

Roma, Adequate Housing, and the Home: Construction and Impact of a Narrative in EU Policy Documents

Silvia Cittadini

s.cittadini@santannapisa.it

PhD candidate in Politics, Human Rights, and Sustainability

Sant'Anna School for Advanced Studies – Institute of Law, Politics and Development, Pisa (Italy)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8882-3818>

Silvia Cittadini is a PhD candidate in Politics, Human Rights, and Sustainability who currently is finishing a thesis on housing rights and policies directed at the Romani minority. She became interested in this topic while working in the NGO sector in Italy and Brussels and later began her research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she obtained a second master's degree in Democracy and Human Rights in South Eastern Europe.



Abstract

This article presents a critical discourse analysis of European Union documents released between 2008 and 2016 on the right to housing and on the inclusion of the Romani minority. The objective is to analyze the definition of adequate housing and its impact on the representation of the Roma and on the consequent housing strategies. The article highlights how a restrictive interpretation of the term “adequate housing,” understood exclusively as a series of physical parameters, associates the Roma with “inadequate” and “substandard” accommodation. This interpretation supports the persistent representation of the Roma as a vulnerable homogeneous group, “Other” from “mainstream society,” informing paternalistic policies that prevent the meaningful participation of Romani individuals in decision-making. Furthermore, it fails to acknowledge the immaterial factors affecting the subjective understanding of the house and its relationship with the identity of the individual, hindering the empowering potential of home-making practices. Following this analysis, the article claims the necessity of recognizing the impact of affective and immaterial factors such as the creation of a socially supportive environment and the possibility of personalizing domestic space in the development of housing policies aimed at supporting the identity and well-being of the individual.

Keywords

- Roma integration
- Housing
- Home
- Identity
- European Union
- Discourse analysis

Introduction

Housing is a key area of intervention of the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. The purpose of the EU Framework is to ensure equal access to adequate housing for all Romani individuals in order to address their socio-economic exclusion and to ensure the protection of their rights. Nevertheless, it is not the first time that housing is at the center of policies concerning Roma. Since the Modern Age, housing policies have affected Romani communities in Europe, often with questionable purposes and outcomes. For instance, housing policies frequently were used in order to assimilate the Central and Eastern European Roma, first during the Empire of Maria Theresa Habsburg and later under the Communist regimes (Barany 2002; Trehan and Kóczé 2009; McGarry 2017). With a completely different purpose, Italian authorities created nomad camps that were ostensibly meant to protect the “nomadic way of life of Roma” but, in fact, were based on a strongly bounded and essentialized understanding of “Romani culture” and resulted in forms of institutional segregation (Sigona 2005; Picker 2013). These examples show the need for a careful analysis of the significance and meaning of the house for the individual and of its relations with identity and cultural background. Notwithstanding, the meaning and significance of the term “adequate housing,” around which housing policies are currently developed, have not been investigated or questioned, but rather left acknowledged as an objective and unproblematic standard.

The objective of this article is to investigate how adequate housing is defined by European Union (EU) policy documents and how this definition informs the representation of Roma and the consequent housing strategies. The analysis of the documents starts in 2008 when the first Roma Summit was held in Brussels, and which marked the beginning of a new phase in the engagement of EU institutions in the inclusion of the Romani minority (Guy 2009). The critical discourse analysis aims, on one side, to assess whether the interpretation of the term “adequate housing” is open enough to encompass different understandings of housing and, on the other side, to investigate how it affects the representation of Roma. The analysis is conducted by acknowledging the role of discourse in the creation and maintenance of unchallenged assumptions, which risk reinforcing and reproducing forms of cultural hegemony and therefore of justifying relations of power and domination (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 9).

The first section presents the different definitions of the term “adequate housing” used by EU policy documents in order to identify the characteristics that a house must have in order to be considered adequate. In the analysis of these definitions, particular attention is given to the tension between the goal of providing a shelter that meets a series of physical parameters and the necessity of respecting different housing needs and preferences. This section of the article refers to a scholarly debate on the significance of the house for the reproduction of socio-cultural values of a society (Bourdieu 1977; Munro and Madigan 1999) and for the maintenance and manifestation of individual identity (Relph 1976; Massey 1995; Rose 1995; Sack 1997; Casey 2001).

The second section presents an analysis of how the understanding of “adequate housing” and the identified adequacy parameters inform the representation of Roma and housing policy recommendations. This analysis adopts the theoretical lens of post-colonial studies, intending to unveil the hidden patterns

through which classification and representation contribute to the persistence of relations of power, in particular in the case of Roma (Gay y Blasco 2003; Richardson 2006; Simhandl 2009; Trehan and Kóczé 2009; Vitale 2009; Boschetti and Vitale 2011; McGarry and Drake 2013; Piasere, Solimano, and Tosi Cambini 2014; Rodríguez Maeso 2014; Kostka 2015; Marushiakova and Popov 2015).

The last section comments on the importance of immaterial factors in the creation of a welcoming and familiar space and on the relevance of the concept of home-making, departing from the essay of Martin Heidegger on dwelling (Heidegger 1971). It consequently proposes a reflection on potential ways forward with an interpretation of the right to housing that acknowledges and supports home-making practices. With this in mind, the relevant literature includes a wide range of disciplines, which have analyzed the impact of home-making on an individual's inclusion and well-being from different perspectives (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kamino 1983; hooks 1990; Marcus 1995; Young 2005; Brun 2015; Évenot 2015; Boccagni and Mubi Brighenti 2017; Cancellieri 2017).

1. 'Adequate Housing' in International Law and EU Policy Documents

The concept of "adequate housing" first appeared in legislation in the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in Article 11. It stated that, "States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing" (UN General Assembly, 1966). The Covenant does not provide a clear definition of "adequate housing," a gap filled later by the General Comment No. 4 to ICESCR. This text specifies that this right has to be interpreted as "the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity" and provides a list of criteria that housing has to meet in order to be considered "adequate": security of tenure, intended as a degree of "legal protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats"; availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure, such as safe drinking water, energy for cooking, sanitation, heating and lighting; affordability – housing costs should be contained; habitability, understood as adequate space and protection "from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, structural hazards, and disease vectors"; accessibility – it should be accessible to vulnerable groups; location – it has to allow access to employment, education, and social services and it has to be away from polluting sources; and cultural adequacy – "The way housing is constructed [...] must appropriately enable the expression of cultural identity and diversity of housing" (United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights 1991).

This definition of the right to housing already presents some challenges and jeopardizes minority and indigenous people (Hohmann 2013). On one side, the physical parameters of adequacy can be used to justify forced resettlement or to impose permanent housing on groups unused to such accommodation. The housing policies imposed on indigenous Inuit populations in Canada provide an example. In the case of the Inuinnait group, igloos and summer tents were replaced with matchbox houses, which nominally may have satisfied the adequacy parameters of habitability and availability of services (heating, lighting, sanitation, and so on) but deprived the individuals of important cultural references (Collignon 2001). On

the other side, an essentialist interpretation of cultural adequacy risks justifying policies that reinforce housing inadequacy and marginalization. The creation of nomad camps in Italy is representative, as it was meant to meet the housing needs of a part of the population practicing nomadism but resulted in the isolation of an entire community, the majority of which is sedentary (Sigona 2005; Picker 2013). These examples demonstrate that the social and cultural implications of the house require special attention, as the term “adequate housing” can be used to impose housing solutions that do not meet the actual housing needs of the individuals.

At the European level, the concept of adequate housing is mentioned in Article 31 of the European Social Charter where the promotion of the access to housing of adequate standards is included among the measures the parties engage to undertake (Council of Europe 1996). In the area of policy, the terms adequate/inadequate housing are used widely by European documents dealing both with housing in general and with the social inclusion of Romani individuals. Despite the fact that all these documents mention “adequate housing,” no common definition of this term is provided, and different understandings of this term sometimes clash, especially regarding the use and interpretation of the cultural adequacy parameter. The European Commission’s report *Discrimination in Housing* embraces fully the ICESCR definition and recognizes the relevance of the cultural adequacy parameter. In accordance with the definition, it calls for the respect of the “traditional way of life of Travellers,” acknowledging that “housing available on the public and private market can also be unsuitable for a population for cultural reasons” (EC 2013b, 37). Two recent documents on housing, the European Commission’s working document *Confronting Homeless in European Union* (2013a) and the Eurofound’s *Inadequate Housing in Europe* (2016), other than mentioning the ICESCR parameters, refer to the *European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion* developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) in 2006. This document does not provide a list of parameters that housing has to meet in order to be adequate, but it divides housing inadequacies into four categories – roofless, houseless, insecure, inadequate – and provides for each an operational definition and a list of housing solutions that would fall into the category. The most striking aspect of this categorization is the inclusion of mobile homes and in general of all “non-standard structures” within the inadequate housing category (FEANTSA 2006). Although the European Commission working document specifies that by inadequate the document means “caravans without access to public utilities such as water, electricity or gas” (2013a, 4), the explicit inclusion of the term mobile home within the “inadequate” category conveys the message that the housing typology itself represents an adequacy risk. Furthermore, it reinforces the association between adequate housing and “conventional dwelling” and inadequate housing and “non-conventional dwelling,” which is present within the Eurofound report.

How inadequacy in housing is understood and conveyed by the EU documents analyzed here can also be traced in the characteristics used to assess housing across the Member States. In the report *Inadequate Housing in Europe*, the identified features of housing inadequacy are basic facilities (lack of indoor flush toilet, lack of bath or shower), affordability (rent or mortgage arrears, utility arrears), structural problems (damp or leaks, rot, insufficient heating or insulation), and lack of space (lack of space to sit outside, shortage of space) (Eurofound 2016). These parameters are widely used with minimal changes and also within other reports concerning housing and specifically targeting Roma (Eurofound 2012; FRA and UNDP 2012). Beyond the fact that cultural adequacy is not included, the methodology used in assessing

housing is exclusively quantitative, with no attempt to investigate the subjective and emotional side. Furthermore, the analysis is included within a narrative constructed around an economic language and perspective. Indeed, the argumentation over the necessity of tackling housing inadequacy is based on a balance between benefits and costs.

A narrative exclusively constructed around the physical features of the house does not take into account the subjective understanding of this space, which is connected to a person's identity and socio-cultural background. Numerous scholars, especially from the discipline of critical geography, have stressed the role of the house in defining and manifesting the identity of the individual (Relph 1976; Massey 1995; Rose 1995; Sack 1997; Casey 2001). Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) has emphasized the role of the physical design of the house in the reproduction of the cultural values and beliefs of the surrounding society: this reproduction passes through the socialization of the child, who familiarizes with the values of the society also through contact with the spatial organization of the house. Gender roles, relations with the family and with the exterior, understanding of privacy, eating habits, and so on are all materialized within the physical space of the house, which therefore becomes a mirror of the socio-cultural context in which we live.

Notwithstanding, an acknowledgement of the relation between house and identity should not lead to the idea that housing needs and preferences are fully determined by the socio-cultural context. First, the individual remains free to interpret and manipulate the values and beliefs of the surrounding society and, consequently, also the space of the house (Bourdieu 1977). Second, both house and identity are fluid and subject to change and therefore cannot be represented as features of bounded and monolithic cultures (Massey 1995; Rose 1995). Finally, although the concept of the house is socially constructed, the way in which the individual interprets it is strictly personal, as the factors intervening in its definition are numerous and intersect with each other (Blunt and Dowling 2006). In conclusion, the relation between house and personal identity emphasizes the intimate nature of the relationship with which the individual engages with this space. Moreover, it highlights how the classification of determined housing solutions as "inadequate" can lead to the misrecognition of identity itself.

2. Representation of Roma and Housing within EU Policy Documents

The representation of Roma through political and media discourses is gaining attention among scholars who are analyzing the policies aimed at fostering the inclusion of this group. Indeed, such representations inform the policies addressing the individuals deemed to belong to this group and are therefore particularly relevant in policy analysis. With this purpose, post-colonial studies represent a useful lens of analysis. The two main aspects that can be traced in this perspective are the trend of representing the Roma as the essential "Other" and the *infantilization* of Romani individuals, which lead to the development of paternalistic policies (Simhandl 2009; Trehan and Kóczé 2009; McGarry 2014; Piasere, Solimano and Cambini 2014; Kostka 2015). This section of the paper is going to show the persistence of these two trends in representing Roma within EU policy documents and their relationship with the definition and

use of the term “adequate housing.” The analysis is conducted on policy documents and reports released by EU institutions between 2008 and 2016, in particular by the European Commission, the European Council, and the Fundamental Rights Agency.

The main criticism of the EU Framework and related documents lies in the representation of Roma as a homogeneous group, which would fail to acknowledge the great diversity both in cultural and social terms and the risks of creating a label under which Romani individuality disappears (Simhandl 2009; Piasere, Solimano and Cambini 2014). Despite the efforts of EU institutions to adopt a language meant to recognize this diversity – such as the use of the term Travellers along with Roma (EC 2008; FRA 2010), or the explicit specification of the use of Roma as an umbrella term (Council of the European Union 2013) – its widespread use as a policy target continues to reify a group and its supposed characteristics.¹¹ An example is the Council Recommendation of 2013, where the use of Roma as an umbrella term is justified by supposed “similar cultural characteristics” shared by the different groups included in this category. As Marushiakova and Popov (2015), among others, have noticed, these supposed “similar cultural characteristics” are used to define a group of people who share little or nothing among each other.

Furthermore, Roma is used widely as an adjective to identify other elements, such as “Roma culture” (EC 2008, 2010, 2011b, 2012), “Roma needs” (EC 2008, 2011a), and “Roma issues” (EC 2008, 2010b, 2012). The use of these terms reinforces the idea that Romani individuals share common features that differentiate them from the rest of the population, especially when these are juxtaposed to a supposed mainstream. An example is the promotion of the intercultural approach within *The 10 Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion – Vademecum*. Here, the intercultural approach is meant to provide the majority population “with tools and competences to help them to understand the Roma culture, and the Roma are provided with tool and competences to understand mainstream culture” (EC 2010a). Consequently, instead of breaking the constructed borders dividing two supposedly homogenous groups (“the Roma” and “the mainstream”), the narrative used by these documents continues to reinforce this divide.

Housing in connection with Roma also is affected by homogenization as European documents fail to meaningfully recognize diversity within this sector, apart from dividing sedentary Roma from non-sedentary. On one side, the housing conditions of the sedentary Roma are unanimously described as disadvantaged (EC 2010a, 2010b), to be developed (EC 2008), isolated (EC 2010a, 2010b, 2012), poor (EC 2008, 2011a), substandard (FRA 2009, 2010), inadequate (FRA 2010, EC 2012), and segregated (EC 2010a, 2010b, 2011b, 2012; FRA 2010). On the other side, nomadism is presented as a practice that needs to be preserved but, at the same time, is part of an ancestral “Romani culture” that poses a problem for public authorities (EC 2012).

The characterization of the housing conditions of Roma is greatly informed by the statistics conducted in this sector. All these studies use the housing standards mentioned in the first section in order to assess

1. The term “reification” refers to a process through which social and political constructions, instead of being treated as such and therefore open to change/negotiation/manipulation, are presented as powerful realities with clear and crystalized characteristics (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

the quality of the houses of Roma compared to non-Roma. The results stress the huge gap in terms of housing adequacy between Roma and the majority of the population (Eurofound 2012; FRA and UNDP 2012). Although it is not the intention of this paper to deny the difficulties that many Romani individuals encounter in accessing housing-related services, these data risk reinforcing the representation of the Roma as intrinsically and indiscriminately poor and vulnerable.

A representative example is the document *What Works for Roma Inclusion in the EU*, meant to support policymakers in the development of the National Strategies and published by the European Commission. This document draws from a subdivision of Roma already reported by a previous Communication (EC 2010b) and based on supposed socio-economic differences and living conditions of Roma. After having stated that Roma are not a homogeneous group, it divides them into five groups according to the place in which they live and the level of integration. Although this division is meant to unveil the differences among Roma, all the groups are presented as a social issue, and housing conditions have a significant role in this characterization. The houses of those living in segregated urban or rural area are associated with “low quality,” “makeshift shacks,” “houses self-made using inappropriate materials,” “slums,” and “lack of urban planning and chaotic expansion”. Furthermore, the document links this situation with supposed features of Roma such as high birth rates and early marriages, which, together with the tendency of living together, would contribute to the expansion of the so-called “slums” (EC 2012).

This depiction not only dangerously links the poor housing conditions with supposed “Romani behaviours,” but also fails to recognize the important differences within these groups and the presence of houses belonging to Roma not reflecting the housing conditions depicted. Furthermore, the condition of the Roma belonging to these groups is opposed to those living in “integrated urban and suburban neighbourhoods,” identified as the one who “have already taken significant steps towards social integration” and “tend to be less visible because they are less concentrated or simply because their living habits are similar to those of the rest of their neighbours” (EC 2012).

This narrative presents a unilateral understanding of the integration process and the consequent idea that in order to be integrated and have access to adequate housing it is necessary to abandon some “Romani habits.” As highlighted by other authors, this understanding of the integration process is the product of a narrative that constructs the Roma as an uncivilized and passive mass that needs to be integrated into the democratic and developed mainstream society (Carrara Sutour et al. 2014; Rostas, Rovid and Szilvasi 2015). While integration is meant to be a two-way process in which different groups adapt to the values and needs of the others, within this narrative integration remains unilateral, as the only ones who are supposed to adapt are the Roma, while the values of the hegemonic culture remain unchallenged (Samers 1998, Phillips 2010).

What Works for Roma Inclusion in the EU is not an isolated case. The housing conditions of the Roma are indiscriminately depicted in negative terms and this risks reifying the association between Roma and inadequate housing. An example is a Fundamental Rights Agency report where “Roma and Traveller housing/accommodation” becomes an entity for itself, conveying the message that such “Roma and Traveller housing” is something clearly definable and different from that which supposedly is “mainstream housing.” Furthermore, “Roma and Traveller housing/accommodation” is associated

with the failure to conform to adequacy requirements: “there is ample evidence that the quality and location of Roma and Traveller housing frequently fails to conform to these requirements [adequacy parameters]” (FRA 2010, 6). It is even stated that its characteristics have a disproportionate impact on those who are facing multiple discrimination: “Two of the characteristics of Roma and Traveller accommodation, low quality and lack of infrastructure, have a disproportionate impact on those facing these challenges” (FRA 2010, 14).

The risks of such reification are multiple. First, it indiscriminately attributes negative characteristics to an entire group of individuals, denying both the diversity within this group and the agency of the single individual in improving housing conditions. Second, it reinforces the association between Roma and poverty, which gives the idea that Roma alone are unable to adapt to the system or that this condition is due to their choice (McGarry 2014). Furthermore, this reification is strictly linked to the process of objectification, through which the group “Roma” is presented and treated as an object that, beyond not taking part in policy planning, can be moved and used by policymakers according to their interests (Vitale 2009).

In the housing sector, the reified association between Roma and “inadequate housing” can result in a misrecognition of “Romani identity” itself: because of the importance of the house as an identity marker (Relph 1976, Rose 1995), its denigration is reflected in the identity of Romani individuals and reinforces their *otherness*. Kligman, for instance, has shown how the house is used in the creation of a distinction between the “uncivilised Roma,” who maintain a “Romani way of living,” and the “civilised one,” who live in “proper houses” (2001). Consequently, the association between Roma and forms of housing deemed “unconventional” (in the case of Travellers) or “inadequate” (in the case of settled Roma), can reinforce the understanding of the Roma as a “backward” group “to be developed” and unable to adapt to contemporary society. This narrative may provoke racism and the development of policies based on a paternalistic approach (Piasere, Solimano and Cambini 2014; Kostka 2015).

At the policy level, this translates into practices that do not recognize fully the agency of Romani individuals but rather treat them as children. In this regard, Trehan and Kóczé (2009) use a term coined by the post-colonial scholar Frantz Fanon – *infantilization*. A narrative constructing Roma as unable to improve their own condition alone leads to the development of policies based on the idea that Romani individuals need to go through a formative process before being ready to become meaningful participants in decision-making. They therefore are treated as children: their participation remains solely symbolic and becomes part of a formative process aimed at educating them on how to become good citizens (Trehan and Kóczé 2009). As other scholars have emphasized, the practice of indiscriminately considering all Roma too immature to represent themselves and taking part in decision-making is widespread not only among policymakers and authorities, but also within organizations aimed at supporting the Roma in their fight against marginalization and exclusion. It is indeed part of a system, which, in a vicious circle, continues reproducing stereotypes that cannot be contested without a meaningful involvement of Roma, which is, in turn, prevented because of the same stereotypes (Gay y Blasco 2003; Boschetti and Vitale 2011).

The paternalistic approach resulting from the construction of a narrative that reproduces stereotypes is already traceable in the policy recommendations and in the presentation of “good practices.” The first issue

that emerges is the participation of the individuals concerned. Although all the policy documents call for a further involvement of the Romani population in the design and implementation of inclusion policies, in most of the practical cases, this participation remains symbolic. An example is the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) report *Improving Roma Housing and Eliminating Slums* on two housing projects implemented in Spain. The projects are presented as a success potentially replicable in other contexts, despite the fact that, as explicitly admitted, the involvement of Roma was minimal and always mediated by non-Romani NGOs (FRA 2009, 13).

Furthermore, the project required the respect of a series of criteria in the selection of new flats (size, price, and location) that restricted housing choice and obliged many families to move to more isolated areas and away from their relatives (FRA 2009, 14). This example shows how paying attention exclusively to a set of physical parameters may neglect other immaterial housing needs – affective or social – that are not immediately observable through statistics and could better emerge with the proper involvement of the individuals concerned. Nevertheless, the involvement necessary in order to meet the singular housing needs and preferences is often neglected also because of the persistent stereotype that Roma tend to create ghettos themselves. In one case, the objective of avoiding the creation of new ghettos resulted in the recommendation of adopting appropriate rules for the relocation of the Romani families as “practices such as permitting the free selection of the flat, housing together the biggest families, etc. will tend towards Roma concentration” (EC 2012, 23).

Another recurrent practice is conditioning the entitlement of the right to adequate housing with the fulfillment of “certain obligations, for example, attending relevant employment trainings, sending children to school and looking after their health” (FRA 2011, 11) or even the adoption of a vague “adequate behaviour” (EC 2012, 44). This practice is the result of a narrative constructed around prejudices (Roma do not want to send their children to school, they do not look after their health, etc.) and that treats Romani individuals as immature. For this reason, emphasis is given to the necessity of following closely each Romani family closely through a process aimed at changing this supposedly childish behavior.

This is the case of the last Eurofound report on inadequate housing, which presents a housing inclusion project addressing Roma and implemented in a small village in Slovakia as a “success story.” The project was implemented between 2013 and 2014 as a pilot self-building project by a local NGO and it was meant to address the poor conditions of the selected families “by upgrading them from passive bystanders to active participants in their home construction” (Szüdi and Kováčová 2016, 431). The Eurofound report praises the project for tackling a series of other issues supposedly connected to the problem of housing inadequacy such as “bad hygiene,” “financial illiteracy,” and “non-working habits.” It explains how the housing project aimed at tackling the above-mentioned issues by training the community and involving the Romani beneficiaries in the construction of the new accommodations, all under the supervision of NGO professionals. It finally praises the fact that Roma demonstrated the ability to be collaborative and to “obey the rules” (Eurofound 2016, 82–84). By emphasizing the fact that Roma involved in the project obeyed the rules, the report implicitly conveys the message that Roma usually do not obey. It furthermore reproduces a colonial approach that treats Romani individuals as children that have to be constantly supervised, whose cooperation does not go beyond following the instructions given by others, and who have to be praised in case they do follow these

instructions and demonstrate an ability to be collaborative. Looking at this narrative, the path towards recognizing the agency of Romani individuals and their meaningful involvement in inclusion projects seems still very long indeed.

3. How the House Can Become a Home: Reflections on Home-making and Housing Policies

Along with reproducing policies based on a paternalistic approach, the persistence of stereotypes affecting the Roma and the indiscriminate labeling of their houses as “inadequate,” present the risk of rendering home-making practices invisible and, in some cases, even hindering these practices altogether. Home-making refers to a process through which persons develop a sense of home within the place in which they live (Brun and Fábos 2015; Cancellieri 2017). Home is a term that refers to a feeling rather than a specific physical place. For this reason, it can be associated to different places – the community, the neighborhood, the nation – and not forcibly to the physical space of the house, which can be an alienating or unsafe space not associated with positive feelings (Munro and Madigan 1999; Blunt and Dowling 2006).

Notwithstanding, numerous studies have stressed the importance of home-making processes for the empowerment of marginalized groups and the central role of the house in this sense. These studies have shown how the possibility of creating home within the domestic space enables individuals to create a space where they feel welcome and where they can express their identity and personality. The direct involvement of individuals in this process thus creates an attachment to the broader context that enables them to engage within the broader community (Brun 2015; Cancellieri 2017). Contemporary works within the field of sociology stress the link between the creation of bonds within the familiar private space and the level of engagement within the communal and public spheres (Thévenot 2015; Boccagni and Brighenti 2017). Furthermore, the house can become a space of resistance for oppressed groups that do not have a voice within the public space (bell hooks 1990). The relevance of these practices moved Iris Marion Young (2005) to call for a further recognition of home as a critical value. She indeed claims the necessity of democratizing home, namely of giving the possibility to everyone to build a home rather than just a house (Young 2005).

But what does building a home actually mean? The home is a space where individuals feel recognized, welcome – and therefore safe – and with which they can identify. It is strictly connected with the identity (collective and individual) of the person and therefore highly subjective and undefinable according to “official” standards. The philosopher Martin Heidegger (1971) claims that the two basic features of the act of dwelling are building and sparing (the act of preservation). He, therefore, asserts that dwelling consists of a continuous process that produces an attachment between individuals and the place in which they live. His work has been used and also criticized by several authors, especially in regard to its validity in contemporary times, where people move more easily, are less attached to specific places, and do not have the possibility to directly build their own home (Relph 1976; Massey 1995; Casey 2001). Nevertheless, it highlights the importance of the involvement of the individual in the process of home-making. Indeed, in order to build a familiar and welcoming space, the physical quality of the house has to be supported with the possibility of personalizing the domestic space (Marcus 1995; Young 2005; Brun 2015; Cancellieri 2017) and with the

creation of positive social relations within its surroundings (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983). The first aspect is connected to the need of individuals to express their individuality, but also to preserve and reproduce their cultural values and beliefs. This personalization is not always possible. It requires a certain level of privacy (intended as the possibility of controlling the space), a space that allows individuals to feel protected and secure, and the possibility to personalize it and make it a material mirror of their identity (Young 2005; Brun 2015). This means that not all houses offered on the market can easily become a home for everyone. Secondly, the feeling of safety and recognition associated with the home goes beyond the space of the house itself; it entails the necessity of building positive relationships with the neighborhood and therefore of feeling welcome (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983).

These theoretical reflections provide relevant insights on how to develop a more inclusive understanding of adequate housing, which, other than ensuring the access to fundamental services (such as electricity, running water, and so on), allows and facilitates the construction of a home. They highlight the relevance of the subjective understanding of the house: since well-being within the domestic space is determined also by immaterial factors such as the social relations within the surrounding context and the possibility of expressing one's individual personality, statistics that consider exclusively the material factors may produce a distorted image of the actual reality. Quantitative statistics should therefore be supplemented with qualitative analyses of the subjective assessment of the house. Furthermore, home-making emphasizes the importance of the direct involvement of the individual, still unsatisfactory in the case of policies towards Roma. This involvement has to be direct and individually-based in order to give visibility to individual housing needs and preferences and to avoid the implementation of housing policies that may break existing social patterns, which are generally invisible to an external policy planner.

With this purpose, it is also important to consider the role of the socio-cultural context in influencing the individual understanding of home. It is therefore necessary to respect different housing solutions by facilitating their access and the equal provision of related services. Finally, the numerous implications involved in the process of home-making that concern the broader socio-economic inclusion of the individual should advise policymakers on the potential consequences of evictions and forced relocations of Romani individuals. It is indeed necessary to consider existing home-making practices, which can be hindered by relocation, and the fact that the new accommodations may be located in an area where Roma may have difficulties finding a supportive and welcoming social structure, especially in consideration of the high level of discrimination suffered by the individuals belonging to this group.

Conclusion

This article analyzed the definition of “adequate housing” provided by international legislation and EU policy documents and its impact on the representation of Roma and on the consequent housing strategy at the EU level. In this context, the main reference is the General Comment No. 4 to ICESCR, which provides a series of “adequacy” criteria, among which lies cultural adequacy, meant to protect the expression of cultural identity. Nevertheless, this definition proves to be problematic: on one side, physical criteria may be used for forced resettlement of people by referencing their physically inadequate housing conditions; on the other side, a bounded and essentialized understanding of culture may fail to meet

the actual housing needs of the individual. At the European level, another reference in the assessment of “adequate housing” is the *European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion*, which provides a categorization of different kinds of homelessness, housing insecurity, and housing inadequacy. This document does not acknowledge cultural adequacy and explicitly includes mobile homes within the “inadequacy” category. In addition, the reports assessing the adequacy of the housing conditions of Roma use strictly physical parameters, such as the presence of basic facilities – like an indoor flush toilet – and the availability of space per person. The picture that emerges from these studies is a huge gap in terms of “housing adequacy” between Roma and non-Roma.

Consequently, the EU policy documents dealing with the inclusion of the Roma within the European Union, failing to recognize the important differences within this group, present the housing conditions of the Romani individuals as indiscriminately “substandard” and “inadequate.” This representation fosters the association between Roma and poverty, which informs policies adopting a paternalistic approach. Furthermore, as the house is deeply linked to collective identity, its denigration may result in the misrecognition of the identity itself. For these reasons, this paper calls for further acknowledgement of the importance of home-making practices, which emphasizes the importance of the involvement of the individual in the definition of the house, the role of emotional attachment to a given place, and the relevance of creating an environment where one can feel welcome and accepted. Indeed, the home, which entails a feeling more than a strictly physical place, cannot be defined in exclusively physical terms. Therefore, in order to allow the construction of a house where the individual can feel at home, the access to housing services has to be supported by the recognition of different understandings of the home and the possibility for individuals to make the house a space where they can express their individual and collective identity. Finally, the importance of the attachment to a place and of the relations with neighborhoods stresses the necessity of more thoughtful consideration of the impact of re-housing policies.

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