

Manifestations of spatial injustice and institutional practices (re)producing them. A view on the neoliberal spatial planning regime creating territorial unevenness in Romania

A területi igazságtalanság megnyilvánulásai és az ezeket újratermelő intézményi gyakorlatok. A területi egyenlőtlenségekhez hozzájáruló romániai neoliberális tervezési rendszer vizsgálata

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ABSTRACT: To address the manifestations of spatial injustices as illustrations of territorial underdevelopment, I utilize the divergent development framework that emphasizes the centrality of the state to development outcomes. By highlighting institutional practices, I stress the contribution of both the top-down and bottom-up agencies in making and preserving some spaces in a deprived condition despite the agencies' declarative aim of offering solutions to reduce deprivations.

Based on the RELOCAL research material, the ultimate aim of the article is to make a theoretical contribution to the interpretation of territorial underdevelopment as the result of a neoliberal spatial planning regime. After discussing its conceptual frameworks (in section 1), the article presents the brief historical summary of territorial inequalities in Romania (section 2) and the national territorial development policies (section 3). Afterwards, it examines some manifestations of territorial unevenness at the local level (section 4) and the local actions tackling spatial injustice (section 5).

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KULCSSZAVAK: térbeli igazságtalanság; területi alulfejlettség; neoliberális tervezés; vállalkozói szemléletű kormányzás

ABSZTRAKT: A tanulmány a romániai területi egyenlőtlenségeket a neoliberális területi tervezési rendszer által (újra)termelt jelenségként elemzi, és egyfelől az országos területfejlesztési politikák, másfelől a helyi önkormányzatok és a projektalapú akciókat megvalósító civil szereplők intézményi gyakorlatai szempontjából tárgyalja. A dolgozat arra az érvre is támaszkodik, amely szerint az egyenlőtlenség a kapitalizmus szerves jellemzője, azaz a profitszerzés logikája által vezérelt tőkebefektetésből vagy a befektetés hiányából fakad. Nem hagyja továbbá figyelmen kívül, hogy a területi



egyenlőtlenségeket a neoliberális állampolitika és a tőkefelhalmozás logikája nem a térbeli igazságtalanság megnyilvánulásaként értelmezi. Az „alulfejlettséget” az „alulfejlett” területek földrajzi és/vagy népességi jellemzőinek „természetes” következményeként kezelő megközelítés nagyban hozzájárul a különböző szinteken létrejövő egyenlőtlenségek fennmaradásához. Az elemzés egyik legfontosabb következtetése, hogy mindezen transzlokális tényezők miatt, amelyek különböző léptékű területi egyenlőtlenségeket okoznak, az egyenlőtlenségek a leküzdésüket célzó helyi projektalapú akciók ellenére is (újra)termelődnek.

Az elméleti keretek felvázolása után a tanulmány előbb a romániai területi egyenlőtlenségeket és a nemzeti területfejlesztési politikákat tárgyalja, majd a helyi szintű egyenlőtlenségek néhány megnyilvánulását, valamint a térbeli igazságtalanságok leküzdésére irányuló helyi akciókat mutatja be. A következtetés az empirikus megállapításokat összekapcsolja azzal a fogalmi kerettel, amelyre az elemzés támaszkodik. Összegzi, hogy milyen mechanizmusok révén vesz részt az állam a területi egyenlőtlenségek újratermelésében, és miként járulnak hozzá ehhez a neoliberális kormányzás elvei szerint működő – a meritokrácia, a versenyképesség, illetve a vállalkozói szemléletű kormányzás ideáit képviselő – projektalapú helyi kezdeményezések. A cikk hangsúlyozza, hogy nem csupán a területi egyenlőtlenségek, hanem mindazok a felülről vagy alulról érvényesülő intézményi gyakorlatok is a területi igazságtalanság megnyilvánulásai, amelyek továbbgörgetik a strukturálisan létrehozott hátrányos helyzeteket, miközben deklaráltan azok felszámolására törekednek. Eme állapotok progresszív megváltoztatása azt feltételezné, hogy az állam ne szolgálja többé a területi egyenlőtlenségeket okozó piaci alapú profitorientált fejlesztést, hanem olyan szabályozásokkal ellenőrizze azt, amelyek garantálják, hogy az épített és a természeti környezet fejlesztése a köz érdekeit szolgálja.

Introduction

This article analyzes territorial unevenness in Romania as a phenomenon (re)produced through a neoliberal spatial planning regime. It completes some former efforts to address uneven urban development as a racialized process (Vincze, Zamfir 2019). Here I describe the territorial planning regime from a twofold perspective, which connects the dominant national territorial development policies to the institutional practices of the local public authorities and non-governmental actors implementing project-based actions. Nevertheless, my paper also relies on the argument that unevenness is an endemic feature of capitalism, i.e., it results from capital investment or disinvestment into territories according to the needs of profit-making. Moreover, one may observe that territorial unevenness is not understood as a manifestation of spatial injustice nor by the neoliberal state policies or by the logic of capital accumulation. And this is another element which leads to the persistence of unevenness at different scales because this way of evaluating the problem frames ‘underdevelopment’ as a supposedly natural outcome of the geographical and/or population-related characteristics of the ‘underdeveloped’ areas. Most importantly, my analysis reveals that due to all these trans-local factors creating territorial unevenness at different scales, the latter is (re)produced despite the local project-based actions¹ aiming to tackle them.

The article uses the empirical material gathered via the RELOCAL research² conducted in Romania in 2017–2019 (alongside investigations made in 11 other countries) by multiple methods, such as interviews, collection of secondary

statistical data, and documenting policies and the public files of the analyzed actions. Our team completed four case studies on local actions handling manifestations of spatial injustice³ and a study on national territorial policies and administrative system.⁴ The current paper uses these results from a different angle than our previous papers, which focused more on the contents and contexts of the local actions (Vincze, Bădiță, Hossu 2019; Zamfir 2020). Nevertheless, together with the latter, the present article continues to maintain that territorial unevenness is a systemic feature of the capitalist political economy resulting from the interconnected logics of capital accumulation, on the one hand, and state politics and governmental policies serving its interests, on the other hand.

After outlining the article's conceptual framework (in its first section), based on the above-mentioned data, first I will discuss the territorial inequalities in Romania (in section 2) and the national territorial development policies (in the third section), and afterwards I will address a few manifestations of unevenness at the local level (in section 4) and the local actions conducted to tackle spatial injustice (in the fifth section). The conclusion reconnects the empirical findings to the conceptual framework chosen for the support of my analysis.

Conceptual framework

With the ultimate aim of highlighting the institutional practices that reproduce territorial unevenness (in Romania), this paper is based on the theory of uneven development (Harvey 2005, 2006; Smith 1984) and on the concept of spatial justice (Soja 2009). The former helps in conceiving territorial unevenness as a systemic phenomenon, while the latter positions the researcher not only into a critical, but also a normative standpoint towards the phenomenon of spatial inequality.

Furthermore, in addition to Soja's interest in highlighting the importance of looking at justice from a critical spatial perspective or of explicitly emphasizing the spatiality of (in)justice, I believe it is crucial to stress that uneven development is unjust exactly because it hinders 'the equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them' (Soja 2009, 1.). By doing so, I want to distance my approach from a spatial perspective, which naturalizes the geographical space or the culture of those who inhabit it (Robinson 2002), and to deal with the complex relationship between space and the political, as it functions in the production of territorial injustice manifested in several forms at different scales.

Most importantly, I accept that uneven development is a systemic product and geographical premise of capitalist development (Smith 1984), that capitalism depends on the capacity to expand towards territories, sectors, and domains not yet incorporated into the circulation of capital (Harvey 2005, 2006), and that territorial unevenness is a result of profit-driven development (Baeten 2012). However, beyond adopting this conceptual frame while describing territorial

inequalities in Romania (section 2) and manifestations of territorial unevenness at local levels (section 4), in this article I will highlight the role of different actors in the reproduction of inequalities during ‘times of polarisation’ (Lang, Görmar 2019). I argue that national and local actors do have agency in the (re)creation of unevenness, because they are guided by the model of entrepreneurial governance (Baeten 2012; Brenner 2004; Hackworth 2007; Jessop 2002; Morange, Fol 2014; Peck, Theodore, Brenner 2013; Vincze 2015) and neoliberal planning (Harvey 1989; Olesen 2014; Peck, Tickell 2002; Sager 2011). More concretely, I will highlight the role of the national territorial development policies (section 3) and of the local public authorities and some non-governmental actors (section 5) in the (re)production of territorial unevenness despite their declarative aim to tackle the problem.

A brief historical summary of territorial inequalities in Romania

During socialism, development was conceived and coordinated by the Romanian state, which performed one of the biggest transformations of the country since its formation at the beginning of the 20th century. The reduction of regional disparities after 1945 was part of both the creation of the supposedly homogeneous Romanian nation and the construction of a socialist economy via nationalization, urbanization, industrialization, centralization of public administration, and integration of Romania into the circuit of trade among socialist countries. Compared to the interwar period, when Romania’s urban population was about 20% of the total, by 1989 this proportion had grown to 53.2%. In the 1980s the less developed counties (Botoșani, Vaslui, Maramureș, Bistrița-Năsăud, Dolj, Olt, Giurgiu, Teleorman) achieved an overall level of industrial production per inhabitant equal to the national average.

Immediately after 1990, when the effects of the dismantled centralized and planned economy were not yet strongly felt, ‘the level of regional disparities in Romania was relatively reduced compared to West European countries’ (as observed in the Romanian National Development Plan 2004–2006, 170.). The first analysis of regional disparities in Romania was made under the PHARE program for the period March to July 1996. It allowed the spatial localization of poverty and underdevelopment in the country's two main areas: the North-East, which includes virtually all the historical region of Moldova; and the South, which is the largest agricultural area of the country called the Romanian Plain (Biriescu, Butuza 2011).

Later analysis revealed that the developmental disparities should be viewed in a more nuanced way, and awareness of the inter-regional inequalities should be considered together with the intra-regional ones (World Bank 2016).⁵ For example, Cluj County has the second-lowest poverty rate in Romania (after Ilfov county including the capital city), but its neighbouring counties in the Northwest Development Region (Bistrița-Năsăud, Maramureș, Sălaj, and Satu Mare) have

higher poverty than the Romanian average. Moreover, it should be noted that areas where poverty is high and the areas displaying the highest number of impoverished people do not necessarily overlap. Penurious areas may be sparsely populated, whereas large cities tend to have low poverty rates, but large numbers of poor people. For example, despite its lower poverty rate, Cluj County has more people at risk of poverty than Sălaj, while Bucharest has more people at risk of poverty than six other counties. Nevertheless, there are cases like some North-Eastern counties, especially Botoşani, Iaşi, and Suceava, which have both high poverty rates and large numbers of poor people.

Today, uneven development in Romania also means that the concentration of resources, including jobs, in a few major cities or ‘growth poles’ (Bere et al. 2013) — where, among other investments, capital is also accumulated via real estate development — leads to the increase of living costs in these localities. All this is happening in parallel with the depopulation of several localities across the country. Section 4 of the article will complete this picture by describing manifestations of territorial unevenness at the local level in four localities.

But before that, I wish to discuss the national territorial development policies, which are elements of a state politics supporting marketization, privatization, and financialization. The latter is part of a global trend, which caused most CEE cities to decline after 1990 (Cadavid et al. 2017), and secondary cities of the region to shrink (Rumpel, Slach 2014), while only a few ‘regional metropolises’ became social or economic nodes of development (Páthy 2017). Therefore, unevenness and spatial injustice created by trans-local forces in several forms cannot be reduced through the means of a locality, with local resources, or by ‘local communities’, even if the latter might be mobilized around socially sensitive development goals and are attracting private capital and EU funds that is needed for the accomplishment of these goals beyond economic growth.

National territorial development policies

Territorial planning policies support the above-mentioned dominant developmental trends that are dependent on capital and foreign investment. They sustain the model of polycentric development and spatial agglomeration of economic activities in a few big cities. The country’s *Territorial Development Strategy* elaborated in 2012 was conceived in the spirit of the *Territorial Agenda of the European Union* (Vincze 2020) and also followed the re-scaled urban-centred EU policies (Brenner 1999). The goals defined in this document referred to the discrepancies between Romania and the other EU Member States but also addressed its internal disparities. This Strategy is supposed to be the basis of the whole spatial planning system for urbanism and upgrading territories, the regional, county, and local strategic documents and development plans, and also operational documents such as urbanistic plans.

In the neoliberal view underpinning Romania's territorial policies, the development of urban centres and growth poles that could attract private capital and EU funds might have a spatial trickle-down effect and would also create jobs for people from the surrounding localities. Moreover, in this system the so-called 'magnet cities' (Cristea et al. 2017) act as 'competitive cities' (Blankespoor et al. 2014), since they compete among each other to attract (foreign) capital and to demonstrate their entrepreneurial capacities. It is the World Bank's development vision that informs such convictions and directions. Its influence in Romania happened in the most possible direct way, as it was the World Bank that, especially since 2012, conducted all the studies informing the strategies on regional and territorial development, integrated (urban) development, housing, the social inclusion of the Roma, and combatting poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, from the position of a consultant for the Romanian government, the World Bank also had a crucial role in elaborating the last *Partnership Agreement between Romania and the European Commission*.⁶

The *Territorial Development Strategy* includes guidelines on territorial cohesion, the urban dimension of cohesion policy, and integrated territorial interventions for urban development and community-led local development (CLLD). CLLD (started in 2014) is the late urban extension of the former LEADER method, which was launched in Romania in 2005 as a special axis of the rural development program, but it took effect especially after 2007. Both programs required the creation of the so-called Local Action Groups, constituted as associations based on the voluntary alliance of the founding members including public institutions, private companies, and civil society organizations acting on a circumscribed rural area (see also Brooks, Kovács 2021 in this volume).

The Local Action Group is not the only new institutional structure without administrative power that was created in the country with the aim of increasing its capacity to absorb EU funds. After the establishment in 1998 of the NUTS1 macro-regions - which lack administrative power - Law 315/2004 created eight development regions to act as a framework for the elaboration, implementation, and evaluation of regional development policies, and the gathering of specific statistical data. Furthermore, this law founded the Councils for Regional Development, which are deliberative regional organisms without juridical personality, and the Agencies for Regional Development, which function as non-profit organizations with a public utility. Later, Law 286/2006 created the so-called Intercommunity Development Associations with the same legal status. In the absence of administrative regionalization, these new forms of association were an essential condition for accessing the environmental funds of the European Union. They are financed from the contributions that come from the local budgets of the partnering administrative-territorial units, and from some other sources. The government supports these associations through the National Program of Development. Despite such institutional innovations, according to its Constitution,

Romania remains a unitary nation state, and from an administrative point of view, since 1968 it has been organized into territorial administrative units. They include approximately 13,700 localities (LAU2), which are integrated into 42 counties (LAU1). These are the country's territorial structures that have elected officials, such as, respectively, local councils and mayors, or county councils and their presidents, with the county prefectures in their turn being the representatives of and appointed by central government.

The old administrative, territorial organization of Romania continued to exist after 1990 but its institutional practices started to be adjusted to the normalized ideologies of global neoliberal capitalism. This is how the more general trend of 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Peck, Theodore, Brenner 2009) happened in the territorial policy sector of Romania: the inherited institutional forms were slowly but incompletely dismantled to unleash further (de)regulatory neoliberal transformations. The phenomenon is a manifestation of how, in the process of transformation of 'actually existing socialism' into neoliberal capitalism, the state did not withdraw from (spatial) planning, but it reworked its relations with the market through (de)regulatory reforms (Baeten 2012, 207.) that eventually led to increasing territorial unevenness. By enacting entrepreneurial governance, the state even transformed itself following market principles, and it participated in the promotion of the neoliberal development paradigm (Robinson 2002, 1056.), proving by this, too, that it plays a central role in the (uneven) development outcomes.

Manifestations of territorial unevenness at the local level

Our targeted localities are placed in three of the eight Development Regions of Romania (North West, Centre, Bucharest-Ilfov). Economically, these are the most developed regions of the country, however, they continue to display internal spatial inequalities. Looking through the RELOCAL research for actions (projects, programmes, policies, strategies) that aimed to tackle spatial injustice at the local level, we could identify and describe some of the manifestations of spatial inequality, which are actually cases of territorial unevenness (re)produced at the level of the localities: residential segregation in the polluted Pata Rât landfill area of Cluj-Napoca, a developed north-western regional city; the perpetuation of informal and precarious housing on the margins of the city of Codlea in central Romania; the occurrence of infrastructurally underdeveloped areas in the capital city; and the formation of a territory disadvantaged by economic collapse and environmental pollution in Northern Romania. This diagnosis completes that discussed in the second section of the article, i.e., the picture of unevenness displayed at different higher scales (between regions, among counties of the same regions, and between the localities of one county). In what follows, I will

briefly present manifestations of unevenness within the cities by describing their main features, which to different degrees and in diverse combinations might characterize other situations from other local contexts as well.

The Pata Rât area, which suffers from residential segregation, is located in the city of Cluj-Napoca, which is defined as a 'growth pole' and is the centre of the Cluj Metropolitan Area in the larger Northwest Development Region. It illustrates how semi-informal residential areas are formed in the isolated and polluted margins of a developed city as a result of several forces, including:

- evictions and relocation of impoverished people to this area by administrative measures;
- the everyday life strategies of looking for cheap housing solutions by people who are forced to sell their labour very cheaply;
- underinvestment in the area, which was formed in the proximity of the landfill;
- the reduction of the public housing stock (including the newly developed social housing) to under 1.5% of the total housing fund of the city, so that is not even enough to respond to the housing needs of the most deprived;
- real estate development and speculation that keeps raising the prices on the housing market, and which makes the city more and more inaccessible for low-income people.

The Mălin neighborhood is a space of informal housing formed in the city of Codlea in Braşov county, which belongs to the Centre Development Region. The municipality is part of the Braşov Metropolitan Area and the Braşov Growth Pole and it is characterized by the following:

- its informal housing area dates to the 1960s: in the context of socialist systematization and urbanization, a group of Roma families was relocated from Codlea to its margins near the local landfill;
- the Mălin neighborhood has existed ever since, even though the old landfill is no longer functional;
- so far, there have been no administrative measures to legalize this informal settlement, to assure long-term security for its inhabitants, and to improve the living conditions in the area.

The zone of Plumbuița is an urban territory suffering from disinvestment and internal inequalities which belongs to District 2 of the capital city Bucharest (the centre of Bucharest-Ilfov region, which displays the best economic indicators in terms of regional development in Romania). This area is an amalgam of:

- natural and cultural patrimony;
- deprived and informal housing;
- new real estate development;
- the subject of debates over ownership;
- a battlefield for several interest groups (the Orthodox Church, the 'Romanian Water' company, private developers, current owners of the

historical palace, and the local public administration), while the needs of impoverished Roma who have lived there for ages are not properly represented when the priorities of local development are established.

The area, including the small town of Baia Sprie and 17 villages, was circumscribed by a Local Action Group (LAG) implementing a LEADER project in the context of a larger Romanian territory disadvantaged by economic collapse and environmental disasters. Baia Sprie belongs to the Baia Mare Growth Pole and Metropolitan Area from Maramureş county located in the Northern part of the North-West Development Region. Briefly, the area might be described by some main features, such as:

- being a former mining zone that socially and territorially was deprived of resources after the mines closed, and in addition, it continued to be affected by pollution;
- lost of many jobs, while the area was emptied of economic activities in the years of de-industrialization;
- internal unevenness from the point of view of economic development: most of the job-creating new companies are in Baia Sprie and other three nearby localities, while five of the component Local Administrative Units are classified as poor areas;
- intensive transnational emigration;
- difficulties in generating locally but also in attracting the resources for the economic development of the area.

Local actions tackling spatial injustice

Each of the four localities where we conducted our investigations had their development strategies that were supposed to be integrated into similar strategies at higher scales, i.e., at the growth pole, metropolitan area, county, regional, and national level. All of them followed similar templates, and frequently they were elaborated by consultancy firms or even by the World Bank, which also ‘works’ for local authorities and not only for the central state. The public authorities that should be accountable for the existence and implementation of development strategies are outsourcing this duty of theirs, together with the services that they were supposed to provide. On the one hand, this is a manifestation of ‘governance-beyond-the-state’ that limits political citizenship (Swyngedouw 2005), and, on the other hand, it facilitates the rise of a project class (Kováč, Kučerová 2006). Furthermore, this is how political responsibility is transformed into technical expertise that is supposedly neutral from a political/ideological point of view, but which, nevertheless, embodies a naturalized political option for neoliberal developmental patterns and trends. In these acts of outsourcing, the state and local public administration are transposing their agency to other actors lacking any political accountability.

Our case studies demonstrated that the problems to which the actions were aimed to respond were territorially localized, but they appeared due to larger trans-local factors and processes, many of them functioning in a *longue durée* time frame. Moreover, while in each case the main implementing stakeholders were local actors, the conceptual frameworks and financial schemes that facilitated them came from trans-local agents. Altogether, 'localism' as a perspective adopted in development theories and practices is rooted in trans-local, or even trans-national policy agendas as a reaction to the failures of centralized development models. Despite its transformative potential in terms of the capacity for acknowledging local problems and for mobilizing local forces to solve them, localism does not exclude the reproduction of inequalities and might, at best, improve procedural justice, i.e., the access of more people to decision-making processes (Blondel, Evrard 2019). However, especially in its neoliberal format, localism can reproduce competition and meritocracy-based governance and justifies inequalities and lack of solidarity with the most deprived.

Table 1 below offers a quick overview of the aims, key agents, financial resources, and shortcoming of the projects that were supposed to solve much bigger structural problems than their administrative capacities, financial stability and existing national legal frames could allow.

To induce a progressive change in reducing territorial unevenness and spatial injustices, the institutional practices discussed in this article should be transformed in many ways, including the following:

- There is a need for more coherent national and local planning policies for cohesive and inclusive territorial development. This should promote, through legislative and financial incentives, the application of the principle of solidarity across unevenly developed areas. In this way, access to basic public services (housing, healthcare, school education) and income resources would be equalized for each social category regardless the territory where they live.
- In the distribution of the EU funds, a compulsory measure should be implemented in the case of every developmental project: they should be analysed from the point of view of their impact upon the most disadvantaged categories, and they should include positive/affirmative actions on behalf of people living in disadvantaged and deprived spaces.
- Beyond the project-based interventions, more state and social control of the socio-economic processes that create uneven development, spatial disparities, and deprivations should be facilitated, to reduce the risk of reproducing inequalities and injustices or living conditions in which people are dispossessed of the basic rights necessary for a decent life.

Table 1.: *The projects' features in a comparative frame*
 A projektek legfontosabb jellemzőinek összehasonlítása

	Aims	Key agents	Financial resources	Shortcomings
Pata Cluj (Social interventions for the desegregation and social inclusion of vulnerable groups in the Cluj Metropolitan Area, including the disadvantaged Roma)	Preparing the desegregation of the landfill area via the relocation of its inhabitants to other parts of Cluj-Napoca or beyond	Intercommunity Development Association – Cluj Metropolitan Area, in collaboration with some NGOs	Poverty Alleviation Program of the Norwegian Funds	The ownership of the project belonged to an institutional structure that did not have public administrative attributions and decision-making power The City Hall did not make any contribution to the project The housing component of the project (which should have been a core element of a desegregation plan) came too late in the project's lifetime Only 35 families out of the total of 350 were relocated to new homes outside of Pata Rat, 75% of them to the villages nearby Cluj-Napoca (i.e., in the Cluj Metropolitan Area) The project did not make any contribution to changing public policies on peoples' accessibility to the city's social housing stock
Mălin-Codlea (Accountability of citizens in the field of housing)	Legalization of an informal settlement in the city of Codlea	Codlea Town Hall, but the initiative belonged to an NGO from outside of the city	Active citizenship program of the National Agency for Roma	The project was not acknowledged as an action of the city's development strategy Legalization of homes was not possible – the fulfilment of this aim would have needed consistent changes in the national legislation on informal settlements Land ownership issues were solved for 10% of the households (who had money to buy land)

Aims	Key agents	Financial resources	Shortcomings
Plumbuița PIDU (Integrated Plan for Urban Development for the Area 2 Plumbuița-Steaua Roșie-Petricani in District 2, Bucharest)	Local Authorities of District 2, Bucharest	Regional Development Program of EU Funds	Restricted legal capacity of public authorities and the unclear property relations regarding the land (in relation to other actors, such as the Orthodox Church, Ghica Palace, and the Romanian Water Company) Reducing the services provided for the benefit of poor Roma to a video surveillance system The implementation of PIDU depends on continuously winning funds through competition
Mara Natur (Microregional Association Mara Natur)	Mara Natur Local Action Group	LEADER program of the EU Funds	Small amount of money compared to the complexities of the local problems that appeared after de-industrialization Only those could benefit from the small grants who were already advanced with their entrepreneurial plans (mostly in tourism) Insecurities of the Leader program at the country level Lack of the needed larger administrative reforms in the country

Source: synthesis of the author

Conclusions

The article has addressed territorial unevenness in a country that in the past three decades has been a laboratory for the transformation of socialism into neoliberal capitalism. Since, during the process, the state has enabled profit-oriented territorial development, it contributed to the (re)production of spatial unevenness. Our case studies demonstrated that in Romania this has happened due to several state-led mechanisms, such as: the outsourcing of welfare services from governmental bodies to project-based organizations and from public budgets to external funding; the rescaling of governmental responsibilities from the level of municipalities (as territorial administrative units) to the level of larger metropolitan areas or other geographically circumscribed territories (that do not have administrative or political powers); the use of several mechanisms to push the pauperized labour force to the peripheries of the gentrifying cities, and even beyond their administrative borders, as urban lands gain more and more value on the real estate market.

All the local actions discussed in this article were initiatives implemented in Romania a few years after the enforcement of governmental austerity measures as a reaction to the 2008-2009 financial crisis. In this sense, they might be assessed as efforts to slightly rebalance the severe effects of the 'reform of the state' or of declaring 'the death of the social state' in 2010. Nevertheless, such projects continue to be part of the regime of entrepreneurial governance and neoliberal planning characterized by the changing role of the state in terms of development. As such, they act in a larger political and economic environment, where the state is transformed from a developer into a manager of development by legislative measures, which prepares the field of development for different private actors (companies, non-governmental organizations, charity groups, and others).

This regime also means that the potential development of the 'underdeveloped territories' is conditioned by the competitiveness of the 'local community', including public authorities, civil society organizations, private companies, and citizens. In this way, development responds to people's needs for services and goods depending on their 'worthiness' or capacity to absorb EU or other funds. Under the rules of entrepreneurial development, social and spatial justice risks being conditioned on the 'merit' of being competitive on the market of these financial programs. Furthermore, under this regime, the competitive advantage of the cities continues to maintain and rely on a local cheap labour force; therefore, even if the localities attract private capital that is expected to create development, this will not necessarily result in the improvement of people's living conditions, in the same way that economic growth does not automatically result in social welfare for all. Therefore, it may be concluded that it is not only territorial unevenness, which is a spatial

manifestation of injustice, but the institutional practices intended to solve it are also structurally unjust.

A progressive transformation in reducing territorial unevenness would mean changing the now-dominant direction of state involvement in spatial planning, i.e., from supporting market principles to the implementation of regulatory rules that could improve the built and natural environment to serve inclusive public interests.

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Notes

1. The local project-based actions under scrutiny are: Social interventions for the de-segregation and social inclusion of vulnerable groups in Cluj Metropolitan Area, including the disadvantaged Roma (Cluj county, North-West Development Region); Accountability of citizens in the field of housing in the city of Codlea (Braşov county, Central Development Region); Integrated Plan for Urban Development for the Area Plumbuita-Steaua Roşie-Petricani from District 2 of Bucharest (Ilfov county surrounding the capital, Bucharest-Ilfov Development Region); Microregional Association Mara Natur (Maramureş county, North-West Development Region).
2. The interpretation of the research results in this article does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the consortium.
3. These are available alongside all 33 case studies published on the project's website <https://relocal.eu/all-cases/>
4. This is presented in a national report on Romania accessible here: <https://relocal.eu/all-cases-2/>.
5. Information is available here: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/23910/K8686.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>
6. The World Bank in Romania: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/romania>

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