilgars et al. 2009).

Data treatment did not privilege a divergent approach but country similarities (Kemeny & Lowe, 1998). This approach is justified by the partial transnationalism of some of the Roma (Toma & Fosztó 2018) but also by previous results in the literature, showing and emphasizing how accounts of homeownership are quite similar across the countries, even if a similar study has never been done with specific ethnic minorities, and views on this tenure have not been compared to views on renting as we have done (Jones et al. 2007).

Having the topic of discrimination in housing markets and services helped us again to analyse differences and commonalities in meanings attributed to the housing experience. Compared to qualitative comparative studies aiming at an ‘understanding’ of how households make housing decisions, the discrimination entry point allows to explore more emotional connections, issue of relation with the local environment and sense of belonging, the tensions between identity, community and security, and narratives that are less “strategic” or based on calculation and the dynamic of expectations (Ford and Quilgars 2001).

## **Temporary Housing: Is It Transitory Housing or a Stigmatised Trap?**

In the Paris metropolitan region, most of the people we interviewed lived, or have lived in shacks, tents, containers, or caravans, as is the case in Milan. Temporary and emergency shelters offer single rooms, as in the case of “social hotels” in the Paris suburbs, or in the temporary centres in Milan. Thus, the experience of living in a highly overcrowded single room space, usually without having its own kitchen, or to having to share a kitchen at is very common.

Almost all our interviewees are familiar with this experience. In many cases, especially in Paris and Milan, interviewees have lived many times in their car with their children, in the periods after evictions, until they could find a new shantytown or a warehouse to settle in, or at least a space to set up a tent or a temporary shack. Not having a bathroom or running water has massive consequences on health and wellbeing, which provided an extremely vulnerable basis at the outbreak of the COVID- 19 pandemic. In Sângeorgiu de Mureș, the interviewed family's poor living conditions did affect the health of their children. Before building an indoor bathroom, they had an outdoor toilet which was shared with the neighbours. Due to the poor hygienic conditions of this shared toilet, their daughter got several infections. In many shantytowns in France and Italy, there are no chemical toilets, or any minimal utility provided by the state or local authorities. The situation is the same in squatted warehouses in France, Italy and Spain. In some Romanian and Hungarian small towns, and in villages, many houses have no sewage, or a good deal of households share the same bathroom. A common use of the bathroom among a multitude of families raises continuous fights and micro-conflicts.

### ***Mixed Feelings Towards Temporary Shelters***

Our interviewees show mixed feelings about these welfare provisions. They see the shelters as a positive solution for quickly fixing homelessness. But interviewees also tend to highlight the very difficult living conditions. Multiple

examples come up in criticism of the shelters: overcrowded spaces, lack of intimacy, frequent tensions among residents, a ban on receiving guests, distant location, excessive control, in many cases the absence of dedicated kitchens for each household or even of common shared kitchens, poor opportunities for vocational training.

The problems of insecurity and peer pressure are present in the public temporary housing shelter as well. In 2013 B.Z., a 33-year-old man with 4 children, entered a Social Emergency Centre in Milan with his family, and then moved to the Temporary Reception Centre in via Sacile and later in the Centre for housing autonomy in via Novara. He struggled with the forced coexistence with other families in these centres, which caused conflicts between the inhabitants and problems for the education of his children who did not have a private space to do their homework and imitated behavioural models that he considered wrong. For this reason, in 2017 he decided to leave the Centre and squat a house. He told us that now he is feeling better and better. He stressed that it is another way of life: here they do not fight with neighbours because everyone has their own space, the children have their place to study and they are clean when they leave for school; he also feels that from the moment he left the Centre, he gained more control over his children's education.

E., 28 years old, married, two children (3 and 8 years old) lived in shantytowns in Ivry (France), as well as in squats. She was a temporary resident in the Ivry CHUM, the emergency housing centre for migrants. For three years, she shared a single room with her husband and children. She is very critical of the living conditions. Since she is tasked with the responsibility of cooking, it was very difficult to organize her family's meals without a kitchen or even a fridge. Furthermore, she felt unjustly treated by the managing association: she felt under watch and was treated with suspicion. She didn't feel encouraged or supported by the social workers, or that she could share her complaints with them. During the covid-19 lockdown in spring of 2020, the situation became even more difficult, as residents were only allowed to leave the CHUM building once per day and were asked to remain in their rooms. But the three years in these very difficult conditions had a positive outcome, because at the end of 2020, E. and her family were offered a social housing flat in Ivry, through the municipal social services (working with the managing association of the CHUM). She is now thrilled to have her own home, more space, and her own kitchen.

The living conditions of households living in hotel rooms rented out by social services is even more extreme, and more discretionary. Sometimes households need to change hotels every 2 or 3 days, sometimes every two weeks, in certain cases they may remain for longer periods. A. P. is a 40-year-old woman, separated, with 5 children, born in Moldova. She has been in France since 2002 and living in social housing since 2019. Before receiving her current flat, she lived between squats and social hotels. She remembers one in Paris, in the 20th arrondissement, with cockroaches, no warm water, and far away from the children's school. But once the room in this hotel had been offered to her, it would have been impossible to say no: there are no alternatives, even if you explain that your children are enrolled in another school district. Hotels are requested by social services in the whole metropolitan region, and any time she had to change hotels, she could end up over an hour away by public transport. It was very difficult for her children to stay in the same kindergarten/school. When they left a room offered by the Malta Order, trying to find a housing solution closer to their social network, a note was in the family's file, making it harder to come back into the circuit of emergency hotels. She did eventually reintegrate the circuit of social hotels after having lived in a shantytown in the

19th arrondissement. This living situation, and the impending eviction of her informal home, put A.P. back in contact with social association. After the destruction of the *bidonville*, the family was housed in a new social hotel, and from then lived through multiple moves from one department to another in the large Paris metropolitan region (93, 77, 95). Over the next years, she moved multiple times, living in many different social hotels, as well as with friends. Sometimes, they only had a few days in a hotel, other times, a few months. The family couldn't do anything but accept the rules: it is risky to complain, since some families struggle to even reach the emergency housing services, waiting on their phones in the hopes of a warm bed. Once you are part of that system, it is costly to leave it. A.P. gave birth to two children during this period. Although emergency housing services are meant to be temporary, and to connect residents for social services in order to help with administrative and social issues, A.P. was never put in contact with any social workers.

Another point is worth to be highlighted: our research proved that even in the most difficult and temporary situations, most of the Roma did not lock themselves up on only co-ethnic relations. They always tried to bind ties with non-co-ethnics, to have better access to information and multiply opportunities for work and economic activities. Interviews show how much it is important for stigmatised vulnerable groups to have access to a certain social mix (Vitale, 2021). In it is not in segregation nor in homophily (Cousin, et al. 2021; Vacca, et al., 2021) that they may find different ties, sources of information, contacts for support, bonds and associations for opportunities.

## **At What Conditions Temporary and Transitory Housing Programmes Produce Opportunities?**

What are the conditions that allow the offer of collective goods and services in temporary housing to produce a positive impact on Roma lifechances and opportunities for upward social mobility? At which conditions temporary housing has an impact not only at the individual's level of health, skills and income, but also at the level of interaction and encounters between Roma and non-coethnics. To answer this question we will compare three three programmes implemented in the Paris metropolitan region to provide temporary housing alternatives to Roma living in shantytowns: the *Village temporaire d'accueil* à Orly (Temporary village for reception in Orly), the *Maîtrise d'oeuvre urbaine et sociale* (MOUS) *dans l'ancienne Gendarmerie de Saint-Maur* (Urban and social project management in the former Gendarmerie of Saint-Maur) and the *Maîtrise d'oeuvre urbaine et sociale* (MOUS) *de Montreuil* (Urban and social project management in Montreuil).

### ***Le Hameau du Bouvray d'Orly***

The project Le Hameau du Bouvray d'Orly (Bouvray Village in Orly) had an explicit goal to create a little temporary village through a supported self-build programme and then help the Roma find jobs and permanent housing solutions. It was dedicated to 17 Roma households living in Orly in 2010 after a fire in their shantytown. The project was carried out by a coalition of public and private actors, with a partnership among the municipality of Orly, the Val-de-Marne Department Council (Conseil Général 94), the cooperative Habitats Solidaires (société d'économie solidaire et fraternelle), Compagnons Bâtisseurs

NGO, Concordia NGO for international volunteers, Habitat et soins association and a local neighbour committee for solidarity with Roma households.

In June 2011, the mayor of Orly and the president of the Val-de-Marne Department Council announced a joint project concerning 17 families who had been living for several years in the shantytowns located in Orly. The city of Orly provided a plot of land for three years, mobilising funding from the region and from Europe via European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Seventeen families were selected based on the criteria of permanence in French territory and 'willingness to integrate'. To enter the project, the families agreed not to beg or commit an act of violence against other families. The Roma were involved in building the wood chalets. The architect Jérôme Laplane registered a patent for a construction process that allows the creation of low-energy building kits. Laplane, with his wooden village kit, provided an economical (30% cheaper), technical (pre-cutting in the factory and self-construction) and sustainable (wood, glass wool for insulation) solution for the project to come to life.

On the building site, the Roma worked on five teams, supported by international volunteers from the Concordia Association. Habitats Solidaires accompanied the self-builders, providing supervision and technical monitoring to ensure the successful assembly of the houses straight from the factory.

All houses were connected to water and electricity; each house had a kitchen, living room and bathroom with a shower, toilet and sink. The houses ranged from 23 m<sup>2</sup> to 53 m<sup>2</sup> (for a family with four children).

On 11 October 2012, the European Commission awarded the Val-de-Marne Department a prize for its policy in favour of the integration of Roma into its territory using European funds. The European Commission particularly appreciated the reception village in Orly, which was financed by Europe with €250,000.

Seventy-seven people lived in the 17 self-built wooden houses for three years. The project involved 40 adults and 34 children. Seventeen wood chalets were built with full connection to utilities (water and electricity). One chalet was built as a common room, with space available as a community centre. At the end of the project, all the families found temporary accommodations and were then supported in rehousing to permanent social housing. All families involved in the project have permanent social housing units. These permanent accommodations are not only within Orly but are distributed throughout the Val de Marne department area. Twelve out of 40 adults gained access to regular employment during the project. After its dismantling, the common room was reassembled and transformed into a small social centre in Villeneuve Saint Georges. We could easily see a deliberate process of communing, for making welfare facilities available and sustainable in times: see Brighenti, 2016; see also Vitale and Membretti, 2013).

The programme ended in 2014. It was financed by the municipality of Orly, the department, the region and the EU ERDF fund with a total cost of €3.7M, composed of investments of €2.2M and running costs of €1.5M. The departmental council and regional council contributed €2.9m and €250,000, respectively and the rest was covered by the EU. The cost per household was very high, €217,000. The programme lasted four years, starting in 2010 after a fire in a shantytown and providing first emergency shelters. In April 2011, they started the construction site and the social project lasted until the end of the project.

The project combined goods and services related to different policy sectors. Indeed, temporary housing was the main focus of the project. Roma families were supported in building their own wood houses.

Also, many services were provided in terms of education. Concerning primary education, the NGO Habitats et Soins, a partner in the project, provided schooling for the children. Children's involvement in primary school went excellently because the school director was involved in the whole programme and, as such, welcomed and frequently met with the parents. NGO set up breakfasts for children in the village to give them and their parents a rhythm to wake up, prepare, have common breakfast and afterwards go to school. For mid-school children, this was more complicated because it was the first schooling for some of them.

The project also allocated resources to realise vocational training; once again, the NGO Habitats et Soins helped adults orienteering, finding vocational training courses. The main sectors for training and internships were childcare, maintenance of premises and recycling of scrap metal. Social support in the village aimed at help in accessing health care, learning the French language, and regularizing working activities.

The programme also had an ecological transition facet related to serious environmental concerns: wood houses allowed satisfactory and adequate comfort, energy consumption was very low, and thermic coverings were very effective.

The project inspired many others in the other departments in the Paris metropolitan region (such as the Guynemer programme in Seine-Saint-Denis), as well as in the rest of France.

The project has been appreciated and has served as a source of inspiration for many reasons:

- The originality of self-constructed, demountable housing
- Its capacity to combine environmental and social goals
- The governance style and the logic of the programme recognised the dignity and working capacity of Roma
- It realised a 'dismountable village' for emergency temporary housing without the beneficiaries being entrapped for a long time in a fully segregated ethnically homogeneous shelter
- Vocational training and job inclusion have been considered equally important as children's schooling
- The mobilisation of young international volunteers in the building process has created original transnational ties

### ***The MOUS of Saint-Maur***

The MOUS de Saint-Maur is an older project and a reference story in France among activists engaged to provide housing alternatives to shantytowns. The project was managed by the association 'Pour Loger' in partnership with the municipality of Saint-Maur and local committees and financed by the Val-de-Marne Council. At the beginning, the programme targeted Roma families evacuated from dangerous buildings or living in tents in the city of Saint-Maur; later, families came from shantytowns with the main goal of receiving temporary housing inclusion for Roma people living in extremely poor conditions (tents, not even shacks or shantytowns). Social support was part of

the programme, with social workers helping with work and housing. The MOUS promoted the production of housing adapted to the characteristics of households experiencing a combination of social and economic difficulties, as well as those related to finding affordable housing.

In May 2003, 52 Roma evicted from a neighbouring shantytown settled in Saint-Maur-des-Fossés on a plot of land located in Rue Bollier in a suburban area opposite a high school. The land belongs to the Val-de-Marne Department Council (*conseil général*), which decided not to evict the dwellers. Due to local planning regulations, it was impossible to settle caravans or build shacks, and Roma families only had tents as shelters with no available toilets. An important mobilisation of solidarity and support was organised by local neighbours in direct and close cooperation with the families.

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, these Roma families were accommodated in the unoccupied former police station owned by the Val-de-Marne Department Council. The council also chose to simultaneously provide accommodations in buildings owned by the council in this municipality to all the shantytown dwellers. A MOUS project was put in place to offer help in access to housing and social services. The municipality and the department council have worked with a highly organised support committee for the Roma dwellers. Noone was excluded by the program. This led to temporary police station housing (“gendarmerie”) belonging to the Val-de-Marne Department. The project was then often referred to as the “Gendarmerie” project, in reference to the building used to shelter the families.

Since 2007, the department council has increased its financial support and asked the association ‘Pour Loger’ to provide social support for the inclusion of the Roma living in the building.

The programme broke with the policy of useless evictions and put these families in safe accommodations. The department council and the municipality showed a strong political will for inclusion. It also provides an alternative to expensive and short-term accommodation in social hotels. Eighteen families, so about 70 people, were sheltered for the first six months on the site belonging to the Val-de-Marne department and then in the old national police building. The programme continues to offer a temporary housing solution for households in need. Due to the success of the programme, other abandoned buildings in the municipality, including roadside buildings and railway tenements owned by the department or other public authorities and often destined for demolition, are therefore refurbished and renovated to accommodate Roma from shantytowns. With regard to housing, the MOUS put most Roma households in contact with a social worker from the city and found accommodations for those with dependent children (minors; see Duvoux & Brunet, 2021). *Accompagner les familles monoparentales. Moyens et enjeux de l'autonomisation de publics à la croisée des vulnérabilités*. Single people found housing solutions through the young workers’ hostels (foyers de jeunes travailleurs) and, after work inclusion, housing rentals in the private sector.

Because this project began in 2003, one area it addressed was the regularisation of the administrative situation for Romanian nationals with a residency permit. Along with the project, a comprehensive approach to households’ empowerment has been adopted, supporting vocational training, job seeking, social support, French language learning and links with local administration.

This MOUS programme using abandoned public buildings for Roma temporary housing has been one of the first realised in France, and it has served as a benchmark and a source of inspiration to many others in the Paris region,



as well as in the whole country. A MOUS is a policy instrument of urban and social project management instituted by the law no. 90-449 of 31 May 1990 “on the implementation of the right to housing” bringing together both associations and institutions. The MOUS finances the engineering linked to the production of adapted housing (whether it is created as a new offer or adapted from the existing stock) in the social, property and technical phases.

The programme accepted that housing inclusion is difficult when one has lived in shantytowns for 10 or 15 years, and it takes time to move from temporary housing to some form of more stable housing. It inspired a method consolidated at the national level in 2012 and 2018 to provide temporary housing at the local level, considering each family through an individual social diagnosis, leading to transitional housing offered with social support. A critical issue in the programme was that there was excessive promiscuity, with several families sharing the same space and having shared kitchens and bathrooms. Moreover, the presence of multi-generational families accentuates the difficulty of having a private life in a single living space (one room per family),

The governance model was characterized by a strong presence on the ground with regular meetings, so to say, implementing a policy style based on two main guiding principles: (1) continuity and (2) proximity. Strong participatory devices involved the pro-Roma neighbours’ committee and Roma beneficiaries. Roma beneficiaries’ involvement was organised into working groups. Also, for Roma beneficiaries’ commitment, a clear distinction was made between the ‘rental’ obligations (formalised in a lease agreement) and the commitments linked to social and professional opportunities (not formalised as eligibility criteria but supported by social work and empowerment projects).

The programme was also known for many elements of flexible management, including the temporary accommodation of additional family members and friends for short stays has been allowed, upon request for authorisation, after a three-party discussion among the managing association, Roma delegates and the host family.

Also, the programme gave a new life to abandoned buildings that were not part of the social housing stock, reducing contention among the poor and competition with people on social housing waiting lists.

### ***The MOUS of Montreuil***

In 2008, the MOUS de Montreuil (MOUS of Montreuil) aimed to provide housing alternatives to 338 Roma individuals living in Montreuil (117 families) in shantytowns or squats while also offering social services to help with integration for employment. It was designed and implemented by a partnership among the municipality of Montreuil, the French state, the Regional Council of Ile de France, de Department Council (*Conseil général*), the National Ministry of Education and the NGO Rues et cités. Also involved was ADOMA<sup>2</sup>, a public company present throughout France, which specializes in housing and accommodation for people in difficulty who cannot access public housing. This

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<sup>2</sup> Adoma was created in 1956 under the name of Sonacotral (SOCIÉTÉ NATIONALE DE CONSTRUCTION pour les TRAVAILLEURS ALGÉRIENS) by the public authorities in order to reduce the number of shantytowns and to accommodate Algerian workers in a context of serious shortage of social housing. A semi-public company, Adoma is governed both by the law on public limited companies (the contracts signed with its employees, suppliers and clients are private law contracts) and by the texts applying to public sector companies. CDC Habitat (56.4%), a subsidiary of Caisse des Dépôts, and the State (42.4%) are Adoma's main shareholders.

company is part of the CDC Habitat group, a subsidiary of the Banque des Territoires created by the Caisse des Dépôts. It was founded by the French state, the department, the region and EU ERDF. The final cost was between €55,000 and €64,000 per household (depending on the estimations). It appears to be much lower than that of other schemes in neighbouring towns (from €111,000 to €227,000). It has been largely considered one of the less expensive but effective programmes realised in the Paris metropolitan region<sup>3</sup>.

Following a fire in a squat in the city of Montreuil in July 2008, Mayor Dominique Voynet immediately decided to offer temporary housing to the Roma living in Montreuil without housing. They used two empty lots owned by the municipality and bought caravans for the households. French Roma and Gypsy families were, like many local residents, very much opposed to the arrival of these new Romanian Roma neighbours. However, the mayor (Europe Ecologie les Verts -EELV, the French green party) insisted that eviction was implemented. Local councillors made a political effort to foster solidarity with homeless Roma families.

In 2010, the municipality built a MOUS project for the 117 families (around 350 persons), with two temporary housing sites called 'integration villages' (*villages d'insertion*), each of them managed by one NGO. A MOUS project for social inclusion brought together the municipality and territorial powers (*Département de Seine-Saint-Denis* and *Région d'Ile-de-France*) as well as the State. They attribute a budget for the inclusion of selected individuals and bring in associations to oversee insertion actions.

There were two sites where caravans were used as temporary housing. The first site was opened in July 2008, with the social services offered by the association *Rues et Cités* for the first years, and starting in 2011, this was taken over the *Cité Myriam* (part of the *Secours Catholique*). *Rues et Cités* provided social support, access to social rights and French language training. The second site hosted 51 families (160 people) with social services provided by the *ALJ 93* Association (whose name has changed to *ALTERALIA*)<sup>4</sup>. The MOUS also had two houses where families belonging to another Roma group live.

At the end of the project, more than 80% of the families had their own resources and were settled: in the private market, in social housing, hostels or in one of the "transitional" units.

Social workers provided by the association *Rues et Cités* were trained by the association coordinator Martin Olivera, an anthropologist who has promoted a method for social housing governance based on the personalisation of social support and a variety of instruments *against* any single, rigid, predefined integration pathway (so to say living room for learning and change). Public services have made great efforts and acquired a culture of supporting families. The local government provided strong political support by the municipal team, ready to defend the right to allocate public resources to help these Roma find durable and safe housing: it has been effective in providing a path towards stable affordable housing.

Other Roma in Montreuil, not included in the MOUS project, were settled with the agreement of the city hall in municipal buildings or on land with

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<sup>3</sup> [https://fnasat.centredoc.fr/index.php?lvl=author\\_see&id=6888](https://fnasat.centredoc.fr/index.php?lvl=author_see&id=6888)

<sup>4</sup> ALJ 93 - Association pour le logement des jeunes (Association for the housing of young people) ALJ 93 (now called Alteralia is an association that manages a residence for young workers, but also an International Residential Centre that can accommodate groups and individuals passing through, an Educational Centre in charge of the global support of young people entrusted to the social assistance for children, a Restaurant and accommodation for people in substandard housing.

occupation agreements (*conventions d'occupation*). In 2012, the city decided to create 'transitional' flats to temporarily accommodate families before they could move into social or private housing. The 'Office public de l'habitat montreuillois' built 22 modular housing units, almost entirely financed by the Ile-de-France region and the European Feder fund. They are fully furnished and equipped with units of different sizes. Thirty-five social housing units were built, with 25 allocated to MOUS dwellers.

Later, thanks to an agreement between the MOUS, the city and Prefecture, several households can find 'a very social' PLAI<sup>5</sup> housing in Montreuil or in neighbouring municipalities. PLAI housing is financed by a subsidised integration loan.

The first focus area of the project is housing, but it has a significant approach to providing housing alternatives. It developed a methodology to help individuals and families prepare the necessary documents for social housing applications while they are in the temporary housing bungalows, and provides mediation with social housing offices and future neighbours. It also involved health services to facilitate access to primary health care, orientation towards specialized services if needed, and sanitary education. As we have seen in other cases, and due to the education problems of children in shantytowns, the MOUS in Montreuil had a specific facet to support access to public education, especially for compulsory school years (6–16 years old), help Roma children integrate at school, provide tutoring and encourage access to higher education and vocational training. All children living on the temporary housing sites were enrolled in school (preschool, primary and middle school). The project also developed a systematic plan to offer active labour market services, including coaching, skills evaluation, access to national and local employment schemes and vocational training sessions. The number of jobseekers decreased by two-thirds between 2010 and the end of 2014, and 53% of the former occupants of the burned squat became employees or self-employed. Broadly, the MOUS workers help identify and mediate access to the necessary services for family services (social welfare), health services, financial services (taxes) and French language learning.

Also, the Montreuil MOUS programme shows the relevance of deconstructing stereotypes against Roma and support in training for civil servants and social workers with the aim of 'protecting' and empowering Roma autonomy and freedom while navigating uncertain and difficult environments, as stated by Mercier and Olivera (2018).

Conflict mediation was another important part of the programme, establishing positive relations with neighbours and allowing children and teenagers to get out and meet the young people of the neighbourhood. They also organised parties on the site to which the local residents were invited.

The MOUS ended in August 2015, when the two sites were closed due to the scheduled end of the programme. It was a pioneering operation in France and the largest of its kind. Almost all of the families had found a place in a temporary housing service or in social housing. It was a 'success', at least in numerical terms, but the housing integration was not durable for all of them, with some households squatting in an abandoned building again or involved in a new municipal programme. However, having two sites with associations chosen that did not have the same approach to social work was an element of tension. There was a focus on autonomy on the first site, while the second site came with strict rules and strong control over the families.

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<sup>5</sup> PLAI housing, financed by the Prêt Locatif Aidé d'Intégration, is allocated to tenants in very precarious situations.

The programme has helped innovate the city governance mode, satisfied fundamental needs for housing and job inclusion and has politically and socially empowered the Roma involved. At the moment, in 2022, one of the councillors of the municipal government is a Roma woman (Liliana Hristache) who lived in a slum in Montreuil and was involved in the project described here<sup>6</sup>. The MOUS collaboration between different public actors has been transferred to other municipalities seeking to create a project to re-house Roma living in slums.

It has developed a governance style based on outreach mechanisms (Vitale, 2003), where civil servants and human rights activists meet hand in hand with Roma beneficiaries, a style based on listening, hearings and meetings outside working hours, with an interest in conviviality (Olivera, 2016). The main innovation was probably related to the investment done to hire a *dedicated* civil servant working within the municipal administration to promote the work of NGOs and associations and to decompartmentalise policy implementation and service delivery. In a way, it has proven the effectiveness of a method based on a variety of housing instruments and flexibility, finding solutions for families on a case-by-case basis. The programme gave the families enough autonomy to go their own way without locking them into a rigid ‘integration scheme’. The autonomy of these families was not seen as an obstacle, although it constituted a real resource for their empowerment (Benarrosh-Orsoni, 2011). The MOUS in Montreuil has involved all the shantytown dwellers, without adding eligibility criteria; they avoid selection bias and competition for benefits, as recurrent in many projects providing housing alternatives to shantytowns. In terms of the implementation mode, the project highlights the relevance of coping with informality without coding and formalising every aspect of the programme. It was made up of a combination of tinkering, misunderstandings, arrangements and the exploitation of critical junctures (Olivera, 2016). Recognising informality does not mean renounce to steer and govern wicked problems, but to give room to coproduction in housing programmes.

## Comparing Alternatives to Shantytowns in the Paris Metropolitan Region

These three case studies have many interesting elements that could be understood better comparing them (Vitale and Tosi, 2019). First, they are sustainable, not only in the social but also in the environmental sense. In Orly, wood houses were quick to assemble and dismantle. They were very well insulated with low energy consumption. The cost for each household was quite high, but the houses remained available and were not damaged. The construction process was very innovative; no part of the construction materials weighed more than 60 kg, so everything could be carried by one man, and thus there was no need for lifting equipment. This has cut off expensive material mobilisation costs. In Saint-Maur, the MOUS financed the design and development of ‘adapted housing’, so to say adapting, retrofitting and renewing an abandoned police station. It financed all the social, property and technical phases of the programme. It required a very limited contribution to the costs by beneficiaries because it was less expensive than any other ones based on paid nights in social hotels, homeless shelters, or emergency shelters. In the MOUS of Montreuil, the project worked and was sustainable thanks to an enlargement

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<sup>6</sup> I made a video documentary with her life story, a short summary of which can be seen [here](#).

of social housing units and a special engagement to reduce ethnic discrimination in accessing social housing.

Second, there was no involvement of beneficiaries or stakeholders in the project. No one among the three studied projects involved the Roma in design and first planning. However, the Roma were involved and very active in both the implementation and the review of the projects. In the case of Orly, a very participative construction site was realised. Apijbat, an associate of the NGO Construire solidaire, manufactured and assembled one of the housing modules in complete self-build, while almost all the modules were industrially prefabricated in the factory and assembled on-site. Divided into five groups of self-builders, the Roma families, accompanied daily by three professionals, participated in the assembly of the 'houses'. A few volunteers also engaged in the process. The Roma were partially involved in the design of the site (not of the overall project), the construction and the daily management of the site, as well as in decision making on internal rules. In the Saint-Maur MOUS case, local associations were heavily mobilised around this project, promoting strong involvement of Roma families in housing management. The support committee that accompanied Roma families was comprised of local neighbour activists and not professional NGOs. Throughout the project, the Roma continued to be involved in decision-making through various working groups organised by 'sector': education, health, conviviality and culture, management of daily life and security (to not forget the contentious embeddedness of these projects and the fear of the Roma even in quite welcoming municipalities). In the same way, the Roma were not involved in the design or planning of the MOUS of Montreuil. The project participants were selected by the project leaders who defined the target groups. Because there were two sites for temporary housing, the question of implementation of action varies; it was reported that in their first site there was more collaboration between the association overseeing the social services and the hosted Roma families to decide together evolution and change to introduce in the project. At the second site, there was a stricter, top-down approach, with less room for involving beneficiaries. It is important to note that the MOUS of Montreuil had a 'Social Life Council', which included eight family delegates and four members of the NGO team; as well, it had a 'women's time' workshop that allowed women to reflect on their situation and their own projects. Broadly speaking, what is at stake is the capacity to change a project after its first design, to enlarge the conversation, and to have the resources and power to adapt. Precise actions and services were added and co-designed *after* getting to know the families and persons to be assisted. Projects have been revised and planned after a moment of mutual knowledge and interaction with beneficiaries.

## **Relevant Insights to Better Understand Policy Learning**

Looking at the implementation of temporary housing help us to dig into some of the mechanisms highlighted by studies on policy learning. In Haas's (1990) seminal work, epistemic communities are able to assume control over knowledge production; while doing so, they influence and 'guide' decision-maker learning on a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, shared causal beliefs, shared notions of validity and a common policy enterprise (Haas, 1992, p. 3). But in the case studied herein, epistemic communities converge and agree

on problem definitions, feasible solutions and calculations of costs and benefits. However, they are weak and unable to influence policymakers, and even if they are able to do so, it is not enough to produce change.

This situation is related to the bias in the Haas approach to learning, a sort of ‘deficit model of learning’ (Dunlop, 2007), where epistemic communities are required to fill decision-makers’ knowledge gaps. In the cases we have studied, this knowledge gap is not a perceived ‘reality’ in policymaking but a problematic admission coming from contention or at least contentious advocacy. Adler and Haas (1992, p. 381) recognise the importance that the ascendancy of an epistemic community is *often* related to ‘the political “fit” between that group’s belief system and those of decision-makers’ (Dunlop, 2007).

Looking at the cases of success and failure in the production of temporary residential alternatives to Roma housing deprivation, the implementation has progressively allocated competencies, resources, legitimacy and some control to the beneficiaries themselves, and partly to third-sector organisations. At the same time, the true innovation has come because in the administration, those who handle the codes of formalised knowledge and know how to interpret the law and the technical dimensions of public action instruments, have been involved and maintained in a generative relation with social workers, activists and beneficiaries (see Podestà & Vitale, 2011). This is an important key for temporary housing, not to fall into the trap of becoming another trap of segregation and exclusion, but maintaining the capacity to produce the local modification of actors’ preferences within a positive spiral towards better housing facilities.

The case of Saint-Maur in the Parisian metropolis shows the importance of having introduced alternative interventions to the ‘Roma camps’ into broader projects of social and urban intervention on the territory, capable of reformulating interpretative frames and building common ground, based on the weight of associations and the local press. Local governance created the institutional conditions for learning from previous programmes of housing alternatives to shantytown settlers. They decided to produce collective goods and service in the neighbourhood object of intervention, not as a compensation for damage, but as a form of compensation for previous deprivation, hence avoiding a racist form of conflict regulation.

Another case of policy learning to cope with adverse selection is Orly’s case in the Paris metropolitan region. Previous programmes were highly selective before the Le Hameau du Bouvray project, looking for Roma champions to improve welfare outcomes. In this case, all persons who lived in a burned shantytown were included. They insisted on vocational training, self-construction and a time-bound project. Usually, these are the kinds of choices that skim many potential recipients, requiring high skills, family protection and a stable migratory plan. However, in this case, the programme did not lose recipients – not even the weakest one. They worked on the project rules, clarified them and made them readable. They faced the control problem and discussed and learned how to take control back on gradual sanctioning, not to exclude people but to manage internal and external conflicts and avoid exclusion. They did not change the rules: policy learning was not about rule changing, but on rule transparency, understanding and communication.

In the case of the MOUS of Saint-Maur, policy learning was less attentive to rule clarification but instead worked with recipients on current rules to create new ones and adapt the existing ones. As stated, spaces were narrow, and there

were many rooms in common and tensions due to shared spaces. The risk was the eviction from the MOUS of troublesome, disruptive characters who did not respect the rules and invaded the privacy of others – working on sanction allocation problems and competence allocation problems. The members of the MOUS programme learned to establish boundary rules when using shared spaces, ask for additional resources, request greater autonomy and a larger housing unit, and involve and empower the recipients. Even more importantly, they worked on stating and adapting information rules regarding the amount and type of information available (or not) to all the actors involved, not only the recipients and social workers but also the local committees, the administration, Roma rights groups and other members involved in the MOUS programme.

Finally, seeking political consensus has influenced policy learning to mitigate influences on the choice of instruments and objectives of public action. In the case of Montreuil, local governments gain consensus and power to mobilise and control selection processes and enlarge the recipients when their constituency shows spontaneous attention to problems such as Roma child poverty, youth male prostitution, suicides, older adult homelessness and shantytown burnings. Once again, policy learning is not endogenous in the administration to improve welfare efficiency and people in need of wellbeing incrementally. These are cases of the proficiency of advocacy coalitions in contention. The key is that contention was articulated with different strategic performances on the media in small but visible street protests, ad hoc musical and cultural festivals and traditional negotiations. What we find interesting is that an issue-based contention does not challenge adverse selection only as a mere quantitative problem in the number and types of excluded persons. On the contrary, to overcome adverse selection pitfalls requires to policy community to learn how to cope with allocation problems, review and improve how to introduce new policy instruments, empower Roma youth excluded by their family networks, understand Roma embeddedness better, learn from methods developed by community-based organisations and religious groups, and not be recognised because they are too informal. In the empirical case, local governments started recognising Roma NGOs as worthy experts to discuss policy impasses and efficacy problems. An outcome of this learning process was to establish not only health mediators but also training programmes to facilitate suffering homeless persons' access to existing 'universalist services' that were previously difficult to reach and were, in fact, selective. This was a difficult innovation, not only for Roma, enacted by contentious Roma advocacy groups that required elaboration and learning but also for precarious homeless persons.

The three cases studied in the Parisian metropolis speak not so much of the initial objectives of creating social ties and making Roma respect 'rules for integration', but more in terms of converging on criteria for the effectiveness of housing intervention and criteria to be invented. Learning has not been a driving factor – a spur to action for policy design. The design was classic, incomplete and almost formal to start with, without any participatory or concerted attention. But later, as we have seen, new actions (financing them), new actors (recognising their competencies and spaces for action) and new modes of participation were implemented for redesigning and for the ordinary management of conflicts. This implementation included a considerable pluralisation of instruments, without excessive demands for total integration between different and bureaucratically compartmentalised sectors.

Still, we see elements of the institutionalisation of substantial rationality and learning conditions. Institutionalisation may be defined as a process of establishing institutions as ‘social regulations’ that symbolise the principles and validity claims of social order (Rehberg, 1994, p. 56). Such a definition has the advantage of distinguishing institutions from simple regulations and arrangements or standardised expectations. In the sense of Lepsius (2017, p. 49), an institution is ‘a social structuring that provides a value with relevance to social action’. In the cases discussed in this article, cities started allocating resources, officers, sub-contractors to dispute resolution services, mediation, inter-groups activities and communicative exchanges. We have also observed some other meso-level stabilisation processes and institutional factors pushing towards learning: the demand for periodic review of procedures, the obligation to plan for the medium term and a reward system for administrations based on outcome control. When present, these factors leave room for power relations and therefore for the capacity of conflictual pressure for change, justifying its action and discussing alternatives.

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