

INDUSTRIAL SHIFTS AND SOCIAL RIFTS: EXAMINING THE LAYERS OF ROMA MARGINALIZATION ACROSS INDUSTRIALIZATION CYCLES IN ROMANIA

Guest Editors' Foreword

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This special issue delves into the transformative processes of de-industrialization and re-industrialization in the Maramures region of Romania, with a nuanced examination of its impacts on housing, labour, and migration, particularly among the Roma community. Anchored by the research project Precarious labor and peripheral housing. The socio-economic practices of Romanian Roma in the context of changing industrial relations and uneven territorial *development* (PRECWORK), this collection of articles provides critical insights into the socio-economic shifts driven by these industrial changes. Through comprehensive analyses rooted in political economy, anthropology, history, and sociology, this issue seeks to reframe our understanding of the complexities surrounding the Roma's experience in a changing economic and political landscape. This introduction sets the stage for exploring these themes deeply, revealing how historical and contemporary forces shape the lives and labour of marginalized communities.

PRECWORK explored the dynamics of Roma social marginalization in the nexus of industrial investment and public policy. By reassessing Roma marginalization during industrialization, deindustrialization and reindustrialization on the backbone of a weak Romanian state, as well as the political, economic and social challenges of inadequate housing and labour transformations and mass migration from Eastern Europe, the PRECWORK project contributes to several strands of literature in political economy, anthropology, history and sociology.

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This special issue aims to provide a new, more comprehensive understanding of the living and working conditions of Romanian Roma in a period of economic and political transformations, by analysing their position form a historical comparative and intersectional perspective, taking into account gender, class, ethnicity and race, as well as spatial and scalar differences. To this end, our research traced Roma marginalization in Romania over three economic cycles: industrialization, deindustrialization and reindustrialization, and explores in-depth three major problems: housing, labour and migration. Analysing the socio-economic practices of the Romanian Roma in the context of changing industrial relations and uneven territorial development, we show that deindustrialization and reindustrialization brought significant changes in the domains of labour, housing and migration. Rather than simply point to the manifestations of supposed cultural features of 'Roma ethnicity', the analyses show how the socio-economic livelihood practices of impoverished Romanian Roma should be understood as responses to social marginalization or strategies to deal with their material and symbolic subjugation under changing historical conditions.

Standing at the intersection of political economy, sociology, history and anthropology, the main theoretical objective of our project is to advance a novel theorization of how CEE's shifting modes of industrial insertion into the global economy have generated different patterns of social marginality and how marginalized and racialised people are dealing with them. By doing this, we aim to provide an understanding of the socio-economic practices of the Romanian Roma, which goes beyond the existing particularistic theoretical frames favouring either cultural specificity, found in the majority of Romani Studies, or classbased approaches to industrial relations and development.

Methodologically, the project zooms in on a single geographical case – namely the town of Baia Mare, in Maramureş County, in the North-West Development Region of Romania – and combines historical, statistical and ethnographic analysis, using diverse research methods, such as oral history, indepth interviews, participant observation, survey, policy analysis, as well as analysing secondary statistical data.

The case study - Baia Mare

The overall project has been inspired by the extended case study method as defined and deployed by the sociologist Michael Burawoy (2009). Starting from this, we use our micro-analysis in the town of Baia Mare to illustrate the great transformations that occurred during the last seven decades. These include socialist industrialization, post-socialist de-industrialization and re-industrialization under neoliberal capitalism. The case under analysis is the region of Baia Mare, the administrative and industrial centre of the Maramureş region. This town and surrounding area have benefited from EU and Romanian government grants and its municipality has managed to reinvent itself as a 'civilized' and 'European' city.⁴ Simultaneously, the town witnessed a sharp degradation of it labour force and the formation of large Roma slums at its edges. This is not a unique development, as similar processes could be observed in other Romanian mid-size cities.

The research found that during deindustrialization hundreds of thousands of workers have sought employment in Western Europe (Ban 2012) and elsewhere in Romania and no less than four highly impoverishes, unregulated neighbourhoods populated predominantly by Roma have sprung up in Baia Mare during the same period. The peripheral lives and daily struggles of people living in the ghettos, their housing condition, their struggles to find work are in dire need for explanations and solutions. We argue that the fragmentation of the working class and the marginalization of the Roma are by no means fortuitous, nor were these all-encompassing processes. While some faced destitution, others thrived, and when work was scarce in the area, Europe became a tempting alternative, as crumbling plants increasingly stand aside newly built industrial parks and roads.

What makes this case particularly compelling is that, in theory, Baia Mare should be a success story. Its industrial firms are inserted in global supply chains, and it has little in the way of the precarious tertiary sector development that one sees in larger cities in the region, in general, and Romania, in particular. Yet when looked at closer, this reindustrialization success appears to have depended largely on the Roma citizens and other impoverished Romanians. They are reduced to destitution and segregated living by the political economy of the deindustrialization period, a traumatic event from which they never recovered. These marginalized people's current employment opportunities in the local industry attest to their extreme deprivation and routinized social crisis. They live in liminal spaces on the minimum wage, under the structural pressures of a highly unequal workfare state and dependent market economy. Moreover, they are deprived of the buffer represented by home ownership and formally universal (if residual) public services (Ban 2019, Emigh et al. 2018). As such, the project compared the mechanisms of racialised poverty, combined with the territorial stigmatization characterizing the deindustrialization and reindustrialization periods.

⁴ https://www.criticatac.ro/sesizare-in-legtur-cu-aciunile-recente-din-baia-mareadministrate-de-primarul-municipiului/

Reindustrialization and Its Discontents: Corporate Strategies, Social Marginalization, and Racialized Poverty

The special issue is situated within the overall analytical framework of the PRECWORK project. We argue project stands as the first comprehensive effort to explore Roma social marginalization across the three pivotal industrial phases: industrialization, deindustrialization, and reindustrialization. It draws inspiration from seminal works like those by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison on the (de)industrialization of the United States (1982), and extends to analyze the interconnectedness of corporate macro-strategies and the consequent racialized poverty and "territorial stigmatization" (Wacquant 2007) that affect urban landscapes through mass incarceration, violent policing, labor market deregulation, and race-based urban planning. The subsequent literature, post-2008 austerity measures, explores these dynamics further, delving into how precarious labor markets in low-skill manufacturing and service sectors drive high rates of emigration and create a 'new austeriat' (Powell and Lever 2017; Allen 2018).

The main gap in this literature is twofold. First, this literature has a strong high-income country bias and may be of limited use in contexts such as Romania: increasing industrial investment as part of the globalization of supply chains, a state with weak tax collection and redistribution capacity, poor coordination between capital and labour and weak rule of law. As for the rich literature on deindustrialization in Romania, its focus is less on the production of new forms of marginalization, such as the ones studied here, and more on urban shrinkage, urban space ruralisation, brownfields, urban dereliction, coreperiphery inequalities and the emergence of new creative industries. Second. this scholarship has not studied the linkage between corporate restructuring strategies and racialized poverty in a reindustrialization context. Therefore, the project aimed to explore what is analytically distinct about reindustrialization's effects on racialized poverty vis-à-vis its mirror image: deindustrialization. Specifically, we wanted to find out if the mechanisms of amplification of the social precariat across generations in reindustrialization cycles are different from those of deindustrialization cycles for all ethnic groups and, if so, how and why.

The socialist era industrialisation and the firm-centred housing paradigm of that policy regime transformed peasants into urban workers, with their own working routines, status markers and disciplines, specialisation skills, long-term employment rewards, work-related identity, collective sense of belonging and intergenerational professional reproduction. Additionally, it reduced the historical marginalisation of the Roma relative to Romanians and Hungarians in the region. However, these improvements were gradually eroded by managerial authoritarianism, the resilience of status categories and ethnic stereotypes among managers, planners and non-Roma workers. Once the socialist regime ended and, with it, its claims to universalism, these contradictions ripped through the social fabric, with mass unemployment, the shrinking of wages and the thinness of safety nets heightening social and ethnic conflict between winners and losers as well as within the marginalised groups themselves.

Both the post-communist developmental state (1990-1996) and the early neoliberal policy regime (1997-2007) have reorganised the workplace with the intention of achieving internal devaluation or the reduction of prices relative to other countries. This has been achieved by cutting employment and wages and by introducing structural policies (especially labour market and welfare state liberalisation) aimed at increasing wage and price flexibility. The consequence of these policies has been the termination of social dialogue, the dismissal of a significant proportion of the workforce, the erosion of purchasing power for industrial workers, and the deterioration of income levels for those employed in the service sector. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the prevalence of unpaid overtime, delays in wage payments, and the creation of more poorly qualified positions.

The process of European integration served to stabilise the decline in work and safety standards, while simultaneously creating new employment opportunities in the industrial sector. This was achieved by facilitating the integration of local firms into global supply chains and the advent of multinational 'greenfield' investments. Concurrently, the 2007-2017 period coincided with heightened pressures to compete as a dependent market economy, leading to the enactment of more pro-employer labour regulations, the undermining of trade unions, and the proliferation of non-standard forms of employment (such as part-time, paid per-piece, irregular, and the reshuffling of social prestige markers in ways that reward migration). These developments were reinforced by the lack of adequate mass transit, inclusive housing, education, and health policies. Consequently, the reindustrialisation of Baia Mare and its region through investments in wood processing, textiles and small-scale metalworking merely reproduced the racialised social marginalisation outcomes generated by the deindustrialisation of the 1990s. In this regard, reindustrialisation had positive results only insofar as the central government mandated minimum wage increases, an expectation that makes the state a critical variable in the nexus between industrial investment and social marginalisation.

The EU integration put a floor under the continuing degradation of work and safety standards and increased industrial employment opportunities by facilitating the insertion of local firms into global supply chains and the advent of multinational 'greenfield' investments. At the same time, the 2007-2017 period coincided with heightened pressures to compete as a dependent market economy, leading to more pro-employer labour rules, union busting, the multiplication of non-standard forms of employment (part-time, paid per-piece, irregular and the reshuffling of social prestige markers in ways that reward migration, reinforced by the lack of adequate mass transit, inclusive housing, education and health policies. As a result, the reindustrialization of Baia Mare and its region via investments in wood processing, textiles and small-scale metalworking merely reproduced the racialized social marginalization outcomes generated by the deindustrialization of the 1990s. In this regard, reindustrialization had positive results only insofar as the central government mandated minimum wage increases, an expectation that makes the state a critical variable in the nexus between industrial investment and social marginalization.

Our project also contributes to the literature on migration and social marginalization following deindustrialization. The accession of CEE countries to the European single market triggered the largest population movements on the European continent in the form of economic migration to countries such as Italy, and Spain, the UK and Ireland, and Germany and the Scandinavian countries. where many migrants have found work in sectors such as construction, agriculture and services. Research has shown that CEE workers are strongly over-represented in the lower tiers of West European labour markets and that the large-scale labour migration has not just provided access to much needed labour and powered sustained economic growth in the host countries, but at the same time also placed collective bargaining institutions and systems of labour market regulation under considerable pressure (Friberg 2016, Friberg et al. 2014, Haakestad and Friberg 2017). The types of employment that these migrants have been able to access thus varies, from high-paying jobs in the primary sector, to highly precarious and exploitative ones in the peripheral sectors of the economy. In addition to the flows of regular labour migration, a smaller but highly visible flow outside the formal labour market has emerged, of people who live under harsh conditions in West European urban centres, often without access to regular housing, pursuing various forms of informal "street work" to generate a relatively meagre income, and whose presence and activities in the public realm has largely been met with hostility and criminalization (Djuve et al. 2015).

Although overlapping, the migration patterns of Roma and non-Roma differ in the sense that Roma migrants are more often found in the informal economy of the host countries, and that they to a larger extent than non-Roma rely on kinship and community-based networks of social support. Research has shown how this type of Roma migration outside formal structures can be understood as an economic adaptation, embedded in the social and economic processes of marginalization of Roma communities in post-socialist Romania, as well as the structure of social capital within Roma households and communities, which can work as a form of capital that enables migration despite lacking formal resources (Tyldum & Friberg 2023).

Migration has become an integral part of the household livelihood strategies among many Romanian Roma, and remittances are often spent on daily expenses, paying down depts, children's schooling and house improvements (Djuve et al. 2015). However, we know little about how the various forms of mobility shape the structural factors that make migration necessary in the first place. For some, migration may constitute a way out of poverty, but it can also contribute to the stagnation of existing social structures, with limited room for escaping poverty and exploitation. To what extent migration is merely a means of survival or a route for social mobility, depends not just on their financial success abroad, but also on opportunities for productive investment at home. There is limited knowledge, however, about the relationship between different forms of migration and the social transformations of migrant sending communities.

This project addresses this gap by dwelling on consequences of migration for the migrants, their families and communities in Romania, and more specifically, on whether migration constitutes a pathway out of poverty or yet another 'marginalization trap.'

Finally, the issue critically examines the narratives of global industrial development, portraying industrial work as a superior and stable employment form, culminating in the formal sector. Contrary to these linear narratives, this collection of articles argues that extreme poverty not only coexists with but is also exacerbated by reindustrialization processes. Recent anthropological insights into labor extend beyond traditional factory settings to include broader socioeconomic contexts, underscoring the significance of social reproduction in understanding industrial labor. This shift in focus reflects a recognition that workers' lives, shaped by kinship, personhood, politics, and sociality, are integral to capitalist value creation (Hann and Parry, 2018; Harvey and Krohn-Hansen, 2018). Scholars argue that job stability does not guarantee financial stability. pointing to the precariousness that workers face, which is influenced by both formal and informal labor markets, as well as by broader social welfare systems (Deneva, 2024; Kofti, 2023; Mollona, 2009). This perspective is reinforced by feminist political economy, which links the production of goods directly with the reproduction of labor power, emphasizing the role of education, healthcare, and community care in sustaining labor forces (Bhattacharya, 2017). In this context, what is observed in the case of the Romanian Roma workers in the industries of Baia Mare, can only be fully grasped if the lens is open to include social reproduction obligations that workers have, commuting patterns, and housing realities

The contributions to this volume

The first theme of this special issue is **labour**. The first article, by Raluca Perneş, sets out to sketch a history of Baia Mare from the perspective of its industry. Thus, the text provides an excellent starting point for our volume, in that it lays out the historical materialist context of the processes we analyse. Starting from 1950, and relying on life-stories gathered through interviews, Perneş shows how the socialist governments turned the town into a prosperous industrial city. Baia Mare had a variety of factories, infrastructure and housing facilities. The population grew steadily, having good incomes, job security and overall stability. Things turned to the worse after 1990, when privatisation and deindustrialisation brought a period of fluctuating fortunes, lack of social security and, in the case of Roma people, extreme poverty and marginalisation. The text then proceeds to analyse current conditions in Baia Mare's factories, showing, again through interview analysis, how workers' conditions worsened in the past years.

This downward trend is analysed and explained by Földes, Mihály and Pop, who use the concept of labour fragmentation. One manifestation of this fragmentation is labour shortage. The authors use governmental datasets, online data sources as well as interviews in order to explain the sources of this labour shortage. They focus on two neighbouring Romanian counties – Maramureş and Sălaj – arguing that Romania's export-led growth model relies on low-cost labour and, particularly in these two counties, on slow or no technological upgrading. The article argues that the labour force composition in the two counties is defined by low knowledge intensity in services, as well as low technology activities in manufacturing. This leads to job vulnerability, lack of investment in research and development, as well as low wages. The author's data shows that these trends are opposed to the national-level propensity towards knowledge intensive services.

Moving further, the volume then takes on this labour precarisation and offers various avenues for interpreting it. As mentioned, the reindustrialization of the Maramureş region facilitated the reproduction of existing inequalities, rather than alleviating them. The text by Mihály and Földes looks at the region's labour regimes in relation to the former mining sector, as well as the present furniture industry. Their contribution presents research gathered through interviews and policy analyses. They argue that the regional labour regime shifted from conservative politics that aimed to safeguard industrial assets, towards a liberal model or privatization. The text focuses on Aramis, which is the region's most consistent employer, and which 'taps into the deregulated, low-cost and vocationally skilled workforce'. The authors bring into discussion the labour shortage that hampers Baia Mare and the region's economy. The strategies employed by companies to handle this issue range from using commuter networks from the rural environment, to using immigrant work power. Both these strategies are further analysed by this special issue's contributors.

The article by Dana Solonean addresses full-on the paradox of Baia Mare's declining labour pool. She starts from noticing that, despite the high rate of immigrants coming to the city, the population rate is decreasing. The text focuses on the ways in which deindustrialization and reindustrialization trigger various paths for international migration to and from Baia Mare. By and large, the town became a supplier of cheap labour force to Western Europe, as well as a prime location for what Solonean calls 'low added value industries'. Drawing on extensive interview work, Solonean's contribution provides fascinating stories of people who migrated from Baia Mare during the post-socialist years, in order to improve their living standards. The text also touches upon the newly arrived workers from South-East Asian countries such as Nepal or India, in showing how they, together with the precarious Roma population of the town, are being used to replenish the dwindling labour pool.

In an effort to understand the trajectories of workers who choose to stay in Baia Mare, Andreea Ferenț looks at patterns of labour commuting. The text starts from the following puzzle: why does it make sense for commuters to continue living in the area? Ferenț investigates the patterns of labour commuting, the strategies and motivations of individuals, as well as their social and family relationships that facilitate and support their work. Her article looks at two major industrial hubs from the Northwestern region of Romania – two companies with foreign-owned capital, which employ a significant part of the region's workforce. Making extensive use of interviews, the text tells a number of stories that lead the author to stress the following argument: short term labour mobility is at once a survival strategy for workers from rural areas, and at the same time an intentional tactic of employers that seek cost-effective labour practices.

Shifting the focus towards the second theme, **migration**, Hestia Delibas describes and compares migration strategies of Roma and non-Roma people, while inquiring on the roles played by class and race in migration patterns. Whereas Romanian Roma have been said to provide affordable and abundant labour within the internal market, Delibas moves the discussion towards the international market, and shows how racial hierarchies extend beyond national borders. Using a ethnographical mix that includes interviews in Baia Mare's marginalized territories of Pirita and Craica, the text argues that the racially motivated dispossession to which Roma people are being subjected to maintains them in a 'cycle of debt they cannot escape'. Roma migration is characterized by shorter stays, job volatility and informal employment. A subsequent focus of the text is on the housing realities of Roma people. For many, the main purpose of

migration is acquiring enough money to have a decent home and to help their households. Conversely, Roma migrants rely heavily on their families at home and migrant networks abroad.

Delibas' text also opens the discussion on **housing** policies in Baia Mare. The two contributions on housing set up a historical perspective of the marginalisation of the Roma people of Baia Mare. The first such contribution looks at practices of evictions and relocations between 1975 and 1989. George Zamfir uses both interviews and archival work in order to focus on the urban spatial politics that sought to manage and contain Roma communities within Baia Mare. The epistemological mechanisms through which Zamfir does this are the debates and decisions of the local administration during the aforementioned period. By looking at these mechanisms, the article highlights the Baia Mare neighbourhood of Hatvan, where a part of the marginalized Roma population had been contained and relocated. On the heels of the final socialist urban development plans, this neighbourhood became systematized, and a number of Roma people were relocated from their huts and informal settlements to newly built panel buildings. However, the administration cut these buildings from central heating, as a coercive measure against Roma people who would not pay their bills.

The second contribution of the housing working group takes a look at the intersection between urban space and security. Manuel Mireanu uses archival material from the period of 1950 – 1989 in order to flesh out an analysis of how urban planning enforced the marginalization of Roma people under the socialist regime. The text focuses on the same neighbourhood, Hatvan, and it shows how in the first years of socialism, this was an urban space that the local administration regarded as a social problem. Within two decades, however, this view changed, and the neighbourhood, along with its inhabitants started to be seen as dangerous, rowdy and prone to illegal behaviours. The Roma people were discursively constructed as an obstacle to the urban comfort that the socialist regime was building in Baia Mare. In order to alleviate these problems, the local administration chose to systematize Hatvan, while enacting policies of repression against the Roma people there. They were systematically evicted and their informal homes destroyed.

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